

Summary of: **The Trivium, the liberal arts if language grammar and logic** written by Sister Miriam Joseph edited by Marguerite McGlinn summarized by Trees_of_Bismuth for Symbolon

Introduction

The book opens with a quote from the Trivium itself:

In true liberal education... the essential activity of the student is to relate the facts learned into a unified, organic whole, to assimilate them as... the rose assimilates food from the soil and increases in size, vitality, and beauty.

followed by an introduction by the editor, she describes her choice to edit the Trivium and many individual outcomes of her edits which are not of concern for a summary. She also prefaces some of the teachings of the book. To her the teachings of the Trivium are tools to perfect the mind with a direct legacy going over the likes of Milton, Shakespeare and Aquinas all the way back to Aristotle. This is followed by multiple paragraphs on the nature of language. Whilst most of these will be indulged in much more depth in later chapters one in particular I would like to mention here, unedited:

The Trivium teaches us that language evolves from the very nature of being human. Because we are rational, we think; because we are social, we interact with other people; because we are corporeal, we use a physical medium. We invent symbols to express the range of practical, theoretical, and poetical experiences that make up our existence. Words allow us to leave a legacy of our experience to delight and to educate those who follow us. Because we use language, we engage in a dialogue with the past and the future.

She then goes over other particulars of her edit until she closes with a paragraph I would also like to leave in full.

Ultimately, Sister Miriam Joseph speaks the most eloquently about the value of this book. She explains that studying the liberal arts is an intransitive activity; the effect of studying these arts stays within the individual and perfects the faculties of the mind and spirit. She compares the studying of the liberal arts with the blooming of the rose; it brings to fruition the possibilities of human nature. She writes, "The utilitarian or servile arts enable one to be a servant—of another person, of the state, of a corporation, or of a business—and to earn a living. The liberal arts, in contrast, teach one how to live; they train the faculties and bring them to perfection; they enable a person to rise above his material environment to live an intellectual, a rational, and therefore a free life in gaining truth.

Chapter 1 The liberal arts

The liberal arts are defined as seven branches, these are:

Logic,	the art of thinking
Grammar,	the art of inventing and combining Symbols
Rhetoric,	the art of communication

Which make up the **Trivium**, the three arts of language. They pertain to the mind.

Arithmetic, the theory of number

Music, the application of the theory of number

Together make up the teachings of **discrete quantity** or simply **number**.

Geometry, the theory of space

Astronomy, the application of theory of space

Make up the teachings of **continuous quantity**.

Together all four make up the **Quadrivium**, the four arts of quantity. They pertain to matter.

Comment: It seems like astronomy is a bit amiss here which, in the contemporary world, basis itself not so much on Geometry but mostly on physics and chemistry. However it seems true that by studying Astronomy with an intent at geometry one gets to apply the theory of space in its finest form.

These fields are said to be each based in the arts of **reading**, **writing**, and **reckoning** with every field being a hub of knowledge and a technique to it's acquiring.

The book states that a mastery of the liberal arts is the best preparation for work in professional schools, such as those of medicine or law. Inasmuch as perfecting one's own faculties makes one a better teacher to others.

It separates the liberal arts from the **utilitarian arts** (for example: carpentry, masonry, plumbing, salesmanship, printing, editing, banking, law, medicine, or the care of souls) and the **seven fine arts** (architecture, instrumental music, sculpture, painting, literature, the drama, and the dance) which are **transitive** in nature, whilst the liberal arts are **intransitive**.

In a transitive art the action begins in a agent, goes out from the agent and ends in the object, so for example in painting the painting first is created in the agents mind, then goes out through the brush and ends in the picture. The outcome, if well done, is a **utility** that serves the needs of the human spirit and has as such a price that is paid to the artist for his work.

Intransitive actions begin in the agent and end in the agent, leading to his perfection. As such a practitioner of the liberal arts does not get paid for his works, which end fully in himself, but, if there is a transaction to be had at all, pays a teacher to instruct him. An analogy for such an action would be the blooming of a rose, self serving and self perfecting.

The book then makes a small excursion on the **three types of goods**:

Valuable goods are goods which increase the intrinsic worth of the possessor (knowledge, virtue, health,...)

Useful goods are goods which enable one to attain valuable goods (food, medicine, books, money, tools,...)

Pleasurable goods are goods which are desired for the satisfaction they give the possessor (happiness, social prestige, flowers, savory food,...)

The liberal arts education is as such a useful good that enables the possessor to liberate themselves a la “ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free” (John 8:32)

The liberal arts are defined as both a **science** (something to know) and an **art** (something to do, even if there is no knowledge of the underlying mechanism). The Trivium serves as their **organon**. One example given is Dionysius Thrax writings on Greek grammar from which the author cites the following:

Grammar is an experimental knowledge of the usages of languages as generally current among poets and prose writers. It is divided into six parts: (1) trained reading with due regard to prosody [versification]; (2) exposition, according to poetic figures [rhetoric]; (3) ready statement of dialectical peculiarities and allusion; (4) discovery of etymologies; (5) the accurate account of analogies; (6) criticism of poetical productions which is the noblest part of grammatical art.

Here we can see the liberal arts being applied to a text, not extended to it. The paragraph that follows it I would like to leave unedited:

Because communication involves the simultaneous exercise of logic, grammar, and rhetoric, these three arts are the fundamental arts of education, of teaching, and of being taught. Accordingly, they must be practiced simultaneously by both teacher and pupil. The pupil must cooperate with the teacher; he must be active, not passive. The teacher may be present either directly or indirectly. When one studies a book, the author is a teacher indirectly present through the book. Communication, as the etymology of the word signifies, results in something possessed in common; it is a oneness shared. Communication takes place only when two minds really meet. If the reader or listener receives the same ideas and emotions that the writer or speaker wished to convey, he understands (although he may disagree); if he receives no ideas, he does not understand; if different ideas, he misunderstands. The same principles of logic, grammar, and rhetoric guide writer, reader, speaker, and listener.

We now come to a part on **liberal arts education**:

Education is also called an art with the distinction of not extending itself onto matter, but rather onto mind, it is thus called the **highest of arts**. It is said to be a cooperative and communal task between the teacher and the student. The goal, according to the book, is not the recollection of individual facts but rather the **compiling** and **structuring** of facts into a **unified, organic whole** in the spirit of the quote that stood at the books opening. Thoughts structured in such a way are said strengthen and perfect the mind whilst a bundle of loose facts would burden it.

The book points out here that the seven liberal arts are not to be understood as individual subjects, but rather as **groups of related subjects**.

For example the applied theory of number includes not just music but also chemistry and physics.

The concluding paragraph I would also like to leave unedited:

The three arts of language provide discipline of mind inasmuch as mind finds expression in language. The four arts of quantity provide means for the study of matter inasmuch as quantity—more precisely, extension—is the outstanding characteristic of matter. (Extension is a characteristic of matter only, whereas number is a characteristic of both matter and spirit.) The function of the trivium is the training of the mind for the study of matter and spirit, which together constitute the sum of reality. The fruit of education is culture, which Matthew Arnold defined as “the knowledge of ourselves [mind] and the world [matter].” In the “sweetness and light” of Christian culture, which adds to the knowledge of the world and ourselves the knowledge of God and of other spirits, we are enabled truly to “see life steadily and see it whole.”

The book now goes further in depth with the liberal arts, stating that they can be described in how they relate to **metaphysics** (which is the search of the true thing or the thing as it is in reality) or how they relate to each other. They relate to metaphysics (and reality) as follows:

Logic	being concerned with the thing as it is known
Grammar	being concerned with the thing as it is symbolized
Rhetoric	being concerned with the thing as it is communicated

These relations are then demonstrated by the use of the following example:

Pluto was discovered in the 1930's, however this of course doesn't mean that Pluto didn't exist before 1930 however it's discovery made it a **logical entity**. Giving this logical concept the name “Pluto” made it a **grammatical entity**. When by it's name knowledge of it (the logical entity) was communicated to others it became a **rhetorical entity**. From this can also be seen that rhetoric is the highest of the language arts as it presupposes both grammar and logic.

The book now goes into the **materials, norms and functions of the language arts**:
(To these **phonetics** and **spelling**, both seen as subsets of grammar, are included.)

Phonetics	prescribes how to combine sounds so as to form spoken words correctly.
Spelling	prescribes how to combine letters so as to form written words correctly.
Grammar	prescribes how to combine words so as to form sentences correctly.
Rhetoric	prescribes how to combine sentences into paragraphs and paragraphs into a whole composition having unity, coherence , and the desired emphasis , as well as clarity, force , and beauty .

Logic prescribes how to combine **concepts** into **judgments** and judgments into **syllogisms** and **chains of reasoning** so as to achieve **truth**.

It is pointed out that Rhetoric, in contrast to Logic, aims at **effectiveness** rather than **correctness**. As such It recognizes various levels of discourse, such as the **literary** (maiden or damsel, steed), the **common** (girl, horse), the **illiterate** (gal, hoss), the **slang** (skirt, plug), the **technical** (homo sapiens, equus caballus), each with its appropriate use, as well as the fitting of language to the situation. It is remarked that while rhetoric is the master art of the trivium, logic is the art of arts, being supported by a quote from Milton:

The general matter of the general arts is either reason or speech. They are employed either in perfecting reason for the sake of proper thinking, as in logic, or in perfecting speech, and that either for the sake of the correct use of words, as in grammar, or the effective use of words, as in rhetoric. Of all the arts the first and most general is logic, then grammar, and last of all rhetoric, since there can be much use of reason without speech, but no use of speech without reason. We gave the second place to grammar because correct speech can be unadorned; but it can hardly be adorned before it is correct.

It is then stated that the liberal arts are **normative studies** (that is they can be shaped and are to be brought in norm with a higher ideal, ethics is given as example which seeks to conform to the good) rather than **speculative studies** (these are studies that can only understand but not influence such as astronomy which can't influence the stars [*Comment: yet*]).

The chapter is concluded by the statement that the mind is perfected in its operations by the **five intellectual virtues** these are:

Understanding	the intuitive grasp of first principles. (speculative)
Science	the knowledge of proximate causes. (speculative)
Wisdom	the knowledge of ultimate causes (metaphysics in the natural order, theology in the supernatural order.) (speculative)
Prudence	is right reason about something to be done. (practical)
Art	is right reason about something to be made. (practical)