

This is not to suggest that we should replace books with bodywork. But this episode does reveal the limits of intellectualized integration and the irony of the phrase “*liberal arts*.” Far from being freeing, as long as they remain a province of thin statements over fleshy expressions—estranged from embodied knowing and our experience as active, sensual, emotional creatures—the so-called liberal arts usher us to a front-row seat in Plato’s cave. With Alexander’s help, Dewey worked out an embodied solution to the problem of dualism. With the help of Dewey—not only the prolific theorist of integration at his desk but also the man who painfully retaught himself to stand and move and breathe—we have worked our way to a conclusion. If general education is to be the occasion of personal integration, and not itself a dis-integrative force, we must heal the rift between liberal and aesthetic education. We must rediscover a form of humane learning that is the stuff of chest and guts.

#### CODA

But what puts the soul in this active state?

—Charles Sanders Peirce<sup>244</sup>

In describing our efforts to live up to the task of formation, I have adopted the phrase “soul action.” I wanted a phrase that captured the drama of inwardness, of discovering and developing one’s subjectivity, but nonetheless staged that drama in the social and physical world. By itself, the word “soul” may suggest something intangible, accessed in the stillness and privacy of contemplative withdrawal. We do have phrases, such as “soul-searching” and “spiritual exercises,” that connote activity, even physicality; but the searching is seen as inward, the exercises as meditative. Just as “journeying on foot, and running are bodily exercises,” Ignatius of Loyola explains, spiritual exercises are ways of “preparing . . . the soul.”<sup>245</sup> For this work, Ignatius recommends “solitude and seclusion,” explaining that,

Ordinarily, the progress made in the Exercises will be greater, the more the exercitant withdraws from all friends and acquaintances, and from all worldly cares. For example, he can leave the house in which he dwelt and choose another house or room in order to live there in as great privacy as possible.<sup>246</sup>

By contrast, we have seen how a crucial chapter in Dewey's own soul action proved to be precisely interpersonal, tactile, and kinesthetic. Dewey needed Alexander to help him find his way out of his cerebellum and into fuller contact with his estranged bodymind. In his frozen, constricted state, what Dewey required was not inward reflection but outward movement; what he needed was greater psychophysical *range of motion*.

There is nothing wrong with associating soul with either spirituality or individuality as long as we do not thereby disassociate it from the physical or the social. I like the open-endedness of Peirce's four-word definition of soul as "that which can move."<sup>247</sup> Soul is vital, embodied form. Soul *moves* in two senses: as inspirited and inspiriting, as animating principle and enlivening effect. The vitality of dynamic form circulates through the intrapersonal, the interpersonal, and the sociocultural. However, the dissociation of mind and body cuts off that circulation. We have been tracking this circulatory disorder at both the level of the individual (Dewey's midlife crisis) and the social (the campus map), and from this we derived a specific curricular conclusion, that general education must be reunited with aesthetic education. If we are to face up to the formidable task of formation, we must reembody liberal learning.<sup>248</sup>

As it stands, formative education leads a kind of ghostly existence in the contemporary university. You can still catch a glimpse of it in campus architecture. A hilltop location; buildings with some history, solidity, and grandeur; communal quads and articulated pathways: all of this points to the idea that something important, something higher, is to be attempted here. And you can still read about it in all of the mission statements that include the compulsory reference to "educating the whole person." But it vanishes as soon as we try to grab hold of it. Our actual priorities are clear from the way we direct attention and resources: the contemporary university is concerned with research and development, instruction and training, sorting and credentialing, not to mention "beer and circus."<sup>249</sup> With an agenda this full, something had to be tabled: it just happens to be what is arguably the core project of higher education. If formative education had been decisively killed off, we could mourn, conduct an autopsy, attempt a resurrection. Instead, it has been consigned to a living death, filed away in the impersonal bureaucracy we call Gen Ed. I suppose that makes this essay—if I can give this already twisty metaphor a final, legal spin—a kind of *writ of habeas corpus*.

As we have seen, there is nothing impersonal about true general education, which involves stirring individuals to soul action, recalling each of us to the task of figuring out who we are and what we stand for. Nor is there anything formulaic or facile about educating the whole person. Idiosyncratic and unscripted, the quest for variegated, dynamic wholeness is as harrowing as it is enlivening. By contrast, the modern machinery of Gen Ed evokes neither the passion nor the pathos of self-formation. The uniform gray of bureaucratic compliance is accented only by occasional flecks of curiosity and blotches of annoyance. Admittedly, this is a strange form of compliance, since what is compelled is choice. However, Gen Ed represents not a rich medium for positive freedom but an empty ritual of consumer preference. Whereas the work of self-cultivation is simultaneously individualizing and deeply communal, the experience of Gen Ed somehow manages to be both generic and isolating. And if our “scattering requirements” do not reliably widen, they certainly do not help students to integrate.

Indeed, what we have discovered is that this is not an accident but an expression of the deep fault lines on which the multiversity is built. If disciplinary departments began as a division of common labor (e.g., to understand and to educate; to enrich our individual and collective self-understandings; to extend, reanimate, and critique our culture and politics), they have devolved into competing firms, fighting for market share, each pushing an intellectual product recast as an end in itself. And this splintering of knowledge makes it difficult to maintain the connection between knowing and becoming, learning and living. Academics become estranged not only from each other but also from their inner sophomore. Consider that the etymological meaning of the word “philosophy” is “love of wisdom,” and that the phrase “doctor of philosophy” was meant to signal that one added to one’s mastery of a specialized field the crucial ability to situate that field in the larger constellation of human inquiry and understanding. To mention wisdom now is to become the butt of jokes.<sup>250</sup> Or we could put the matter another way, saying that what has been severed is the unity of teaching and learning. Professors begin to lose touch with themselves as learners; students remain unaware that, as liberal learners, they must direct and shape their own learning. Following Dewey, we traced the further fractures that branch off from mind-body dualism into rifts between culture and utility, the liberal and the vocational, verbal abstraction and sensuous form.

With the very foundations of the university riven by these curricular, cultural, epistemological, and existential fault lines, it should not surprise us when our holistic initiatives founder, backfire (scattering us further), or degenerate into empty rituals and rhetoric. To rescue holistic education from platitudes will require more than a rejiggering of requirements or a rebranding of Gen Ed. To face up to the twofold task of formation, to summon a community devoted to soul action, demands a thoroughgoing project of reimagination.



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# Undeclared

## A Philosophy of Formative Higher Education

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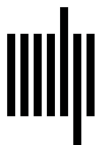
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