Back to the Core

Rethinking Core Texts in Liberal Arts & Sciences Education in Europe

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Dedication

This book is based on a conference on Liberal Arts and Sciences Education and Core Texts in the European Context held at Amsterdam University College in September 2015. The conference would not have been possible without the gracious support of Amsterdam University College's founding Dean Marijk van der Wende, who in the early stages of AUC's existence took the risk of supporting what turned out to be a monumental conference. The editors are also grateful to the Association for Core Texts and Courses and, in particular, to its director J. Scott Lee who was crucial for making the conference a success. The editors of the volume wish to thank all participants to the conference who, with their contagious commitment to teaching core texts, were invaluable for making the conference a success, facilitating the exchange of ideas and good practices and building a community around the teaching of core texts in Europe. Finally, the editors thank Joanna Boothman, who helped to develop a title for the book and designed its playful cover.

Introduction

Emma Cohen de Lara and Hanke Drop

Over the last century, European universities have evolved to become advanced research institutions, mainly offering academic training in specialized disciplines. The Bologna process that started in the late nineties encouraged European institutions of higher education to broaden their curricula and to commit to undergraduate education with increased vigor. One of the results of this development is that Europe is currently witnessing a proliferation of liberal arts and sciences colleges and broad bachelor degrees. These degrees are meant to provide students with a comprehensive framework to help them orient their advanced studies. More importantly, they are designed to promote a liberal education that is focused not only on advanced research skills but also on shaping critical thinking skills, the ability to think across disciplines, the creative imagination, and civic engagement and leadership skills. People seem to agree that in an increasingly globalizing and complex world, there is a growing demand for leaders and decision-makers who can think prudently and comprehensively about multifaceted problems and challenges.

Within this approach to undergraduate education, courses that involve core texts – i.e. classic texts from philosophical, historical, literary or cultural traditions – are gaining significance. Core texts, involving "the best that has been written" meet the challenges of modern higher education in a unique way. They not only develop the student's philosophical, analytical, literary, and general reading skills, but they also suspend the concerns of the moment while opening up new normative, literary, psychological, philosophical, or political horizons. This has potentially formative and liberating effects. The dialectic between, on the one hand, the ideas and questions in classic texts and, on the other hand, the experience of today's world promotes creativity, self-reflection, and independent thinking. Core texts have the potential to draw students out of their intellectual comfort zone, challenging their own beliefs and opinions. As such, these texts constitute an important part of a genuinely *liberal* education.

Last September 2015, an international conference was held at Amsterdam University College on the topic of Liberal Arts and Sciences Education and Core Texts in the European context. The conference brought people together who use core texts in one way or other in their courses, preferably in a liberal arts and sciences, broad bachelor, or comprehensive studies environment. A

core text in this sense is any text that has stood or is likely to stand the test of time, from Plato to Derrida, from Homer to Dostoyevsky, from Augustine to Gandhi. The conference defines core texts in an inclusive way as any classic text that provides the foundation for a shared discourse whether from the Western or non-Western tradition, from ancient to (post-)modern time periods, and embedded in the humanities - philosophy, literature, history, and the arts – the social sciences – politics, anthropology, sociology, economics, and law – or the natural sciences – biology, physics, mathematics, etc. The conference invited reflection on questions about the meaning of a well-rounded liberal education, the role and meaning of core texts in European higher education, pedagogical aims, teaching pedagogies, assessment techniques, the selection of texts, core texts and big questions, and so forth. Participants were asked to present papers on the above questions *and* include the discussion of a core text in the philosophical, literary, historical, or cultural tradition. Papers were meant to be short, so as to allow plenty of time for discussion. Panels were designed to encourage lively liberal arts and sciences discussions, not only about teaching and skills but also about the content of the liberal arts and the liberal sciences. With this volume, we hope to convey the passion that faculty members and university leaders share about developing liberal arts and sciences education in Europe based on core texts in order to provide students with a well-rounded, formative, and genuinely liberal education.

The first part of the volume offers insights into core texts education in the United States and Europe. Liberal arts and sciences education has a long tradition in the United States. British settlers introduced what we now call liberal arts and sciences education in the American colonies in 1636 with the founding of Harvard College.[1] Even though there is much debate about the pressures on offering students a broad, "useless" bachelor degree, from the European perspective the liberal arts and sciences are thriving in the United States, as is the discourse on liberal arts and sciences education.[2] Hence, it is no surprise that the new European colleges have frequently taken their lead from

[1] Bruce A. Kimball, *Orators and Philosophers. A History of the Idea of Liberal Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1986), 133.

[2] Recent examples of books contributing to the discourse are Michael S. Roth, *Beyond the University: Why Liberal Education Matters* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2014) and Mark William Roche, *Why Choose the Liberal Arts?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010). Classics are Martha C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1997) and Martha C. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit. Why Democracy needs the Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010) and, further back, Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind. How higher education has failed democracy and impoverished the souls of today's students.* (London: Penguin Books, 1987).

the American institutions, following these in their overall philosophy and in their curricula, course materials and learning outcomes. As Emma Cohen de Lara points out in her chapter on Liberal Education and Core Texts: the case of the Netherlands, Dutch education has increasingly trailed the American developments in higher education. The founder of the first university college in the Netherlands, Hans Andriaansen, modeled its curriculum on Smith College in Massachusetts. And yet one could argue that liberal arts and sciences education in Europe is developing distinct features and areas of attention.

From the perspective of core text education, we argue that cross-pollination between American and European practices continues to be a productive exercise. This is reflected in *Back to the Core*; four of the authors in the first part write from the American perspective – Chris Nelson, Thomas A. Stapleford, Richard Kamber, Scott J. Lee – interlaced with five authors who write from the European perspective – Miguel Tamen, Emma Cohen de Lara, Alkeline van Lenning, Nigel Tubbs, Connell Vaughan – and three authors who are American but who work in the European context – Ewa Atanassow, David Kretz, Angela C. Miceli Stout. These chapters convey the lively exchange of ideas between the American and European experience of liberal arts and sciences education.

The chapters in this volume testify of methodological or even metaphysical pluralism when it comes to the different approaches to core text education. It starts out with two keynote addresses. The first is a passionate plea by Christopher B. Nelson, long-time President of St. John's College Annapolis, for the value of core texts in higher education. Core texts, according to Nelson, promote the development not so much of specialist knowledge but of the abilities such as sound judgment, humility, and the imagination. These abilities are important but not necessarily trained well within the specialized disciplines.

The second keynote address is by Miguel Tamen. Writing from the European perspective, Tamen throws a shadow on the idea that liberal studies can be brought back into European universities. The main problem, so he argues, is that modern universities have lost their financial independence and independence from the state. The modern university has become an "intellectually timid monster."

In slight disagreement with Tamen, Emma Cohen de Lara observes opportunities for liberal learning in the context of the recently founded university colleges in the Netherlands. After a series of unsuccessful attempts to introduce general education at the Dutch universities, the university college model has become an institutional success. In particular, Cohen de Lara argues that the colleges are opportunities for experimentation with transformative education. Core texts in political philosophy constitute an important part of transformative education because they train the mind to think more independent-

ly about what is naturally just even in the face of what is conventionally just. This kind of intellectual independence is a crucial part of what it means to be educated as a free person.

Providing an additional account of the transformative power of core texts, Angela C. Miceli Stout, in her chapter on "The Spirit of Liberal Learning": A Reflection on the Cowan Method of Teaching the Liberal Arts, delves into the Cowan's method of teaching core texts in order to engage the poetic imagination of the students. Donald and Louise Cowan, who were pivotal in developing the University of Dallas from a small college into a dynamic university committed to liberal learning in the sixties, argued that the best way to educate citizens as human persons is via the liberal arts. The educational vision of the Cowans centered on the idea that poetry, literature, the novel, film are uniquely suited to speak to the students as human beings. They argued that these media have a potential transformative effect because they appeal not only to the intellect but also to the emotions and the imagination of the reader.

In an inspiring and practically oriented chapter, Thomas A. Stapleford addresses a general dilemma that many faculty members face, namely, of how to maintain a proper balance between teaching and research. The dilemma has particular pertinence for many faculty members in a liberal arts and sciences environment. Faculty members in the liberal arts and sciences face more time constraints – they typically teach more than faculty at main research universities – and they may also experience a conflict between broad teaching built around core texts and producing specialized research. Stapleford shows the model provided by the Program of Liberal Studies at the University of Notre Dame, which is a major research university, makes it possible to combine core-text education with specialized research. The model is based on a number of factors, such as offering teaching loads and leave availability comparable to those of faculty in traditional departments and ensuring the hiring of faculty with a true passion for both liberal education and specialized scholarship, which have made the combination a success.

Alkeline van Lenning takes on the challenge of reflecting on the role of core texts in a digital age. She notes that, even though the digital age is a reality and its possibilities cannot be ignored, there are also drawbacks. The risk is that students develop a short attention span and become especially skilled in superficial skimming activities on the Internet. Core texts, Van Lenning argues, offer a valuable antidote to the downside of the digital age because they promote contemplation and sustained concentration and can play an important role on a personal, emotional level.

Another component of modern times is democracy. Ewa Atanassow and David Kretz defend the premise that the relaxation of social norms in a democracy makes equality possible but also tends to undermine community.

They make the case for core text education based on its ability to address the heterogeneity of values that is so typical of the democratic age. As they seek to show with an insightful reading of Aristophanes' *Clouds*, when education is treated only instrumentally for the acquisition of skills and as a means for (economic) advancement, without addressing the heterogeneity of moral ends, it is bound to make democracy's problems concerning the bond between generations and social trust worse rather than solving them. Core-text-based learning is a foundation for a robustly democratic education, helping students to shape their normative common ground.

From here follow a series of philosophical reflections on the nature of a core text tradition, curriculum or canon by J. Scott Lee, Nigel Tubbs, and Connell Vaughan. All three contributions provide a loose fit with the tradition of (moral) inquiry that has been dubbed "*the genealogical tradition.*"[3] For genealogy, there is no such thing as truth-as-such, nor is there an accepted, universal standard of truth and rationality that can be summoned in order to test a particular thesis or argument. Any truth claim tends to mask the search for power and the will to oppress. Rather, genealogy argues that there is a multiplicity of perspectives from which the world can be viewed, and a multiplicity of idioms by means of which the world can be characterized.[4] Genealogy has two implications for the reading of core texts. First of all, authors in this tradition emphasize that commentary is interpretation, and that all interpretation is creative. Hence, the reader is a crucial agent in constructing the meaning of a core text. The second implication is that the traditional canon of core texts and the notion of a canon as such is discredited. Since there are no rules of rationality to be appealed to, there are rather strategies of insight and subversion, the need to articulate a canon is interpreted as an imposition of a particular – oftentimes Western – worldview.

The genealogical tradition can be distinguished from the Enlightenment tradition, which Alisdair MacIntyre refers to as the encyclopaedist tradition that distinguishes knowledge from mere belief, that maps progress towards knowledge and understands knowledge in cumulative terms. Unlike the genealogical tradition, the encyclopaedist tradition argues that there is truth or, at the very least, that substantive rationality is unitary and that there is a single conception of what the standards and achievements of rationality are.[5] As long as the correct methods of inquiry are employed one can acquire true

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[3] Alisdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry. Encyclopedia, Genealogy, and Tradition being Gifford Lectures delivered in the University of Edinburgh in 1988* (London: Duckworth, 1990), chapter 2.

[4] Ibid, 36.

[5] Ibid, 14.

knowledge. The tradition has close affinity with the attempt to order universities into disciplines, mirroring the order of the cosmos itself.[6] In this tradition, a core text curriculum should be understood as a narrative about how mankind increased its knowledge, that is, a narrative about an increasing consensus concerning how to acquire knowledge, and as a source of cumulative knowledge itself.

At the same time, genealogy can be distinguished from the classical tradition, for which education is transformative, pace the chapters by Cohen de Lara and Stout. Both recognize a core text tradition from which we can draw if we are to identify who we are as human beings and what we may become. By means of this engagement, one's own narrative becomes part of a larger narrative or tradition of inquiry that is ongoing and itself open to change, taking its directions from the past. In and through one's reading of core texts the reader not only learns about the texts but also learns about him- or herself. The texts function as a mirror, helping the reader 'see' or reflect on his or her own preconceptions and dispositions more clearly, possibly adjusting these and, hence, transforming him- or herself. Wisdom or *sophia*, to speak in ancient terms, is not considered to be a body of knowledge but a virtue, i.e. a quality of one's character.

The implications for a core text curriculum are that texts dealing with the human condition and questions about the good life are given a particular prominence. The 'arts' in liberal arts is taken back to its medieval meaning of crafts. The liberal arts – grammar, rhetoric, logic, music (i.e. the muses, which includes music but also literature and poetry), geometry, arithmetic, astronomy and philosophy (i.e. not as a particular discipline but as inquiry as such) – are the arts that craft the soul of the free person.[7] These arts were considered to be intellectually liberating because they helped the student distinguish what is from what seems to be but is in fact not so. The goal of the inquiry of these arts is ultimately to develop insight into what is really good to do and what only seems good to do. In short, the goal of the liberal arts, including the study of geometry and so forth, is ultimately to answer questions about the good life. Now, as both Cohen de Lara and Stout seek to show, the liberal arts go to the heart of educating the student as a whole person. This, one could argue, is the best way to prepare students to enter the world in which there is always uncertainty and where people have to make their own decisions both for themselves and for others. It is a kind of education that is more lasting than skills-education, because of the mere fact that the particular kinds of

[6] Ibid, 21.
[7] Ibid, 61.

skills required by economic developments – although often useful and essential – come and go.

The three contributions in this volume that fit into the genealogical tradition display a remarkable variety and richness, engagement with which constitutes a valuable challenge to those who fit into any of the two alternative traditions, namely, the classical and the encyclopaedist one.

Take, for example, J. Scott Lee's chapter Freedom, Arts and Sciences, Criticism in the Liberal Arts: An Aristotelian Perspective. Lee argues that a liberal arts curriculum consisting of core texts can be understood as a series of creative acts and achievements in which authors as artists re-invent the world. The purpose of studying the liberal arts is to allow a study of invention, and liberal arts education leads to freedom understood as the freedom to invent. Scott proposes that students and faculty have to relate the disparate works of arts and sciences to each other, as a work of art that is in ongoing transition or creation. In this way, a liberal arts curriculum allows the student to be creative in his- or her own right, which promotes the joy of learning about human invention both on a theoretical and on a practical level.

Nigel Tubbs' Freedom is to Learn: Education for its Own Sake is based on the premise that first principles – or any kind of unifying foundational rationality – is anachronistic and grounding of the imperialism of the West's triumphs. He unmasks a curriculum of the liberal arts based on the search for such foundational rationality as an attempt to political mastery. There have been, so Tubbs argues, two uprisings against the attempt to use education for domination. The philosopher Kant was the first who caused a crisis in metaphysics but, according to Tubbs, remained stuck in the old rhetoric of master and slave. The second uprising is more promising; it is constituted by the genuine liberation of reason through the conscious recognition of the master-slave dialectic. The liberation of reason results in self-determination, and this practice, so Tubbs argues, constitutes genuinely liberal education or education for its own sake.

Like Tubbs, Connell Vaughan challenges the traditional notion of a core text, based on his reading of Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The *Dialectic* is an attack on blind propagation and chronology of a canon of core texts. As such, Vaughan argues, the *Dialectic* is actually a great starting point into the tradition because it is abrasive, reinforcing and critical. Critical thinking is here not understood in terms of a skill set but, rather, the ability to understand (deconstruct, even) the nature of knowledge and its relationship to power and domination. According to Vaughan, Horkheimer and Adorno not so much critique the general tradition of the canon but are opposed to the notion of a *Bildungskanon*, which in their eyes instrumentalizes education in that it shapes students to become perfect in-

struments of the economy. In Marxist terms, imposing a *Bildungskanon* on students turns them into a commodity.

In particular the last two chapters in the first section of this volume may seem to challenge the second section of the volume. *Back to the Core* leaves it up to the reader, however, to navigate his or her way through the "*constrained disagreement*"[8] about the meaning of core texts and the canon, and to select from the methodological and even metaphysical pluralism of the first section the frame by which to enter into the second section of this volume. The primary purpose of the second section of this volume is twofold. First and foremost, the chapters are written to convey the passion that many teachers in the liberal arts and sciences have for core texts and for the educational and pedagogical value of core texts. Furthermore, the chapters in the second section are written in order to provide a firsthand account of experiences with reading core texts. All chapters in this section primarily deal with a core text. The chapters thus provide insight into the practice of reading core texts and are organized chronologically with the first chapter providing a reading of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and the final chapter reflecting on the place in the canon of the corpus of twentieth-century writer David Foster Wallace.

In Under-Thought: Teaching Homer in a Liberal Arts and Sciences Curriculum, David Janssens provides a range of reading techniques that ancient readers of Homer employed in order to gain access to Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. These reading techniques, so Janssens argues, are of use in the contemporary classroom because they promote a way of reading Homer that is conducive to critical thinking. One of these reading techniques is the assumption that Homer explains himself, albeit in an oblique manner. An awareness of Homer's under-thought, that is the tendency not to make all connections explicit, promotes careful study of the text and reflection on its underlying meaning. Approaching Homer's texts through the lens of the ancient reader helps us appreciate their philosophical importance, which places Homeric poetry even more squarely in a liberal arts and science curriculum.

Like Janssens, Richard Kamber seeks to bring out the contemporary relevance of ancient texts, such as Plato's *Euthyphro*, to a liberal arts and sciences curriculum and, again like Janssens, Kamber shows that the relevance of ancient texts lies in their inestimable ability to draw the reader towards philosophical reflection. Plato's *Euthyphro* presents the reader with a genuine dilemma that is particularly pertinent in current times, namely, the question of how objectivity of any moral value can be grounded. Whereas divinity is often taken to be the foundation for morality, Plato's *Euthyphro* already provided a

[8] Ibid., 233.

major challenge to this premise. According to Kamber, the value of the *Euthyphro* is that it pushes the reader into the realm of philosophy in which foundations are no longer taken for granted or left unquestioned. Philosophy, so Kamber argues, has a liberating effect on people even though it also produces uneasiness. Still, in light of modern moral pluralism, philosophy – or the ability to think for oneself without relying on tradition or religion – is more necessary than ever.

Matthew Post likewise receives inspiration from Plato's dialogues. Post's chapter focuses on Plato's *Republic*, which is another one of Plato's testimonies of philosophy as the highest liberal art. In a close fit with the genealogical tradition, Post reads Plato's *Republic* as offering a theory of knowledge that makes unified knowledge or knowledge of the whole impossible. Given that the whole is unknowable, all one can do, according to Post, is grasp the separate Platonic ideas without achieving a sense of interconnectedness. In an interesting response, however, to the genealogical tradition described above, Post argues that the lack of knowing the whole is unproblematic and need result neither in relativism nor in the abandonment of philosophy and truth altogether. Instead, the requirements to be consistent and complete are false standards of truth. The implications for the liberal arts are that the liberal arts should provide a challenge both to relativism as well as to the failure to seek truth.

In Core Texts and Big Questions for Health Undergraduates. The Cases of Job and King Lear, Teresa Vallès-Botey and Andrea Rodriguez-Prat explain how great artistic and humanistic works are important for the training of health care professionals. Health care professionals are inevitably confronted with the pain and suffering of their patients, and hence, reflection on the meaning of pain and suffering constitutes an important part of their education. The great works of literature, art and philosophy that deal with the human condition provide rich sources for thinking about pain and suffering. Vallès-Botey and Rodriguez-Prat show how these core sources balance the clinical view of health care with a humanistic perspective. In their own course, Identity and Vulnerability, they focus on the figure of Job and his reincarnations throughout cultural history. The course offers a comparative analysis of the biblical Job and Shakespeare's King Lear. Both characters show prominent differences in their attitude and resilience towards intense physical, emotional, and spiritual pain and loss. Vallès-Botey and Rodriguez-Prat argue that these differences create opportunities for students to reflect on core questions related to human suffering.

Moving from the Bible and Shakespeare to the painter Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Geoff Lehman in Bruegel's *Via Crucis*: (Visual) Experience and the Problem of Interpretation presents the reader with an introduction to visual pedagogy through a meticulous and exciting description of the *Via Crucis*. Leh-

man's point of departure is that the painting itself teaches the students and he shows how the painting invites the viewer to engage with the main theme from divergent but coordinated perspectives. The picture tells us that each viewpoint represents a different epistemic position and, hence, vision itself is presented as an interpretative act. The move away from an absolute viewpoint towards a variety of viewpoints was new and, according to Lehman, results in a rich experience to the viewer and invites enhanced interpretive and responsive activity. Lehman rightly calls the painting a "pictorial core text" and argues that, as such, the shared encounter with such a work of art is well at home in the context of a liberal arts and sciences discussion seminar.

Moving back from painting to literature, Álvaro Sánchez-Ostiz reflects on the important question about the role of national classics – "local heroes" as he calls them – in a core text course. He argues that there are several reasons to include a "local hero" in a course, such as the opportunity to read a text in its original language and the need to pass on the cultural traditions of one's native country. And, yet, as Sánchez-Ostiz illustrates based on his experience of including Félix Lope de Vega's *Fuenteovejuna* in a newly designed great books course at the University of Navarra, the advantages are not unambiguous in the modern, international classroom. He makes the persuasive case that, ultimately, the main criterion for selecting a text should be its inherent power to engage students in the great human conversation.

In the same century that Lope de Vega composed *Fuenteovejuna*, René Descartes wrote *Discourse on Method*. The text constitutes an invitation for Topi Heikkerö to argue for the inclusion of the philosophical reading of great mathematical works as part of a liberal arts education. Heikkerö argues that liberal study involves the cultivation of self-knowledge and always addresses the foundations of knowing. Liberal study rejects the researcher's assumption that one comes to know by focusing on a minuscule research area. Even though Descartes in some ways preempted the academic specialization of the twentieth century, he wrote *Discourse on Method* not only as an exposition of new mathematics but also to transform society and its underpinning assumptions. Therefore, intense specialization would not do justice to the fruitful interpretation of his philosophy. Instead, the liberal arts context provides the most hospitable environment for interpreting his philosophy in conjunction with his scientific contributions. This, so argues Heikkerö, is necessary not only to gain insight into Descartes' ideas, but also to develop the self-knowledge of the student – especially as budding scientist – and to address the foundations of knowing.

Jumping ahead about a century, transforming society into an alternative modernity is also a direct link to the next chapter, written by Hanke Drop and Iko Doeland, on Rousseau's Three Concepts of Freedom. According to Drop

and Doeland, Rousseau seeks possibilities for restoring the freedom of citizens as individuals in the corrupted and violent society. They argue that Rousseau displays an optimism about mankind in particular when it concerns the ability of the individual to heal the damage that society imposes on him. An individual's fantasy, desire and creativity provide him with the ability to live a meaningful life regardless of social constraints. Drop and Doeland argue that this is a fruitful notion when connected to liberal arts education.

The tension between the happiness of the individual and the constraints of society also plays a role in Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*. Sandra Schruijer makes a strong case to include Freud in a liberal arts and sciences curriculum. The text should be included on account of its enduring relevance to those interested in the paradoxes and complexities inherent in a community. Furthermore, as Schruijer shows eloquently, the text easily transgresses disciplinary boundaries between psychology, sociology, anthropology, psychiatry, political science, philosophy, and theology. As such, the text is a particular good fit with a liberal arts and sciences program.

In Franz Kafka as a Law Professor: What Kafka's *The Trial* Teaches Us about Legal Procedure, Arie-Jan Kwak deals with the themes of suffering, guilt, inconsistencies, injustice, tyranny, alienation and loneliness that play a central role in Kafka's *The Trial*. Kwak explains how *The Trial* offers such a crushing account of what it is like to live in a totalitarian state, where a particular political ideology rules supreme and where there is no independent legal system that makes a fair legal proceeding possible. This makes the text immanently suitable for law students, providing them with a mirror to better understand the, usually more perfect, legal system that they live and operate in.

The injustices, lack of freedom and inhumanities against individual human beings in totalitarian regimes also constitute the topic of Gelijn Molier's chapter on Vasili Grossman's *Everything Flows*. Molier argues that while Hannah Arendt's theoretical analysis of totalitarianism may conceptually clarify how an individual living under a totalitarian regime enjoys freedom neither in the public nor in the private realm, it is literature that may enlighten us at the level of empathy, emotion and morality. Molier argues that *Everything Flows* can help to humanize repressed people, which is particularly relevant for law students who in their profession often encounter people suffering from injustice.

Joop Berding shares with Molier the important insight that core texts have the power to move the reader and to awaken the reader's moral sensibilities. In his chapter, Berding offers a parallel reading of Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and Harry Mulisch's *Criminal Case 40/61, the Trial of Adolf Eichmann*. The main question that arises when the books are read together is how an individual's responsibility is to be judged with regard to one of the greatest incomprehensible disasters mankind has ever had to deal with, namely, the

Shoah. Berding also examines the literary style that both Mulisch and Arendt have used to write about the trial of Adolf Eichmann, one of the Shoah's main initiators. Both authors, Berding proposes, use a devastating irony. This style has in many ways contributed to the impact of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and *Criminal Case 40/61* and to the controversy that continues about these publications to this day.

The next two chapters describe, each from a different angle, a proposed course on Hannah Arendt taught by Elizabeth Stewart and Ruth Bevan at Yeshiva University. Stewart's part of the course maintains an interdisciplinary perspective, which consists of a combination of a biopolitical and a psychoanalytical approach. Central in this section of the course is the analysis of Hannah Arendt's reading of the Eichmann trial as a play that represents the drama, tragedy, and catastrophy of the Enlightenment, the fate of Western politics, and perhaps of Western civilization as a whole. In the second part of the course, Ruth Bevan delves more deeply into Arendt's views on modernity. Related to the question what modernity means, students examine concepts such as atomization and secularization and, perhaps above all, the dominance of technology. For Arendt, the rise of the empowered individual dissolved a sense of community and produced a disturbing narcissism. What is then the basis for the modern community? Bevan leaves this as an important question for the students.

In Doing and Seeing is not Separate: The Embodiment of Seeing in Merleau-Ponty's *Eye and Mind*, Iko Doeland and Hanke Drop argue that Merleau-Ponty uses the "language of the painter" in order to clarify that the painter knows things in a different way than the scientist or the philosopher knows. Merleau-Ponty compares seeing to the language of the painter because seeing is an act and practice of the body, and the world of a painter is a visible world. We cannot separate "seeing" from the "act of seeing" and, thus, we need, according to Merleau-Ponty, a first person perspective (i.e. the seer) instead of the common ('objective') third person perspective of the scientist in order to understand what it means to become aware of something. By bringing in the first person perspective we come to a broader and deeper knowledge, for this brings us back to a *lived* world, a world that affords lived experiences. The philosophical reading of Merleau-Ponty's *Eye and Mind* offers the reader the thoughtful idea that we might be able to restore the alliance between the subject and the world he or she lives in, as part of liberal arts education.

In the final chapter, Allard den Dulk takes up the challenge to analyze David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, which he categorizes as an existentialist instead of postmodern text. Whereas postmodernism tends to celebrate the *fragmentation* of the self, existentialism emphasizes the importance of *becoming* a self. As such, Den Dulk argues, Wallace's work provides an excellent addition

to the canon of core texts generally taught in liberal arts curricula. Wallace is increasingly regarded as pioneering a new development in contemporary literature and his work could be a crucial new entry into the canon itself. At the same time, David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* also sheds new light on important movements or schools already included in the canon, namely postmodernism and existentialism. These are important questions for students in liberal arts programs to think about.

Together, the chapters in this volume seek to show that core texts provide unique sources for liberal arts and sciences education. The chapters show authors from a range of disciplines in conversation with one another. They show that core texts can provide excellent sources for engaging students in critical conversation about their intellectual views, emotional dispositions, and about life questions. Thereby, core text education goes beyond transferring knowledge to students and offers the kind of education that is personally meaningful. Furthermore, the volume hopes to be a testimony to the union of, on the one hand, content and, on the other hand, curricular considerations. The best way to think about what and how we teach our students is to engage directly with content. Hopefully, *Back to the Core* provides a good indication of the inexhaustible richness of core texts and their inestimable academic and pedagogical value.

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