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# THE INTERNSHIP: BRIDGE BETWEEN MARKETPLACE AND LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION IN THE CATHOLIC TRADITION

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*Internships can be distinctive pedagogical opportunities within a Catholic liberal arts education. The applied marketplace experience provided by an internship, properly understood, is consistent with the Catholic understanding of education. The value of internships for Catholic higher education can be illustrated by focusing on communication and rhetorical studies. This essay consists of a selected review of literature situating internships within liberal arts education, followed by the articulation of a Thomistic framework for rhetorical education.*

## INTRODUCTION

Catholic institutions of higher education in the United States struggle with issues of identity and mission, seeking to be faithful to a religious tradition and to offer the best of secular education (Thimmesh, 1997; Wilcox & King, 2000). Burtchaell (1998) details the change in character of religious institutions over time, characterizing loss of religious ground with the metaphorical title of his book, *The Dying of the Light*, while O'Brien (2002) examines possibilities and challenges for Catholic education, particularly as Catholic institutions seek distinctiveness that simultaneously embraces normative standards of higher education. On a departmental level, these concerns have been framed using Buber's (1966) term "unity of contraries" (p. 111) in an analysis of one academic unit within a Catholic institution to provide a rationale for a specialist/generalist educational model (Fritz, Arnett, Ritter, & Ferrara, 2005) within a mission oriented to praxis, or theory-informed action (Fritz, 2002).

In this essay, we offer Catholic institutions of higher education a way to emphasize their unique tradition by positioning the internship experience as a bridge between liberal arts education and the marketplace, arguing that this

applied experience is important for Catholic liberal arts education and can serve as an important marker of Catholic institutional identity when understood within the philosophical framework of Thomism. Informed by Cardinal Newman (1959), we suggest that a liberal arts education can provide an ethical orientation to practice in the marketplace with an integrated approach that values intellectual training for its own sake, while aiming to influence the world toward truth, justice, and goodness. The field of communication and rhetorical studies provides a location for illustrating this integration of practical experience with a liberal arts education. This essay begins with a definition of liberal arts education as we use it in this essay, then presents a selected review of literature situating internships within higher education, and follows with articulation of a Thomistic framework for education in rhetoric within the liberal arts, defining the internship experience as pedagogical engagement of common human experience that holds ethical and practical implications.

## **LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION**

Classically understood as comprising the contents of the trivium (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music; Lewis, 1964), the liberal arts now carry the connotation of “nonspecialized, nonscientific studies” (Munzel, 2003, p. 46), or the humanities. The history of the liberal arts includes a post-19th century split between the humanities and sciences (Munzel, 2003), with liberal arts colleges including in their curriculum attention to each area of study, recognizing the importance of the sciences to a well-rounded education (Styer, 2002). The broader term liberal education in the United States has been conceptualized as education that prizes reasoning, knowledge for its own sake, critical intelligence, and habits of mind that foster democratic participation (Kimball, 1986, 1996). This essay understands liberal arts education broadly, as marked by common use (liberal arts colleges), recognizing its historic roots and the value of the tradition it represents.

## **THE INTERNSHIP AS A MODE OF LEARNING**

An internship can be defined as an experiential learning activity providing a bridge between academic education and the world of the professions (Sgroi & Ryniker, 2002). Derived from principles of cooperative education initiated early in the 20th century (Sovilla, 1998), internships are offered by universities in response to calls by employers for greater job preparedness on the part of students (Elkins, 2002). Internship programs have been touted as a means to provide students with an opportunity to develop skills tied to job contexts (Gabris & Mitchell, 1989). Faculty, however, express concerns for

the academic value of what is seen as merely work experience (Fitt & Heverly, 1992), while debates between advocates of liberal arts education and advocates of professional training for the marketplace (Cornwall & Stoddard, 2001; Rabuzzi, 2001) are played out at the disciplinary level at professional conferences and in disciplinary journals.

Understanding the internship as a form of praxis, or theory-informed action (Arnett & Arneson, 1999), provides a philosophical background for internships consistent with a liberal arts education within the Catholic tradition and is consistent with the growing literature on the nature and function of internships, which are said to work best as an integral part of the educational experience (Cantor, 1995). The importance of praxis is seen in the value of reflection on experience, which is understood to be necessary for learning (Kolb, 1984). Articulating a public, philosophical grounding for an internship program offers a qualitative contribution to education and to the marketplace in an era marked by the dual concerns of citizen education and student placement.

Grounding the internship within the notion of *praxis* permits connection to the notion of practical wisdom (Aristotle, 1954) as a core aspect of higher education (Churchill, 1997), which articulates a concern for action that moves beyond technique (Barrett, 1978). The metaphor of engineering opens the idea of practical wisdom, showing a need to understand a complete picture of the unique location in which one is situated in order to take constructive action (Arnett, 1999). When internships are embedded within a humanities framework, students engage reflection nourished by a philosophical background, providing a rich educational experience drawn from what might otherwise become thin unreflective practices and answering concerns of academics who fear “the transformation of liberal arts institutions into ‘trade schools’” (Corbett & Kendall, 1999, p. 75).

Within private schools with a religious orientation, a theological and philosophical foundation provides further support for mission distinctiveness necessary for program and institutional survival (Arnett & Fritz, 2002; Fritz, 1997). Educators within the liberal arts have a valuable history of traditional philosophy providing ethical parameters within which to engage the marketplace across temporal circumstances. Catholic education has historically embraced the liberal arts through the philosophy of Thomism (MacIntyre, 2001), and hence inherits a philosophical framework permitting such institutions to embrace an internship program within a degree program in communication and rhetorical studies without the danger of specialization, a concern of many educators in the liberal arts (Fritz et al., 2005).

The formative framework of Thomism embraces accountability to the good, the true, and the real identified in all areas of life; hence, it provides a pedagogical environment compatible with the liberal arts. A rhetoric pro-

gram in a Catholic institution of higher education seeking to engage the community and its marketplace within a liberal arts tradition is therefore substantiated by a Thomistic framework that provides grounding for wise decisions regarding the certain and contingent elements of human life. The Thomistic view of education provides a formative landscape of principle and practice.

As a striking contrast to skepticism and relativism in all of its forms, Aquinas assumes an independent and knowable reality as the proper starting point of philosophy (Aquinas, 1975a, 1975b) while he supplies a moral philosophy highlighted by the formation of virtue, which disposes one rationally toward the good (Aquinas, 1966, 1975c, 1975d). A Thomistic education provides the student with the proper and ethical starting point of engagement for life in the community. Hibbs (1990) argues that the theological teleology of St. Thomas supplies a natural law perspective with an obligatory basis in persuasion and practice toward the good, which Hibbs ultimately frames as a “rhetoric of the good” (p. 309). With the primacy of Aquinas in Catholic thought, it is proper to evaluate contemporary pedagogical issues from the philosophical vantage point of Thomism. The Thomistic approach provides a formative basis, theoretical justification, and an ethical framework for communication internships as part of a collegiate rhetorical curriculum guided by the liberal arts.

## THOMISM AND CATHOLIC EDUCATION

For Roman Catholicism, Thomism has a foundational primacy for theological, philosophical, moral, and practical matters (Leo XIII, 1879; McArthur, 1991; McInerney, 1966). John Paul II (1998) affirms this view in *Fides et Ratio*. The life of St. Thomas Aquinas provides a model of commitment, learning, and scholarship (Chesterton, 1956; McCormick, 1937). Moral, ethical, and legal applications of Thomism offer a serious and scholarly view of contemporary society (Haldane, 2000; Hittinger, 2003). In the realm of education, Catholic schooling historically has insisted on liberal education and the liberal arts for the clergy and the laity with a view toward the true, the good, and the real (Newman, 1959; Pius XI, 1929; Wise, 1947). Wise writes:

The Christian ideal is embedded in our ways of life. The paths of virtue and learning, the goals of excellence and the tortuous, heroic struggle for attainment demand the training of man's highest powers; and the liberal arts have rightly been esteemed as formative of noble ideals and effective methods, valid habits of thought and true premises. (1947, p. 172)

## THOMISM AND THE LIBERAL ARTS

Thomism, because of the formation and foci of Aquinas, has a special relationship to the liberal arts (Rand, 1946; Wise, 1947). McArthur (1991)

argues that a restoration of genuine liberal education is essential to the formative study of St. Thomas Aquinas. Conversely, the liberal arts tradition within a Catholic institution of higher education needs Thomism for several reasons. First, a liberal arts education needs a philosophical foundation, for which Thomism is especially suited within Catholic educational contexts. According to Leo XIII (1879),

When philosophy stood stainless in honor and wise in judgment, then, as facts and constant experience showed, the liberal arts flourished as never before or since; but, neglected and almost blotted out, they lay prone since philosophy began to lean to error and join hands with folly. (p. 20)

Reflection grounded in reality and guided by reason leading to virtuous action is a pressing need for the expanding challenges, both ethical and practical, of the 21st century marketplace.

Second, the philosophical realism and moral philosophy of Aquinas are supportive of the role of a liberal arts education in shaping an ethical community. The formative nature of the liberal arts prepares students for a diligent life of accountability to roles within the larger community, which specialization cannot provide (Hitchcock, 1991; Weaver, 1948; Wise, 1947). Upon observing higher education, Weaver (1955/2000) states,

Engineers and other technicians can be turned out by a more or less routine type of training. But skill in dealing with the public, in relating business policy to broad social trends, and in exercising the sort of imaginative insight which leads to long-term success is developed by the more philosophical, less specialized type of education. (p. 177)

A Catholic education recognizes leadership and accountability inside and outside the marketplace. According to McNerny, “A human being who pursued truth as if he were a pure spirit with no other obligations would be a morally defective human being” (2001, p. 94).

## **THOMISM AND RHETORICAL EDUCATION**

One important area of study in the liberal arts is the practical, liberal art of rhetoric, a foundational discipline of the broader area of communication. Rhetoric, as medicine for the soul (Plato, 1956) or “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” (Aristotle, 1954, §1, 2, 1355b), participates in the formative program of the liberal arts. Rhetoric, as a practical liberal art, needs the solid context given by a sound philosophy (Wise, 1947) for ethical action in the world because its domain—the art of

persuading others—is an essentially ethical task. As Aristotle (1954) states in the *Rhetoric*,

But rhetoric we look upon as the power of observing the means of persuasion on almost any subject presented to us; and that is why we say that, in its technical character, it is not concerned with any special or definite class of subjects. (§I, 2, 1355b)

Thomism offers a foundation by which students are given philosophical, rhetorical, and ethical entrance to the marketplace of the 21st century, much needed in an era when practitioners of the rhetorical arts, such as public relations, law, advertising, and journalism, are called into account for their actions by professional associations as well as the larger community, must practice virtue, and are required to engage the world. Aquinas provides a view of accountability to reality and roles while establishing parameters for human activity. A Thomistic education supplies a philosophical and ethical framework for an internship in rhetoric/communication.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

From a Catholic standpoint, rhetoric is accountable to the true, the good, and the real, by which human communication can offer service to the human community. According to Cardinal Newman (1959), the Roman Catholic Church through its clergy has worked rhetorically to preach the Roman Catholic faith to particular audiences around the world since the time of Jesus Christ. Wise (1947) states, “Rhetoric employs the powers of conviction and persuasion. Even if formal philosophy is kept separate from the liberal arts, at least the basic laws of reasoning and sound ethical norms have some part in rhetoric” (p. 188). A rhetoric program within a Catholic university, grounded in the larger breadth of the liberal arts within a Thomistic foundation, contributes to the disposition necessary to meet the challenges of the marketplace with a strong sense of accountability, conforming to and amplifying the good, the true, and the real within the larger human community. Mele (1999) analyzes the application of Thomistic thought to business ethics during the 16th and 17th centuries in Spain; Mele argues that although the social and economic conditions were particular to that time in history, Thomism provides an ethical framework applicable today because it is universal, yet flexible. Thus, Thomism offers grounding for ethical theory, pedagogy, and practice in the marketplace.

## **A BACKGROUND WITH LIMITS**

Philosophical grounding for the marketplace is especially necessary in the context of internships within liberal arts programs in order to provide limits

on specialization. Marketplace communication and professional development are pressing issues in the field of communication within a liberal arts framework, often addressed with internship experience and service learning amidst a host of questions pertaining to issues such as theory, procedure, grading, and compensation (Beard & Morton, 1999; Blakeslee, 2001; Corbett & Kendall, 1999; Maynard, 1997; McEachern, 2001; Tovey, 2001). Hilt and Lipschultz (1996), for instance, indicate that for broadcast journalism, the coupling of the liberal arts with internship experience can be beneficial for career preparation and job placement.

In a communication and rhetorical studies program at a Catholic university or college, an internship experience provides a context for the application of the liberal arts, and, in particular, the exercise of rhetoric. One danger facing programs understood as having applied value, of which an internship is one indicator, is the threat of specialization trumping the broad and formative focus of the liberal arts. Among departmental standpoints, professorial emphases, and student dispositions, when a solid theoretical grounding favoring the liberal arts is traditionally understood, specialization is kept at bay on campus while a student from this pedagogical atmosphere will be ready to participate successfully in the various temporal activities of society. In the particular area of internship programs in rhetoric/communication, Thomism offers philosophical, theoretical, and ethical support.

Jacobi (1990) argues that a rhetorical approach is a way of overcoming the ethical problems of the perceived neutrality of professional writing courses. From the Thomistic framework of liberal arts, internship students could appropriate their study of rhetoric within the larger metaphysical and moral aspects of their education, which gives them the reference points to practice persuasion and argumentation within ethical parameters. For example, students involved with advertising, public relations, or journalism internships understand these arts as falling within the realm of rhetoric: advertising as persuasion, public relations as rhetorical form, journalism as selective rhetorical presentation within accountability to community and profession. Weaver states, "Language, which is thus predicative, is for the same cause sermonic" (1970, p. 224). Students, through internship duties such as research and writing, are employing rhetoric to persuade various audiences, with real consequences for which they are accountable.

With these tasks properly framed, and with students properly formed, students will understand that they are working within the framework of the liberal arts grounded in an ethical rhetoric. This proper understanding of rhetorical action prevents students from either equating a liberal arts education with the internship experience or viewing the internship experience as neutral action; the liberal arts now serve to place the practical and particular in proper per-



spective. The larger educational lesson becomes the recognition that the marketplace is part of life, but all of life is not the marketplace, and that the marketplace and all of life are accountable to something larger. If specialization is not the departmental or educational focus, but achieves balance with liberal arts education in the form of praxis (theory-informed action), and is so named, specialization will not become an objective of communication education, and when action is framed ethically, its proper end in the good is perceived.

## **THOMISTIC REALISM AS PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION FOR PRACTIS**

The internship experience, finally, can be understood within the framework of Thomistic realism, which provides metaphysical, ethical, and practical reference points for engagement within community life in its various forms, including the marketplace.

Philosophically, Thomistic realism provides a substantive foundation for the intellectual, formative, and communicative aspects of life, from the family to the classroom to the marketplace and public square (Gorman, 1962; Ryan, 1942; Slavin, 1942). According to Slavin (1942),

Thomistic education comprises two essential elements, the metaphysical and the psychological; or, in simpler language, education is concerned with objective truth and subjective development. Man in attaining this objective truth must be prepared not only for learning but also for living. (p. 318)

Chesterton (1956) writes, “The fact that Thomism is the philosophy of common sense is itself a matter of common sense” (p. 118). In an age of doubt regarding truth, post-modern scholars derive definitions of common sense among competing narrative structures from particular communities (Gadamer, 1986). The mission of Catholic higher education involves the consideration of common human experience across locales to study and apply what is good, true, and real. This faithful disposition cultivates a welcome local home (Arnett, 1992) for those seeking the proper end of education—knowledge of the truth.

Pope John Paul II (1998) affirms the human capacity to know, with certainty, objective reality. For philosophical realism in general (Thomistic or otherwise), there is interdisciplinary, scholarly space for application of its assumptions and methods to all of human life, intellectual and practical, including human communication (Adler, 1993; Hikins, 1990; McInerney, 2001; Ryan, 1942; Weaver, 1948). The philosophical realism of Aquinas is a solid standpoint for both scholarly argumentation and pedagogical method.

According to Ryan (1942), “Truth is not merely experimental and utili-

tarian, not merely a matter of human will and effort. Truth is the conformity of the mind with the thing known” (p. 72). Thomistic realism is a specific type of philosophical realism that is the shining gem of Catholic thought on metaphysical explanation and common experience, for it is not a philosophy in which doubt, critique, or interpretation is primary, for with Thomistic realism, reality (living and non-living) is known in itself by the intellect and the senses (Chesterton, 1956; Gilson, 1986; McInerny, 2001; Ryan, 1942). According to Chesterton (1956):

But no pupil of St. Thomas needs to addle his brains in order adequately to addle his eggs; to put his head at any particular angle in looking at eggs, or squinting at eggs, or winking the other eye in order to see a new simplification of eggs. The Thomist stands in the broad daylight of the brotherhood of men, in their common consciousness that eggs are not hens or dreams or mere practical assumptions; but things attested by the Authority of the Senses, which is from God. (p. 121)

What are the pedagogical benefits of Thomistic realism, especially for the rhetorical student in the expansive and complex world of the 21st century? The question is larger than the realms of rhetorical studies, marketplace communication, and graded internships, although it is inclusive of all three of these areas of academic and practical interest. It is ultimately an issue of formation and disposition. Ryan (1942) writes, “Skepticism is essentially abnormal and unnatural; it is a disease of the mind” (p. 74). Thomistic realism is not a philosophy of critical doubt, and its adherent is not paralyzed by dilemmas about knowing, because the acquisition of truth is the proper activity of the human intellect—skepticism is not the learning mode of intellectual virtue (Ryan, 1942). Thomism supplies a healthy alternative to contemporary skepticisms, such as a deconstructive hermeneutic, which is typical in many academic environments. Thomistic realism removes unnecessary theoretical constraints, for it gives the communication student pedagogical openness to the good, the true, and the real, which allows for a more complete and ethical engagement with human life. Thomistic realism embraces a constructive disposition applicable to varying social and economic circumstances, recognizing reality as the philosophical starting point and valuing it for its actual existence and essential goodness as part of creation.

## **THOMISM AS ETHICAL BASIS FOR INTERNSHIP SITES**

A rhetoric nestled in the liberal arts, directed by the coherence of a Thomistic education, speaks to the importance of ethical fit between students of a Catholic educational institution and their host internship sites. Communication interns should contribute to organizations, and a student

formed by the liberal arts in the Thomistic tradition brings much to the table. A department guided by a Thomistic view would have ample theoretical resources to evaluate possible internship sites. Regardless of perceived benefits, an organization that violates Catholic moral teaching can be justifiably (especially on theoretical grounds) excluded as an internship site. According to Slavin (1942),

The field of Thomistic education is much wider than any classroom. It reaches out to the home, to the Church, to occupational groups, to any and every agency which influences men and women. It can never be restricted to any particular period of a person's life but encompasses the whole of life. (p. 331)

In a Catholic, Thomistic, rhetorical pedagogy, communication internships must be conducted within an explicitly ethical framework. Humans reasonably know reality and learn truth, and virtue cultivates intellectual formation. Slavin writes, "Thomistic philosophy of education is not satisfied with imparting intellectual culture or scholarship. It insists on something more—the inculcating of sound and solid principles of morality" (1942, p. 325). Slavin also states,

Mere intellectual perspicacity can stifle human life and carry with it the danger of lopsidedness. Good mathematicians, good philosophers, good engineers need also to be good men. True learning must be carried over to the more important field of good living, and education must deal with both. (p. 327)

Thomistic scholarship is rich with discussions of morality, ethics, and virtue that are grounded in Scripture, tradition, philosophy, natural law, and virtue (Haldane, 2000; Hibbs, 1999; Hittinger, 2003; McInerny, 2001).

## CONCLUSION

Internships are an important part of a praxis-oriented Catholic liberal arts education in communication and rhetorical studies for the 21st century. The field of communication/rhetoric recognizes the existence and value of difference and uniqueness in the midst of commonality and therefore should welcome a Thomistic perspective that offers pedagogical insight. In a world of competing narratives (MacIntyre, 1984), a Thomistic tradition provides to Catholic higher education a theoretical and ethical framework for internships, supporting mission and identity while enhancing institutional distinctiveness. Thomism provides ethical coherence and a formative base for educational communities of professors and students seeking to move theory into the practice. By framing marketplace involvement within this scholarly and

spiritual tradition, Catholic institutions can offer an alternative education for communicative praxis that is distinct from secular counterparts, yet resonant with the best of secular learning, being in the world but not of it. For a communication program grounded in the liberal arts, it provides the basis for an ethical rhetoric of engagement with the marketplace.

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