

# Identities in Flux

**Globalisation, Trauma,  
and Reconciliation**

Edited by  
DAGMAR KUSÁ

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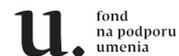
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## Classical Education in a Globalised World and Our Modern Prejudices: Questions of Identity and the Curriculum

Jon Stewart

### Abstract

This article argues that classical education is often misunderstood due to a number of modern prejudices which distort the original concept. These distortions include the general neglect of several large spheres: the natural sciences, religion, and other cultures, that is, those beyond the Greco-Roman heritage. The article attempts to correct these misunderstandings in order to present a model for classical education that is truly “classical.” At the end, it is argued that this revised model can help us to make a stronger case for the relevance of classical education in the context of a globalised world.

*Keywords:* classical education, globalisation, science, technology, religion

Education is a field that is often rather vulnerable to new trends, which all claim to have discovered an innovative method of teaching or learning.<sup>1</sup> These trends tend to come and go at regular intervals, each having a fixed lifespan, and each being surpassed by a new one. It is easy to get frustrated by these kinds of discussions and to take refuge in something that seems to be stable and can endure unperturbed in the face of the storm of such debates, namely, classical education.

However, often when there is talk of classical education this tends to have a rather old-fashioned or outdated ring to it in the ears of some people. Our modern world is dominated by fast changes in the social order and rapid developments in technology. So why on earth would someone think that an educational program based on learning dead languages or studying cultures that perished a couple thousand years ago could in any way be relevant for navigating one’s way through the complexities of modern life? Are educators really acting responsibly when they insist on such an old model of education? Is this really doing our young people any service? Would they not be better off studying things that are more directly relevant to the real challenges that they will encounter in later life? These are the kinds of concerns and objections that teachers of classical education are used to hearing, and they are worth taking seriously since although classical education served people well in previous ages, there is no *a priori*

<sup>1</sup> This work was produced at the Institute of Philosophy, Slovak Academy of Sciences. It was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under the contract No. APVV-15-0682.

reason to infer from this that it is in any way relevant for life in the 21st century.

Especially troublesome for programs of classical education is the claim that students in a modern multicultural society cannot identify with the texts. Coming from many cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds, many students today regard the insistence on the classical Western canon as a form of cultural imperialism. They feel alienated from the works read in classical education programs, and this robs them of their interest in learning. Here we can easily see that the complex issue of modern self-identity is closely related to that of education.

Over the past several decades many programs of classical education and Western civilisation have been abandoned in favour of new curricula thought to be more representative of a diverse population. The problem that these new programs face has been one of continuity. The length of a semester sets natural limits on how much material can be covered, and it is has proven a massive challenge to replace the Western canon with a more representative one that includes important texts from the different traditions of world history. The size and diversity of the material seems to defy the confines of an individual course.

In this article, I wish to address this complex constellation of questions about whether classical education is still appropriate for life in the globalised world of the 21st century. I wish to argue that it is and in fact that it is more relevant today than it ever has been in past ages. I wish to argue that classical education in fact contains texts that are far more diverse and representative of other cultures than has been acknowledged.

In order to make this case, it will be necessary to recall and define more closely what we really mean by “classical education.” This discussion will help us to determine 1) what is “classical” about this program of education, that is, what elements of it reflect something from the classical world, and 2) how well it is suited to answering the needs of the modern world in which we live. I wish to try to show that some of what we usually understand by classical education is in fact a cliché that is in need of critical revision. But once we undertake this revision we will be able to develop an educational program that is truly *classical* in that it is an accurate reflection of certain elements of Greek and Roman culture. Moreover, the revision of our understanding of classical education will also have the additional benefit that it will enable us to argue for its importance and relevance more effectively. Armed then with a revised conception of classical education, I wish, at the end of the article, to reflect on the question of what classical education could mean in the context of the globalised, multicultural world of the 21st century. Here I wish to argue that classical education is indeed well suited to respond to the demands to produce well-functioning citizens equipped to face effectively the challenges of the complex and fast-changing modern world.

Here at the outset I would like to submit that the terms of the critical discussions about classical education are often based on misunderstandings and stereotyped conceptions of what this kind of education really means. I want to try to show that people are often victims of a modern prejudice and ethnocentrism based on modern specialisation, which distorts their understanding of the past. My thesis is that this distorted understanding of what constitutes classical education is what leads to the problems of relevance for classical education. Instead, I submit that if we could modify our conception of classical education to make it fall more in line with what real classical education is, then we would find that substantial headway can be made towards meeting the well-known objection of irrelevance. My goal here is to test our intuitions about these issues concerning classical education. Some people might perceive this as provocative, but my goal is not to provoke but instead to reach a new conceptual clarity, which can help us move forward with the discussion about classical education.

### **The Need to Rethink What We Mean by “Classical Education”**

What do we mean by classical education? Usually classical education is closely associated with the humanities fields, for example, literature, history, philosophy, drama, etc. So standard definitions tend to say something like the following: “Classical education is a program of studies that focuses primarily on the humanities, covering the languages, literature, history, art, and other cultural aspects of Ancient Greece and Rome.” According to the standard story, it is from the ancient Greek and Roman authors that we have inherited the rich heritage from these fields that constitutes the basis of Western culture. In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the Greco-Roman canon became a formalised course of study in Europe. While there is of course some truth in definitions like this, I wish to suggest that some misunderstandings also lie concealed in this generally accepted view. In what follows I wish to try to identify a few prejudices that can be found in the common understanding of classical education and the educational policies based on this.

### **The Prejudice about Science and Technology**

First, it will be noted that in this definition there is no word about the sciences or technology. Indeed, today we tend to think that education in the sciences is more or less the polar opposite of that of classical education. The standard view is that the two have absolutely nothing to do with one another and that the kinds of knowledge involved are different in kind. Here, I want to argue, we find our first fundamental misunderstanding in what classical education really means.

Today we tend to think of Aristotle almost exclusively as a philosopher. But his philosophical studies constitute only a part of his *corpus*. He

was also a natural scientist, specifically, a botanist, a geologist, a physicist, a zoologist, an anatomist, and so on. But these quite substantial aspects of his work tend to be largely neglected today. If this does not sound right, then we need only ask how many people have read Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* or *Politics* and contrast this number with how many have read his work *On the Generation of Animals*.

It is of course no secret that what the world has received from the Greeks and the Romans is not just the highbrow studies of literature, history and philosophy but also the sciences. Who has not heard of the great Greek mathematicians such as Euclid or scientists such as Archimedes? But the problem is that these fields of the sciences are not usually counted as belonging to the core of classical education, which, as we just noted, is reserved for the humanities disciplines. Usually, the sciences are radically separated from these fields. But this is, I submit, entirely arbitrary and, alas, the result of modern specialisation. Why do not the sciences count for classical education as well? If classical education means *per definition* what comes from the Greeks and the Romans, then the sciences too are a part of this rich cultural heritage that we have received from them.

When we think of the Roman “classics” we invariably think of literary texts such as Vergil’s *Aeneid* or Livy’s *History of Rome*, but we tend not to think nearly so readily of Vitruvius’ book on architecture or Frontinus’ book on aqueducts. The classics department at most any university is usually a part of the larger department of literature. The education that people receive in these departments is primarily literary. Why is this the case? Why do not classics departments treat the culture of the classical world in a more representative manner?

Most troubling, I believe, is our modern tendency to separate science from the humanities and from culture in general. It is as if there is some fundamental belief that science is something apart from the rest of human culture, as if it develops on its own in a vacuum. Of course, in reality this is not the case. The development of science goes hand-in-hand with social and cultural development, and there is a reciprocal influence of the one sphere on the other. So my suggestion here is to try to look beyond this modern blindness that sees science as something different in kind from culture and the humanities, and instead come to regard it as a fundamental and integral part of human culture as a whole.

This is an important insight for educators who have an investment in classical education since with this idea we can modify our handed-down conception of what classical education means by making room for the sciences as an integrated part of it. This is, I submit, the way in which the Greeks and the Romans conceived of things, and thus it is a more veridical understanding of the concept of classical education. But, moreover, it is also a more veridical reflection of the actual state of things and the

practice of the humanities and the sciences in the real world of today. We should not allow ourselves to be fooled into a false separation of things based simply on the division of the fields in the common college catalogue. Science belongs every bit as much to classical education as does history or poetry.

### The Prejudice about Religion

It will be noted that in the standard definition that we gave of classical education at the outset, there was no mention of religion. Once again, I think that it is a common perception that religion is something different in kind from the traditional fields of classical education. In many cases great care has been taken to make sure that no form of instruction in religion appears in the curriculum of classical education. This, I submit, is another example of a modern prejudice that instead of being in harmony with classical education, in fact, radically departs from it.

The works *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are often taken to be paradigm cases of texts belonging to the classical canon. If anything, then surely Homer belongs to classical education. These are wonderful works of literature, and, some would argue, they also contain some faint whispers of history. This sounds entirely intuitive and uncontroversial to our ears. But, I wish to submit that this is in part an anachronistic misunderstanding based on a modern perspective. For the Greeks of the archaic and classical period the Homeric poems were far more than simply works of literature or history; rather, they were regarded as objects of great reverence as religious texts. These poems (along with Hesiod's *Theogony*) were the Greeks' main sources of information about the gods and the origin of their deepest religious beliefs and practices. We miss the religious elements in these texts because the ancient Greek religion plays little role for us in the modern world. We thus interpret these texts with modern categories that we are used to using and thus ignoring what seems meaningless to us.

To take another example, surely the Greek dramas of Sophocles, Aeschylus, Euripides, and Aristophanes belong to classical education. They tell wonderful stories about ethical duties and responsibilities, and contain great insight into the human spirit. Thus, they have been the source of endless examples for specialists in ethics or psychology. They are the origin of many forms of modern entertainment from theatre to film. Here again it is not difficult to see how this aspect of Greek culture had a profound influence on modern thinking in these different areas. But all of this is something of a distortion. Greek drama is not primarily about art, entertainment, ethics or psychology. Rather, Greek drama arose from Greek religious rites to the god Dionysius. Dramatic works were always performed in connection with religious festivals. These were never conceived by the Greeks as purely secular works of art or

literature. This is a modern way of thinking or, if you prefer, a modern prejudice.

Greek epic poetry and Greek drama are not isolated examples; indeed, many of the canonical texts that we know from the ancient world in other traditions are also in the end religious texts, although in our modern secular world we tend to treat them as literature, history, etc. In the ancient world, religion permeated every aspect of society and culture. Since it tends to be more limited or compartmentalised in our modern world, people mistakenly take this picture with them when they read ancient texts, and they thus tend not to take too seriously the religious elements in these works, especially when those religious elements seem strange or foreign to us. So, for example, in the Hindu classic the *Ramayana*, Rama is regarded by the modern reader just as a great hero, but people forget that he is the seventh avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu. Once again there is an overlooked religious element that is absolutely central to the work. Our modern secular mindset thus distorts our understanding of these ancient texts both in the Greco-Roman tradition and in other traditions.

But why then do we tend to think of the classics as literary or historical texts and not religious ones? Why do we tend to exclude religion from the curriculum in classical education? The reason for this, I believe, has to do with the origin and development of the field of the classics. The German philologist Friedrich August Wolf (1759-1824) is credited with coining the term "*Altertumswissenschaft*," literally the "science of antiquity," to designate the broad field of classical studies (Marchand, 1996; von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, 1982; Pfeiffer, 1976; Arnoldt, 1861; Sandys; Bursian, 1883). He established the first department of classical studies at the University of Halle in 1787. During Wolf's time the study of Greek and Latin at the university had always been the purview of the Faculty of Theology. But Wolf yearned to read texts such as Homer outside of this context. In time, he came to develop a sense of animosity towards his colleagues at the Faculty of Theology for monopolising the instruction of Greek and Latin. His mission was to create a university institute dedicated to the study of the classical languages independent of theology. Thus when this department was established, it was specifically in opposition to the study of theology. In this context there was a tendency for the budding field of classics to identify itself with literature, history, etc., that is, fields that were as different from the theological fields as possible. But this meant selectively focusing on specific aspects of the ancient world and ignoring others. As a result, scholars in this field and those that sprang from it tended to read the ancient texts in a purely secular manner and ignore whatever religious connotations they otherwise contained. While this development makes perfect sense when seen in the context of Wolf's time, in the big picture this is an obvious distortion caused by modern specialisation. The ancients did not

divide things in this way. Ancient culture was an organic whole. It was not possible simply to ignore the religious element in Greek culture at will.

This is also a valuable insight for us as educators with an investment in classical education. Again, very often religion is considered to be something different and separate from classical education. Some advocates of classical education pride themselves on their religious tolerance and open-mindedness due to the fact that they do not teach any form of religion in their classroom. They regard such teaching as suspect and inevitably doctrinal in some way. Thus, it is argued, the only way to avoid falling into the trap of indoctrinating or, worse, corrupting young minds with religion is not to teach it. But here we can see clearly that there is a real rub between this view and the way the ancients conceived of things. The modern view reflects certain negative conceptions about religion that come from the Enlightenment, that is, from Wolf's time, whereas the ancient view fully embraced religion and made it an absolutely central part of their culture and life. So to say that one is interested in developing a program of classical education but then to eliminate wholly any trace of religion is simply contradictory. Such a program cannot be rightly termed "classical". When one eliminates religion, one eliminates a major aspect of classical culture. This insight tells us that we need to think carefully about how to integrate religion in a responsible manner into our programs for classical education.

### **The Prejudice About Influence**

For my third point, I wish to focus on a set of prejudices or misconceptions surrounding the traditional argument for relevance. In critical discussions about the value of classical education, the argument is often heard that our modern culture derives from classical Greek and Roman culture. So, therefore, in order to understand the foundations of modern society, we need to learn about the classics. Democracy, literature and drama all have their basis in ancient Greek culture, and so when we learn about the Greeks, we are in a sense learning about ourselves. This is often thought to be a strong counterargument to the reproaches of the lack of relevance of classical education.

It will be noted that this argument is based on the premise of influence. The classics are classics precisely because they have exercised a major influence on subsequent Western thinking. This is why, so the argument goes, we should prioritise the culture of the ancient Greeks and Romans in our educational programs. While at first glance convincing, this argument about influence is problematic if we wish to insist on it dogmatically since it makes the classics in a sense dependent on their influence for modern society. This raises three problems which I think all show how selective people are in their conception of Greek and Roman culture and the role it plays in our culture today.

First, there are many aspects of Greco-Roman culture that do not exert any meaningful influence on modern life. Let us take, for example, Greek polytheism; while the stories of the Greek gods and goddesses might be interesting for specialists of mythology or might be useful to literary scholars when identifying specific literary allusions and motifs, it would be inauthentic to say that this aspect of the Greek religion is a central part of our modern society. We do not have large numbers of followers of the cult of Apollo; only the tiniest of groups of neopagans today continue to believe in the Greek gods as a living religion, and even this modern phenomenon is arguably quite different from the actual religion of the ancient Greeks and Romans.

So, given that there are aspects of Greek or Roman culture like this that exerted little long-term influence on modern Western society, should they really be given such a unique privileged position in our educational systems and programs? The point here is simply to show that when we decide to identify Greek and Roman culture as "classic," we are in fact being selective in an arbitrary way since we do not mean *all* of Greek and Roman culture but only certain aspects of it.

Second, part and parcel of the idea of a "classic" in the sense of influence is that the work in question is one worthy of emulation. The idea is that the Greeks and the Romans set the bar high, and we have been trying to reach it ever since. Homer is a classic in the sense that later authors, Vergil, Dante, Milton, Joyce, and others, try though they may, can only imitate him imperfectly. He represents an ideal that will always inspire later ages but which will never be fully attained. In short, the idea of a "classic" is invariably something positive.

But there are a number of aspects of Greek and Roman society that we can hardly regard today in any positive light whatsoever: the cultural arrogance and ethnocentrism of the Greeks; the positive disposition toward military conquest that saw virtue in defeating other peoples; the more or less universal institution of slavery; the merciless suppression of conquered peoples; the oppression of women; the widespread practice of torture and public execution, at times for public entertainment, and on and on. Make no mistake: for all of our adulation of the great cultural achievements of the Greek and Roman world, there was plenty that is and should be utterly repellent to us. Should we regard these institutions and cultural practices as "classics"? Once again, why should we give privilege of place to such cultures that engaged in such terrible brutality and injustice? Are these the values that we want to introduce to and instil in our young people via classical education? The point here is again merely to bring home how selective people tend to be when they think of Greek and Roman culture in the context of classical education. There is a tendency to put certain elements of their culture up on a pedestal and ignore the other aspects of it that do

not fit with the humanistic picture that educators customarily try to convey. Once again, this shows a serious deviation from the reality of classical culture in all of its aspects. Sadly, the relevance argument still works here. Europe and the West have, alas, inherited a number of these negative institutions and practices from the Greeks and the Romans. But the question this raises is whether this is anything we should be particularly proud of or should enshrine as the foundation of our educational system.

Third, if we make the criterion for what a “classic” is the influence that it has had, then it will be noted that this makes it *independent of* any specific culture such as the Greeks or the Romans. In this sense a classic text could in principle come from anywhere, provided that it exercised an important influence in the development of our modern thinking. Thus, this is not in and of itself an argument for studying Greek and Roman culture; rather, it is an argument for studying what has been influential.

If we take a look at the development of science and technology in the European Middle Ages, we find something quite interesting. We see that the leading scientific works of that period come not from the Greeks, the Romans or even the later Europeans but from Arabic authors, for example, Al-Battani’s and Al-Kindi’s works on astronomy, Al-Farabi’s work on geometry, Avicenna’s work on medicine, Abu Ma’shar’s work on botany, Omar Khayyám’s and Thābit ibn Qurra’s work on mathematics. These are all thinkers who had a major impact on the development of Western science. But oddly we do not tend to include them as a part of the “classics” since they are not from the Greco-Roman world. But by the very criterion that the advocates of classical education themselves give, namely, influence, they should by all rights be included. For whatever reason these thinkers are generally neglected, although their influence has been so profound.

Let me illustrate this with a simple example. In every school we find zealous young people studying algebra, which is regarded as an important part of their education in mathematics and a preparation for later university studies. If we were to ask all of those zealous 8th-graders who was the founder of algebra, how many of them could come up with the name of Muhammad ibn Mūsā al-Khwārizmī, let alone the title of his main work, *The Compendious Book on Calculation by Completion and Balancing*? Ask them who invented geometry, and they will tell you immediately: Euclid. Who invented the fundamental laws of classical physics: Newton. But then ask them who invented algebra, and you will see lots of stammering and fidgeting.

The conclusion that we need to draw from this is that our conception of classical education is overly narrow and perhaps somewhat prejudiced. If the goal of education is relevance in the sense of teaching our young people things that they need to know about the origins and development of the society and culture that they live in, then we must recognise that the Western tradition is a highly eclectic one that has always readily taken up and

incorporated ideas from other cultures. Indeed, this is one of the things that arguably has made it great. We need to make sure that the texts that we select for the canon are ones that truly represent the development of human thought as a whole. While traditionally this has always been associated with Western civilisation, with this example we can see that this is a far more complex story than it is usually thought to be.

### A Revised Conception of Classical Education

These examples of the natural sciences, religion, and other cultural traditions should, I submit, enjoin us to rethink our conception of classical education. They show us that there is much more to this than simply the traditional humanities fields.

A much more fruitful way of understanding classical education can, I believe, be found in a concept by the 19th-century German philosopher Hegel. At the very heart of his complex philosophical system, Hegel makes an absolutely fundamental distinction between what he calls “nature” and what he calls “spirit.” By “nature” he means the physical world that surrounds us and that is governed by the natural laws. By “spirit” he refers to the human mind and all of its products. Today this is what anthropologists would refer to generally as human culture. We might think of nature as something that is simply immediately there before us as we enter the world, but spirit is something that we ourselves as human beings collectively have to create in one way or another. This involves not just the usual things that we associate with culture, such as the academic fields of literature and history, but also language, technical expertise, religious beliefs, and scientific knowledge. In prehistorical times, for example, it was a *cultural* asset to know how to make and preserve fire.

Again, it is mere prejudice that excludes science and technology from what we usually understand by culture. It is likewise mere prejudice to exclude religion from culture. Perhaps most troublesome of all, it is mere prejudice to exclude foreign traditions from culture. These are all products of the human mind that have every right to deserve our respect and be made the object of serious study. We can follow Hegel’s lead and understand classical education as the understanding of the human spirit or mind in all of its forms. Thus, classical education should include all of these fields. It should also include all peoples as an interconnected, developing whole, that is, humanity in general.

### The Relevance of Classical Education in the Globalised World

Let us then turn to the specifics of our globalised world and ask what this world demands of its citizens. In modern discussions about education, the idea of an educational program suited to the globalised world and classical education are usually thought to be at opposite ends of the spectrum.

While classical education is thought to be traditional or even reactionary, education for a globalised world is supposed to be progressive and modern. The idea is that classical education has nothing to offer in our modern society of the 21st century. The Greeks and the Romans lived in a very different world and had no inkling of the problems of globalisation. I wish to argue that this conception is also based on certain modern prejudices.

What do we really mean with globalisation? This means living with an awareness that the entire world is interconnected in a myriad of different ways. These interconnections mean that we should be attentive to people with different languages, religious practices, traditions and ways of thinking. We can no longer be content to stick to our own isolated, regional group, so to speak. This all sounds very progressive and modern, but a closer look reveals that this conception was nothing new to the Greeks and the Romans. It is a modern prejudice to think that globalisation is something new. This prejudice comes from the experience of the rise of nationalism in the 19th and 20th centuries, which gave priority to the nation state. It is against this background that globalisation sounds like a new phenomenon, but in fact it is not.

The Greeks were acutely aware of their neighbouring peoples: the Babylonians, the Egyptians, the Persians, the Phoenicians, etc. Educated Greeks such as Herodotus went abroad to learn from foreign cultures. To be sure, the Greeks had a profoundly ethnocentric side, and they dismissed non-Greek speakers as “barbarians.” Nonetheless they also had a keen awareness of other cultures and traditions and in some cases stood in awe of them. The Romans created a vast empire that contained a large number of conquered peoples with different languages, traditions and religions. It profited from its tolerance towards these differences. It is difficult to see how their experience differed qualitatively from our modern experience of globalisation. In short, the idea of globalisation is not a modern one but rather an ancient one.

Polybius, a Greek living in the second century before Christ, wrote a history of, among other things, the Second Punic War that pitted Rome against its archenemy Carthage. He explains that this conflict, which took place from 218 to 201 BC, was an epic event that signalled a major shift in history. Since both the Romans and the Carthaginians had colonies throughout the Mediterranean, the war covered a vast geographical area. In his introduction Polybius explains that

in earlier times the world's history had consisted, so to speak, of a series of unrelated episodes, the origins and results of each being as widely separated as their localities, but from this point onwards history becomes an organic whole: the affairs of Italy and of Africa are connected with those of Asia and Greece, and all events bear a relationship and contribute to a single end. (Polybius, 1979, p. 43)

Here we can see already in antiquity, two centuries before Christ, the first glimpses of a globalised perspective. Polybius realises that with the conflict of Rome and North African Carthage the world had in a sense become smaller. It is no longer possible just to pay attention to one's own private concerns in one's own local region. Now the Mediterranean world is interconnected, and what happens in one place has important consequences for what happens elsewhere. So Polybius' impassioned plea is that in order to understand the Second Punic War, people need to adopt not a local or specialised perspective but a universal, or we would say *global*, one. He complains:

It is impossible for us to achieve this comprehensive view from those histories which record isolated events...The fact is that we can obtain no more than an impression of a whole from a part, but certainly neither a thorough knowledge nor an accurate understanding. (Polybius, 1979, p. 44)

Polybius then proposes his own view of universal history: “it is only by combining and comparing the various parts of the whole with one another and noting their resemblances and their differences that we shall arrive at a comprehensive view” (Polybius, 1979, p. 45). True understanding is only possible if we can see the whole picture and thus the individual parts in their broader context.

Polybius' progressive vision is highly relevant for our global world today. Things that happen on one side of the globe more and more frequently have an important impact on things on the other side. The world has become smaller as the technological developments in communication, transportation and trade have in a sense made everyone in the world our neighbour. This presents new challenges not least of all to education.

There have been other periods in history like this when the world seemed suddenly to take on a broader perspective, and each of these can be seen as key periods for the development of globalisation. One might refer to the 15th century with the discovery of the Americas and the Jesuit missionaries in China, which gave rise to the field of Sinology. One might also refer to the first half of the 19th century, which saw a dramatically increased awareness of non-Western cultures and the birth of what has been referred to as Orientalism or Asian Studies, with the foundation of the scholarly fields of Indology, Egyptology, Persian Studies and Arabic Studies. Similarly, economists in the 19th century became aware of what we today refer to as the global economy, that is, the ways in which modes of production and marketing of goods in one place expand and have an impact on different places around the world (Marx, 1978). With each of these periods, Europe was obliged to re-evaluate its self-image and its position in the world.

Thus, the phenomenon of globalisation is not unique to our modern world but in fact goes back through history. Therefore, there is every reason to think that certain aspects of a classical educational system that were well suited to other periods in history might well be appropriate today as well. Perhaps the key issue with globalisation is that it means an increased awareness of one's place in the world as a member of one people, one society, one nation, one religion vis-à-vis others. This sounds quite straightforward, but a great deal is implied here with regard to its consequences for education. This means more than a simple sense of general respect for difference and otherness. This should be a given. But it means, more significantly, a serious and dedicated effort to learn about all the things that make people different, or, as Polybius says, to learn about all the parts in all their complexity in order to understand the whole. Here one starts to see that mutual respect is simply the visible tip of a very large iceberg. What globalised education means is a systematic curriculum that educates young people in the history of all the different peoples of the world, in the different religions of the world, and in the different traditions of art and literature. This means learning foreign languages and different modes of communication that facilitate one's interaction with people from all over the world. Only with such a full commitment truly to learn about the other can one genuinely call oneself a full-fledged global citizen in the modern world.

Here we can heed Polybius' words that true understanding is only possible with an overview of the whole. It is necessary to see the role of the part in the bigger picture, and only in this way are the part and the whole truly comprehensible. This is a daunting task, but I believe that with a revised model of classical education we have the basic tools in hand to accomplish this ambitious goal. First, it is necessary to understand science and technology as a central part of our classical heritage on equal footing with literature, history and the other fields traditionally associated with classical education. In this way, we can make classical education fit better with the demands of the fast-changing modern world that is based on science and technology. Second, it is necessary to include instruction in religion as a part of classical education. Specifically, we need to design programs that teach students the basics of the main religious traditions in order to prepare them for life in a multicultural globalised world. Finally, it is necessary to expand classical education to include other traditions that have also been influential on modern society. Classical education has always been about learning about different cultures. This needs merely to be expanded from a more or less exclusive occupation with the Greeks and the Romans to include other cultures of the world.

The approach suggested here has great relevance for the issue of self-identity. This approach will help to overcome the sense of alienation that some students feel from Western Civilisation courses since they do not

see in the Western authors a reflection of their own cultural or ethnic background. When they see that Western Civilisation is not a monolithic entity but rather a complex, fluid, and eclectic idea, then they will realise that what is called "Western" in fact encompasses a great many things. The Arabic mathematicians and natural scientists have a rightful claim to be a part of this tradition, just as do previously marginalised figures such as Harriet Tubman and Booker T. Washington. This new understanding of Western Civilisation allows students to see their own identity as a part of the story of the West, since they realise that this story is by no means an uncritical one. Many great Western writers and thinkers are highly critical of what are taken to be typically Western values and ideas. When the students realise this, then they can mobilise their own sense of alienation with the West as a productive motivation to study its history and culture in order to articulate their criticism of it. The approach suggested here thus helps to motivate the modern diverse student body in a way that the traditional encomium for the grandeur of the West did not.

With these suggestions, it should be clear that I am not proposing any kind of radical or revolutionary change. The basics of all of my proposals are already to be found in classical education if this concept is understood correctly. We do not need to start with something entirely new here, but instead we can build on the old strengths of classical education and expand on them in a way that will make it more suitable for our times.

Given all of this, there is no reason why advocates of classical education need to be on the defensive or need to seek desperately for arguments to justify their existence. A correct understanding of classical education provides them with all that we need. But it should be noted that a part of this is a critical understanding, that is, an awareness of the limitations and shortcomings of the Greek and Roman world as the sole basis for an educational program. But I see this critical understanding as a strength and not a weakness. We might have to abandon some cherished clichés and stereotypes about classical education, but nothing will be lost by this, and ultimately we will end up with a more dynamic and robust conception of education that will better serve our students in the challenges that they will meet in the globalised world.

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## De Reconciliation: Violence, the Flesh, and Primary Vulnerability

James Griffith

### Abstract

This essay compares Merleau-Ponty's notion of the flesh with Judith Butler's concept of primary vulnerability in terms of their helpfulness for developing an intersubjective ontology. It compares the flesh with Butler's more recent concept of primary vulnerability insofar as she sees both as useful for intersubjective ontology. The hiatus of the flesh is that which spans between self and world and opens Merleau-Ponty's thought onto an intersubjective ontology. While Butler's discussion of vulnerability as a primary condition of human existence also makes this concept intersubjective, her understanding of violence as articulated through vulnerability makes this a more helpful concept for intersubjective ontology than the flesh. While many discussions of an intersubjective way of life focus almost exclusively on its positive possibilities, almost to the exclusion of violence altogether, the understanding of violence Butler presents through primary vulnerability help us to discern whether a violation is benign or malign. In turn, this fuller understanding of violence lets primary vulnerability open onto an ethical imperative of reconciliation, but a reconciliation of what is never whole.

*Keywords:* Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the flesh, Judith Butler, primary vulnerability, intersubjectivity

In an essay from the late 1980s, Judith Butler criticises the early Maurice Merleau-Ponty for taking up sexuality and gender from the perspective of a male or masculine master dominating a female or feminine slave to the point of incorporating her into his subjectivity, despite Merleau-Ponty's claims to opening up sexuality beyond naturalising categories<sup>1</sup>. On her reading, Merleau-Ponty seems valuable for feminist philosophy because he offers an account of sexuality dislodged from naturalising and normalising tendencies because it "is coextensive with existence" and "as a mode of situating oneself in terms of one's intersubjectivity" because no sexual state is without reference to the world nor does it have a predetermined form (Butler, 1990, p. 85/89). However, his account still tacitly maintains heterosexual assumptions about sexuality because he erroneously distinguishes "biological subsistence and the domain of historical and cultural

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