



Philosophy, Interdisciplinarity and 'Critical Being': The Contribution of Crichton Campus' Philosophy-based Core Courses to Personal Development and Authenticity

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Our students...have not merely to perform competently, they have to...offer a rationale for what they are doing and for the discarded alternative actions. 1

Human beings differ profoundly in regard to the tendency to regard their lives as a whole. To some men it is natural to do so, and essential to happiness is to be able to do so with some satisfaction. To others life is a series of detached incidents without directed movement and without unity. I think the former sort are more likely to achieve happiness than the latter, since they will gradually build up those circumstances from which they can derive contentment and self-respect, whereas the others will be blown about by the winds of circumstance now this way, now that, without ever arriving at any haven. The habit of viewing life as a whole is an

essential part of wisdom and of true morality, and is one of the things which ought to be encouraged in education. Consistent purpose is not enough to make life happy, but it is an almost indispensable condition of a happy life. And consistent purpose embodies itself mainly in work. 2

The weekend I spent with [Primal Scream] in New York brought home to me the perils of being too 'rock 'n' roll'. I've always tried to bear in mind that famous Kipling line (Rudyard, not Mr, obviously) about patriotism; 'What do they know of England, that only England know?' Substitute pop music for England and you have very sound sentiments. If you only know about B-sides and acetates and line-ups and serial numbers, then you are merely a statistician. To understand pop music fully, you have to know and care about families, cooking, holidays, sport, trousers, literature, transport, fishing, all that stuff. 3

My aim here⁴ is to assess the contribution of the philosophy-based 'core courses' of Glasgow University's Crichton Campus⁵ to the educational aim of 'personal development.' First I will briefly describe the content and rationale of these courses; second I will explain, assess and reformulate the meaning of 'personal development', as addressed in the Dearing Report⁶, in terms of Ronald Barnett's notion of 'critical being'; and third I will show how the core curriculum and associated pedagogical approaches can help achieve some of the key features of 'critical being'. Of great importance here, I will argue, is their potential for avoiding a pitfall that could result from certain (directive) ways of implementing personal development; specifically, its clash with the ideal of authenticity.

I: Core courses

In Scottish universities, students generally receive a broader based education than is found in most other UK universities. New undergraduates at many institutions in Scotland are aligned with a faculty rather than a department so that in their first and second years they will take three courses each semester in three different subjects within that faculty. Subject specialization comes after this point, and many students will end up specializing in a subject or subjects different from their initial choice.⁷

Glasgow University's Crichton Campus (in Dumfries) shares the ethos of the Scottish generalist tradition, but differs from the model described in two ways. The first is that it does not restrict choice to faculty; students can choose from courses from the natural sciences, social sciences, creative and cultural studies, and humanities. The second is the existence of four compulsory 'core' courses that, in Crichton's initial curriculum design at least, are to be taken by all undergraduates no matter what their intended specialism(s).

The aim of the core courses has been well described by Ben Franks in the previous edition of this journal.⁸ Briefly, it is to provide students with a rounded intellectual grounding; in particular one that emphasises 'the search for areas of similarity between different forms of knowledge and accenting areas of conflict within the differing epistemologies' ⁹. It is to promote a meta-understanding of specific disciplines (e.g. applying epistemological, textual and ethical perspectives), and it is to help forge a 'democratic intellect'?one that applies itself critically and responsibly to social and ethical issues. Three of the four are in a wide sense philosophical, but not so wide that any would be out of place in the curriculum of a traditional philosophy department. One course (**Science: History and Culture** (S:HC)) concerns the philosophy, sociology and history of science; another (**Issues in Contemporary Society** (ICS)) concerns applied ethics and political philosophy, and the third (**Argument-Rhetoric-Theory** (A-R-T)) which is substantially practical or exercise-based?concerns, among other things, the status of argument, reason and dialogue in post-modernity. The fourth (**Text and Communication** (T&C)) is about textual analysis and would be more at home in a media or cultural studies department, but is still recognizably philosophical in so far as it places heavy emphasis on ideology and interpretation (writers discussed include Marx, Kafka, Benjamin, Ortega, Wittgenstein and Barthes).

II: Personal development

In this section I want to unpack the idea of 'personal development' as it is understood in higher education, making specific reference to the recommendations of the Dearing Report and to Ronald Barnett's 'critical being'. On the face of it the factors relevant to personal development are broadly agreed upon by Dearing, Barnett and other theorists and practitioners (such as Stella Cottrell¹⁰), but as I shall go on to argue in the next section, Barnett's approach appears distinct enough (or is detailed enough about implementation) to immunize it from a danger concerning student authenticity that I will highlight.

The features of personal development contained in the Dearing Report¹¹ can be summarized as: 1) Students should have knowledge of how to learn.¹² 2) They should have more explicit knowledge of the 'key skills' their degree programme will offer them.¹³ 3) There should be greater reflection on their progress and on the relationship between study and professional work (requiring more opportunities for work experience).¹⁴ 4) There should more choice between 'different types of higher education programme, including more offering a broader knowledge of a range of subjects.'¹⁵ 5) There should be an awareness and ability to 'adapt to the implications of change, while maintaining the values which make for a civilized society'.¹⁶ This last involves the understanding that learning is lifelong.

The relation to some of Richard Peters' aims of education is clear¹⁷. Dearing is advocating breadth as well as depth of knowledge, and that learning should be transformative (i.e. have an impact on the way we perceive the world and conduct ourselves beyond academe). The report is at odds with Peters, however, to the extent that a principal aim is not learning for its own sake? a love of one's subjects? but to produce more instrumentally competent graduates that are better suited to the demands of the workplace. This is symptomatic of what Barnett, Parry and Coate call the 'performative shift'.¹⁸ The committee was asked to take account of the 'principle' that 'learning should be increasingly responsive to employment needs', and indeed many of the items expressed by the Department of Education as 'principles' and 'context' that constrain the report concern economics.¹⁹

Even if the motivation underpinning this report is economic to the degree that we should be cynical about the reasons behind personal development being so strongly recommended, the 'performative shift' shares an important structural feature with what I understand as a form of authenticity in relation to learning. The relationship between personal development and authenticity I will discuss later, but as a prelude to this I will say that the context of academic learning should be recognized by the student. By **context** I mean things like their reasons for being at university and studying what they are studying in terms of things like life projects (vocational and otherwise), personality, ideals and ideology (however inchoate these might be). Any disagreement I have with Dearing (and others, like Cottrell) does not (here at least) concern the intrinsic versus the instrumental value of knowledge in higher education, but rather the intrinsic versus the instrumental value of certain contextualizing elements of personal development.

A wide-ranging and detailed account of the ideal graduate that incorporates personal development as it has so far been conceptualized is Ronald Barnett's notion of 'critical being'.²⁰ It stems from his expansion of 'contemporary forms of criticality'. 'Critical thinking', he says,

is more than thinking. It involves action, if only in the sense that the expression of a critical thought is a definite intervention in the world. And it involves the self. The development of critical thought brings the development of the self. The self is not outside the critical thinking but is intimately implicated in it; and nor is this only the cerebral self. The expression of critical thought calls for emotion (if only emotional control), commitment and courage. Criticality, therefore, embraces action and the self just as much as it embraces thinking. Accordingly we should abandon the notion of critical thinking as central to higher education and replace it with a more encompassing idea of critical being, which embraces action and the self together with thought.²¹

Barnett, then, identifies three 'domains' of critical thought: 'theoretical knowledge', 'action' (including skills) and 'self'. Only a combination of these three, closely interlinked, domains can generate the ideal of 'critical being'. This has important implications for the critical aspect of this paper, and it is something I will highlight as I use these domains as headings under which to develop a more detailed picture of critical being.

1. Theoretical knowledge

a. **The contextualization of knowledge.** Dearing recommends that 'all undergraduate programmes include sufficient breadth to enable specialists to understand their specialism within its context.'²² What is meant by 'context'? First there is contextualization among other academic knowledge; second social contextualization? for example among 'corporate, professional and industrial' applications.²³ This is principally addressed by Barnett under 'action'. Both of these can give rise to questions such as 'Why does [English, chemistry, history etc.] matter?'²⁴ Third there is contextualization among the complex whole of individual projects. This is addressed under 'self'.

The first of these? the importance in education of the contextualization of academic knowledge among other academic knowledge? is a familiar ideal.²⁵ For one thing over-specialization and too narrow a focus are seen as contra a balanced, moderate personality ideal, and contra an intuitive notion of an educated person. The political dangers of such specialization? for instance scientists ignorant to the ethical ramifications of their research? has been written about at length by Mary Midgeley.²⁶ A second factor is simply that a student's understanding of their subject is impeded at a cognitive level by excessive specialism. Endless examples can be given, but two are: the importance of the scientific revolution for understanding aspects of Descartes' philosophy, and the importance of early twentieth century American politics for understanding the rise of scientific behaviourism. Perhaps a good measure of contextual understanding is a student's ability to explain the meaning and purpose of their discipline (or parts of it) to a lay person.

A further point about breadth, about which a great deal more will be said over the course of this article, is Barnett's suggestion that knowledge extending beyond one's specialism aids the student's 'acknowledgement of the relativity of knowledge.'²⁷ Different disciplines can supply different perspectives on a given topic, perspectives that are not always commensurable.

b. **Reasoned thinking.** 'Employers emphasised to us in their evidence the importance of high level analytical skills... [They are] concerned about the general capabilities of those with higher education qualifications', and 'they are often looking for rounded but adaptable people who can successfully tackle a range of tasks...'²⁸ To a great extent this kind of analytical skill corresponds with informal logic; little explanation should be needed. It includes non-subject-specific reasoning skills such as the ability to spot arguments and identify fallacies; an understanding of the meaning and significance of validity and truth, and an appreciation of what Douglas Walton calls the 'rules of persuasion dialogue',²⁹ and Barnett calls 'the general rules of rational discourse' (for instance 'turn-taking, acute listening, respect for the other's point of view').³⁰ A widening of the idea of spotting and analysing fallacies sees it as including an ability to assess evidence in a fashion more familiar to natural and social sciences (e.g. external validity and causal fallacies).

This aspect of the knowledge domain merges with the 'action' (or skills) domain, but what can be more clearly seen as a skill is critical thinking as it refers to the forms of analysis we expect from students in, say, essay and report writing. As such this will be addressed under the 'action' heading.

c. **Meta-awareness of academic knowledge and specific disciplines.** Barnett discusses epistemological and ethical forms of 'metacritique'³¹. It is, he says, a form of criticism 'that works outside the conventions of the discipline', and it concerns, for example, biases caused by 'sectional interest' and 'particular epistemologies', and the significance of ethical perspectives.³² With the ethical form of metacritique comes an awareness of the non-neutrality of academic knowledge. An example (which heavily influences the core course Science: History and Culture) is a post-Kuhnian sociology of science, and of course, in terms of its relation to other disciplines, philosophy is metacritical. As I will discuss later, when this kind of perspective transfers to the individual's understanding of their own values we have a

mergence with the 'self' domain.

2. Action

Two connected, but still quite distinct, components are included in Barnett's action domain: one is skills such as critical thinking and communication, and the other concerns the link between formal learning and the outside world (primarily the workplace). The latter is not theoretical knowledge of the typically academic kind, but rather knowledge? or know-how?applied in a fairly specific (say, vocational) situation. It is this that justifies its inclusion in a separate domain.

a. **Critical thinking skills.** Referring to Dearing and similar recommendations in other countries, a recent review of critical thinking in education acknowledges that 'national government policy as well as employers are demanding that education, no matter in what discipline or at which level, ought to enable graduates to think 'smarter'.³³ This translates into the kinds of skills that demonstrate autonomous, creative thought and the ability to problem-solve, and that epitomize the (often implicit) expectations of higher education.³⁴ For example, Maclellan and Soden's taxonomy of critical thinking includes the ability to unpack concepts, recognize contradictions, develop arguments, provide evidence, examine the implications of evidence, question interpretations of evidence, and suggest alternative interpretations.³⁵ Many higher education courses incorporate skills specific to certain fields of work³⁶, but non-vocational courses can be explicit in their teaching and assessment of these transferable abilities.

b. **Communication.** Aspects of effective communication that can be developed by higher education include presentation skills (including the use of technology); clarity and brevity of written communications; and 'people skills' such as team work, listening, negotiation, assertiveness, leadership and offering and accepting constructive criticism.
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c. **Learning to learn.** To the extent that this can be seen as separate from specific skills needed for successful production of assessments, learning to learn offers a partially objective perspective on processes of learning (e.g. learning 'cycles', learning 'styles', learning 'approaches' (deep, shallow, strategic), the relationship between psychological states (for example anxiety) and learning, levels of comprehension, the role of writing in comprehension, ownership of knowledge, the 'illusion of learning', strategies for memorizing etc.). It merges with the self domain when the student starts to make sense of their own capacities, tendencies, approaches, experiences etc. in light of the theory. If this is close to the self domain, and the theory close to the knowledge domain, the skill here is being a more effective learner. This comes from an informed reflection upon the self which over time changes learning habits.

d. **An awareness of what higher education means and what it can offer.** This includes an understanding (and experience) of how academic work (both subject matter and approach) relates to professional work, and a recognition of what knowledge, skills and attitudes are valued by the cultural climate students find themselves in.

3. Self

a. **The habit of reflection or self-monitoring.** This can be seen as incorporating all of the above with the suffix 'and what this means for me personally'; but it also refers to seeing oneself as a learner in terms of other projects in one's life and in terms of one's life as a whole. Pertinent questions include,

- What do I really want to achieve from life?
- What kind of person do I want to be?
- Am I clear about my personal goals and ambitions?
- Am I making the right decisions to get me where I really want to be?
- Am I in charge of my life and my studies?or am I just hoping it all will work out somehow?³⁸ This element of

the self domain crosses over with the skills domain to the extent that the habit of reflection can be instilled by practice.³⁹

More will be said about this when I discuss authenticity.

b. **Autonomy.** By this I mean the ability to be self-directed; to be able and willing to make informed decision?decisions that involve critical thinking and appropriate knowledge of the kind described in the other domains, but also, vitally, self-knowledge and self management.

This idea is strongly linked to emotional intelligence: 'emotional autonomy' is, for Francis Dunlop, 'the culminating feature of any emotional education'.⁴⁰ Central to this is the kind of self-understanding and acceptance advocated by humanistic psychologists like Carl Rogers. The idea of a self to which we have to be true is highly unfashionable in philosophical circles, but at the very minimum I presume we can accept the sense of an authenticity in which the student 'must not let ... fashion, intellectualism, or a purely 'instrumental' life tempt him to deny **his** feelings, as is so common today, especially among the products of higher education.'⁴¹ Whatever the origins of this individual self, and whatever its mutability, the phenomenology reveals a degree of capability to stand back from our current situation and make choices that are in some sense 'our' choices and that in some sense are aligned to what 'we' want rather than what others expect of us.

c. **Passion and ownership.** Passion here, in a Kierkegaardian or Jamesian way, refers to the quality of thought and action?its intensity and felt personal significance. Barnett says:

Even to speak of the student imbuing her truth claims and her actions with her own meanings does not get at what is at issue here; or even to speak of the student being autonomous; or even of the student being self-motivated. ... What is further required is that the student injects some energy of her own. The student's own will has to come into play: the student has to will her truth claims or her actions or even her own self-reflections. ... Authentic interventions cannot be made without critical energy.⁴²

A lot of what has preceded this points to the importance of students owning their ideas and actions. Ownership can refer to depth of understanding - something like the ability to put something in our own words in a way that captures its nuances and sophistications?but also to an awareness of the meaning of something for one's life as a whole. Placed in such a perspective the 'energy' Barnett talks about is all the more likely to be present because this kind of awareness tends to bridge any divide between thought and action.

d. **The contingency of values.** A sensitivity to cultural differences, to the relatively fluid nature of our current culture, and to the implications this has for work is stressed by Dearing. Barnett's approach is, predictably, more holistic, and merges into a sort of postmodern personality ideal familiar from the work of, among others, Richard Rorty. Barnett says:

Through ... critical self-reflection, we become more fully human ... we come to a fuller insight into our knowledge frameworks and their ideological underpinnings, which we might otherwise take for granted.⁴³

His constant reference to the students in Tiananmen Square illustrates his agreement with Schumpeter's view that:

To realize the relative validity of one's convictions and yet stand for them unflinchingly, is what

distinguishes a civilized man from a barbarian. 44

In a similar fashion to Rorty's 'liberal ironist'?someone 'who faces up to the contingency of his or her most central beliefs and desires'⁴⁵? Barnett identifies two 'levels' of reflexive awareness.⁴⁶ One is interpersonal: the post-modern age requires us to be aware of the contingent nature of our beliefs and thus the legitimacy of the beliefs of others. We have a responsibility to be open to other discourses and to be modest towards our own. The other is individual: we must take responsibility for fashioning our own lives?the values we adopt, the action we take, the overall 'project' that makes sense (however provisionally) of our current commitments?and moreover, we must do this **with energy and commitment**.

III: Critical being and authenticity

Clearly then the three domains of critical being are strongly interrelated, but Barnett sees the self domain as sovereign, and I agree. Its privileged position comes about because theoretical knowledge and skills do not stand alone for the individual, but are valued for a reason. Among his eight forms of critical self-reflection is what he calls 'reflection as self-realization'. He says:

We become ourselves by becoming more aware of our own projects, and being secure about ourselves as pursuers of those projects. More than that, projects hitherto classified as attempts to understand the world are reconstituted as projects of self-discovery. 47

For Barnett's ideal student subject-specific learning is placed not just in the context of other subjects, but in the context of the learner's authentic projects. They should be able and ready to address questions like 'Why am I in HE?' and 'Why am I following **this** programme at **this** institution?': questions that require relatively holistic answers concerning where?at this juncture at least?they see their lives going; answers which in turn require the forms of knowledge described above, and the enactment of which requires the virtues described above (which are, in turn, supported by the competencies described above).

Through critical reflection the self can pull these strands of criticality together into a coherent whole, and it is this whole that is similar to the idea of authenticity. The way I understand authenticity is drawn from the existential tradition?Kierkegaard and Nietzsche in particular. It is not simply a matter of being true to ourselves in the psychological or psychoanalytic sense, but of being true to our **condition** (principally one of contingency). The authentic person is developing a rounded view of themselves (in terms of competencies, attitudes, preferences and values) and of the world (what's to know, how we can know it, individual and cultural differences etc.). They are brave and resolute in their formulation and enactment of projects that grow from, and test out, these competencies, attitudes, preferences and values. In part these projects succeed and fail to the extent that they co-ordinate with a world realistically perceived. 48 The ability to evaluate and change self-perceptions and projects in light of successes and failures is facilitated by key intellectual and emotional competencies (such as reasoned thinking, problem solving, managing fear and anxiety, social competence and healthy self-esteem).

The ideal graduate is then a 'passionate sceptic'⁴⁹, they are brave⁵⁰ and they acknowledge that their 'hold on life is fragile.'⁵¹ They are tolerant and modest, and yet committed. They are an 'ironist' in Rorty's sense, and very much in the sense that Owen Flanagan talks of the ironist as a 'confident unconfident'; someone he 'likes' because she is,

... a realist, and realism is a form of authenticity, and authenticity seems to turn out ... to be good, better, at any rate, than the alternative. ... The ironist is a virtuoso of playing mirrors off against herself, of saying "right ... but then again." Or, "I'm going ahead in this way, there's more to be said, and some of that more will undermine my present confidence in going ahead in this way, but there is not world enough and time. So here I stand."⁵²

Critical being, I am claiming, can be usefully seen as a fusion of personal development (in, say, Dearing and Cottrell) and authenticity.

IV: Critical being and the curriculum

How does the student experience personal-development? In the concluding Unscientific Postscript, Kierkegaard (or his pseudonym, Climacus), explaining his reasons for using indirect communication, says,

My principle thought was that in our age, because of the great increase of knowledge, we had forgotten what it means to exist ... this must therefore be set forth. But above all it must not be done in a dogmatizing manner, for then the misunderstanding would instantly take the explanatory effort to itself in a new misunderstanding, as if existing consisted in getting to know something about this or that.⁵³

Similarly, Barnett believes that the 'critical capacities in all three domains ... are not to be taught in any straightforward sense, **but are to be won by the student themselves.**'⁵⁴ This is something I agree with, but not something which is addressed by Dearing or by other dedicated books on personal development in education. There is something about attaining critical being that requires it to be self-generated in a way that many approaches to personal development miss.

The problem, as I see, it divides into two issues. One is whether critical being **can** be taught in an explicit way, and the other is whether it **should** be. As far as the 'can' question goes, the obvious problem with artificial means of prompting reflection of these kinds is that students do not take ownership of them. They do them because they have to and not because of any real appreciation of their sense and worth. And worse still, they resent having to do them. Perhaps in a similar fashion, a guaranteed way to impede a student's intrinsic interest in a subject is to tell them that they should love it for its own sake. The correct way is just to teach it (enthusiastically and competently), and **they** will decide whether they love it or not. This analogy falls down in higher education however when these aspects of the curriculum are topics the students have not chosen, and if their attitude is one of resenting having to be there they will (understandably) adopt a strategic approach and, in effect, **not** let the teacher teach.

I do, though, think that if certain new features of the curriculum are taught properly students can quickly forget their resentment and start enjoying what they are learning (this is something we have consistently encountered with the core courses). But as far as the full potential of critical being goes, there is a limit to this. Perhaps the engaged student is liable to treat the more personal elements as theoretical knowledge (for example the psychology of learning), or as a set of skills. If it is essay-writing, CV-writing, time management, problemsolving or even interpersonal skills that are being taught then this can be understood and usefully engaged with as 'skills for life' or 'skills for success'. What Kierkegaard and Barnett appreciate, however, is that the passion that drives critical being (and that is basic to authenticity) not only cannot be communicated directly, but these skills will create an illusion of authenticity that will obscure the requirement for passion and ownership. Students are exposed to the danger of feeling that they are engaging with 'the problem of life' just by stepping outside traditional academic learning and making themselves reflective and rounded in this prescribed way. In short, this runs the risk of 'authenticity by numbers', and that is a contradiction.

Part of my ethical worry concerns the fact that even if authenticity is not obscured in this way and these aspects of personal development are understood as, say, a means to success in professional life, then students need to understand **why** they are doing this and this takes us into ethical territory. Either they unreflectively accept the need to be (say) employable, or they reflectively make the choice to divide themselves into something like an employable self and a 'real' or 'whole' self. The first of these options lacks consent?no choice is made because there is no awareness that there is a choice to be made?and the second requires a level of critical understanding that is far from ubiquitous among young undergraduates. Where there is this understanding, personal development seems ethically

relatively unproblematic, but how are we to assess which students have it and which do not? And even if this is viable, do we then implement a two-tier personal development curriculum?

My deeper ethical concern is this: authenticity is firmly in the private domain of the individual. It is something they can only want to gain **for themselves**. To try to force it upon them will not only not work, but it is **invasive**. There are of course all manner of ways in which an individual is shaped by culture and has to conform, but (and maybe this is exaggerated by Western culture) subjective understanding of, and passion about, the direction one takes in life? essentially how one sees the world and what one cares about? is deeply personal. There is a limit to what we can be told (however implicitly) to do. We need to make our own mistakes and learn from these; as deBeauvoir says, 'To want to prohibit a man from error is to forbid him to fulfill his own existence, it is to deprive him of life.'⁵⁵ Such freedom is a vital part of what being a young person? typically, perhaps, until one's mid-twenties? is about, and arguably any explicit schooling that impinges on this is an infringement on personal freedom. I am not claiming here that the individual is entirely alone in developing authentic self-awareness? parents, friends and other intimates play a part? but the crucial difference is that these people engage (or should engage) with them **in their particularity** and not as part of a generalized, state-sanctioned education.⁵⁶

Just as a student's intrinsic love of a subject is not a top-down matter, nor is their self development to the extent that it resembles authenticity. And just as the intrinsic love of a subject is transmitted, indirectly, by a teacher who loves it intrinsically, so authenticity must be transmitted indirectly; it must be stimulated rather than taught. In part this is achieved by teachers who, in Barnett's words 'live out their own identities fully and utterly'⁵⁷, but in part I argue that it can be enabled by a curriculum that more explicitly contains philosophical elements.

V: Core courses and critical being

I am, then, arguing, that a student's being disposed to the pivotal 'self' element of critical being should, as far as is possible, be organically stimulated by changes in the academic curriculum (and changes in teaching practice) rather than being more artificially introduced. I want to argue in this section that the cores can help achieve critical being in a number of ways. They are especially effective in the knowledge domain, fairly effective in the skills domain and, perhaps most interestingly, they can play a vital and appropriate (non-intrusive) role in the self domain. I shall develop my position under the headings of 'contextual knowledge and metacritique', the 'freeing of the individual from ideological delusions', 'reasoning skills', and 'stimulating self-reflection'.

1. **Contextual knowledge and metacritique.** As I have described, the Scottish system, and the Crichton set up in particular, allow students to study a fairly wide range of subjects. Is this by itself though likely to generate a true breadth of knowledge? Two pitfalls face a multidisciplinary curriculum: one is superficiality, and the other is an inability to integrate the separate disciplines.

'Interdisciplinarity' Barnett says,

is of critical importance. ... It encourages the possibility of different cognitive perspectives being turned on a subject and so illuminating it in different ways. This can be said simply enough but it is fraught with problems, both of an epistemological and of an operational kind. Precisely how, in any one course, are such multiple perspectives to be opened to students in a serious way? A superficial encounter with a rival disciplinary perspective could be counter-productive: it could present unwelcome cognitive challenge and fail to bring even the cognitive transformation that a deep familiarity with a single intellectual field would bring.⁵⁸

The cores lessen this risk. On the one hand it is important that they are themselves inherently interdisciplinary, rather than forming part of a set of courses originating in separate disciplines. This inherent interdisciplinarity takes two forms:

- a) They deal with themes that sit on the cusp of different disciplines such as applied ethics, the history and sociology of science, and ideology in different forms of text.
- b) They are theoretical/philosophical and deal with meta-questions applicable to many or most subjects.

In these ways they illuminate deep connections between disciplines; connections 'reflecting long-established and natural groupings of subjects, or new combinations with recognisably organic connections.'⁵⁹ They help students develop the habit of looking at their specialism from other angles that might otherwise remain alien?historical, philosophical, sociological, political, textual etc.?and as such they are a form of 'integrated interdisciplinary'.⁶⁰ This partly corresponds with what Barnett means when he says that interdisciplinarity must be 'critical interdisciplinarity';⁶¹ an interdisciplinarity that 'engenders ... discursive creativity' and creates 'opportunities for spontaneous and fruitful cross-linkages across the discourses represented by the university.'⁶² On the other hand the cores avoid superficiality by functioning coherently as a package. Several themes run through all four of them (notably politics and ethics, interpretation, and the contextualized nature of knowledge) and thus each semester for their first two years these themes are reinforced. At my most optimistic I would say that the student who studies one discipline along with the cores is on the way to a critical breadth that meets, among others, Barnett's ideal and the kind that (for different reasons) is advocated by Dearing.

So it is precisely via meeting the requirements of 'metacritique' that the cores help establish a viable contextualizing interdisciplinarity and thus the breadth of knowledge desired in university graduates.

2. The 'freeing of the individual from ideological delusions'. The notion that we can never be completely free from ideology and that no ideology is immune from questioning is part of critical being and something stimulated by all four of the cores. Ideology is tackled most explicitly in ICS, and combined with T&C's detailed analysis of language, meaning and ideology in a variety of texts (including news bias), and S:HC's questioning of science's objectivity, we come close to David Cooper's concern (after Nietzsche) that a 'teacher ... can have few more important tasks than to alert the young to, and loosen the grip of, the many metaphors we live by.'⁶³

3. Reasoning skills and the application of these in presentations, debate and 'persuasion dialogues' figure prominently in the cores. There is a web-based reasoning section in S:HC that runs parallel to lectures; features of arguments are revised and developed in ICS, and informal logic is a central element of the A-R-T curriculum. The final section of this course offers a metacritique of reasoning itself.⁶⁴

Communication skills are taught and practised in the debates and dialogues that occur formally in A-R-T and informally in the highly discursive seminars of the other three cores (especially ICS). Although a group presentation forms part of the formal assessment of T&C, I am aware that many courses these days (not least at the Crichton) involve students having to present orally, and so the cores do not stand out in this specific respect.

4. Stimulating self-reflection. The cores are precisely not personal development courses, and that, if my argument in the last section holds, is to their advantage. However, I believe they are able to stimulate the self-reflective aspect of critical being. Barnett says,

In critique, quite different views of an object or a topic might be proffered as alternative perspectives are taken on board. This is real cognitive and personal challenge, and it may open up the way to a transformation of the individual student.⁶⁵

Barnett sees metacritical thinking as linked to autonomy and thus to authenticity. Regarding students' understanding of their subjects, reflexive questions like

How secure is it? How deep is it? How wide-ranging are the connections that I am making with

other topics? How much reliance am I placing on authorities ...? How original is it? How bold is it? How clear is it? ... indicates a self-monitoring capability which is an essential condition for human autonomy.⁶⁶

The previous three points all contribute to this capability, and more precisely the core courses have an influence on self-reflection and authenticity in two ways.

The first is via the curriculum (ICS and other examples of ethics and ideology). 'We are in the presence of critical thinking' says Barnett, 'when a student comes to recognize the essential contestability of all knowledge claims. When that state of mind has been reached, the student understands not just that what she encounters in books and elsewhere ... as contestable, but that her own ideas are contestable too.'⁶⁷ Since values and ideas form part of our identity, scrutinizing them objectively should also open our selves up to scrutiny.

Through having to confront unfamiliar subject matter, theories and perspectives, a form of what Peter Jarvis calls a 'disjunction' is liable to occur.⁶⁸ A disjunction is a significant rupture in an individual's beliefs caused by an encounter with a contradictory or incommensurable point of view. That the term is resonant with the 'upheavals of thought'⁶⁹ that can be defining of emotional episodes is no coincidence: the encounter is not 'cold', but personal and therefore emotional. In terms of learning, the student is more likely to experience disjunction on the core course than in other parts of the curriculum, and thus more likely to be jarred into reflexivity and creativity. The reflexivity could be at the level of the subject matter itself and its connection to their own values and beliefs, but it could also be engendered by confusion that arises concerning why they should have to be taking these courses in the first place. This can force on them the requirement to engage with the creative process of making connections between cores and their other courses, and also to ask questions about the purpose of (their) higher education in general.

The second way in which the cores can stimulate self-reflection is through the integration of disciplines extending to the integration of self. Why might this transference occur? One reason is that a self is partly a collection of beliefs. Some of these will be addressed directly by philosophical topics (see a) above), but others will be more indirectly affected. This is because the cores environment engenders the habit of reflection and integration, and this habit is liable to extend to one's self as a whole. If a student becomes used to contextualizing intellectual input, they are perhaps also primed to contextualize the process of learning itself? in other words, to contextualize themselves as **learners**. The implied perspective is something like this: "My learning is part of a greater set of projects that, in a certain, important, sense, defines me". The set of projects is understood as more or less contingent, and perhaps most critically (especially for younger students) could contain a number of unknowns. (What is unknown might principally amount to self-knowledge that can only be gained by formative experiences such as higher education.) What is fairly well understood though is that learning and their current activities are, inevitably, contextualized.

Some examples are questions like 'Why am I in HE?' and 'Why is this piece of learning important?' (Answers might be: 1. Because I enjoy finding out about it (I'm intrinsically interested in it). 2. Because I need to know it in order to make sense of something I'm intrinsically interested in. 3. Because it's part of a broader subject area that is not only of intrinsic interest to me, but that will form part of a knowledge and skills base vital for my intended ambitions (personal virtues, career etc.). 4. Because I need to know it to pass my exam.)

VI: Conclusion

I hope I have shown that the cores can go some significant distance towards engendering critical being. In this conclusion there are three points I want to make concerning the implications of what I have argued for.

First, there is more that could be achieved in terms of critical being considering the sorts of freedoms the cores rationale allows. Some examples, briefly stated, are these:

- a) An explicit questioning of learning and education and in particular higher education. This is already touched on in ICS and A-R-T, but could be expanded and made increasingly self-referential.
- b) Integrating T&C with study skills: for example seeing essays as themselves a form of communication? narrative structure, bias, authority, originality etc.
- c) Introducing critical thinking specifically in terms of academic (and other) writing skills, complimenting the reasoned thinking that forms part of S:HC, ICS and A-R-T.
- d) Being more varied in our teaching methods (for example peer assessment, problem-based learning, conceptual diaries, withholding formative grades (though not comments)). Even if these turn out to be no more effective than traditional methods, if they are unusual or unexpected enough this might further encourage criticality (via disjunction) in the students.

My second point concerns the implications for philosophy as a discipline, and if the cores are as valuable as I am claiming they are, then these could be substantial. On the one hand the suggestion is that most or all students can benefit from having philosophically based materials as core to their curriculum; and on the other it is argued that broad educational aims, now recognized by higher education policy in the UK, could be significantly fulfilled by the inclusion of such subjects in the curriculum.

My final concluding point is that if the plausibility of the conceptual link between the cores and the self domain is accepted (or tentatively accepted) the extent to which this works in practice remains to be seen. My personal experiences and those of my colleagues suggest it does work with many students, but a more systematic investigation is needed. It is this that will be addressed by the interviews that will form a central part of the next stage of this project, the results of which will hopefully appear in the next edition of this journal.

Endnotes

- Ronald Barnett, *Higher Education: A Critical Business*, p.104
- Bertrand Russell, *The Conquest of Happiness*, p.140
- Stuart Maconie, *Cider With Roadies*, p.30
- My thanks to Ben Franks, Sean Johnston, Michelle Kane, Angie McClanahan and Ralph Jessop for their comments on earlier drafts of this article.
- It is no secret that Glasgow's presence at the Crichton is likely to be phased out. Since the curriculum is not relevant to the factors that have led to this decision, then a championing of, and research into the value of core courses remains valid. The comments in the conclusion of the paper that concerns future developments is now probably not pertinent to the Crichton, but it is still of theoretical interest and of course, of relevance to any future curricula that share features of what's been achieved in Dumfries.
- The Report of the National Committee for Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997.
- 'At the University of Aberdeen, for example, 60 per cent of the students on undergraduate MA and BSc programmes graduate with degrees which are different to those declared as intended at entry.' ('Report of the Scottish Committee', National Committee for Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE), 1997, Ch.2, Section 2.14)
- Franks, B., 2006. More specific details of the cores curriculum can be accessed on the Crichton website: http://www.cc.gla.ac.uk/layer2/core_modules.htm.
- Franks, B., 2006: 130
- For example Cottrell, 2003.
- The 'National Report', NCIHE, 1997.
- Dearing Recommendation 2

- Dearing Recommendation 2
- Dearing Recommendations 18-20
- Dearing Recommendation 14
- Dearing Summary Report, section 21.
- These are an intrinsic (rather than instrumental) enthusiasm for knowledge, depth of knowledge, breadth of knowledge, and the capacity for the academic learning to transform perceptions of the world outside the classroom. (See, e.g., Peters, R., 1973)
- Barnett, Parry and Coate, 2004: 142
- In the mix though there is at least the recognition that higher education in the UK 'continues to have a key role in developing powers of the mind, and in advancing understanding and learning through scholarship and research'. Also acknowledged is the part it plays 'in the nation's social, moral and spiritual life...and in enabling personal development' ('Annex A to the terms of reference').
- Barnett, 1997, 2004.
- Barnett, 1997: 48
- Dearing Recommendation 16.
- Barnett, 1997: 113
- For a discussion along these lines with regard to philosophy, see David Cooper (1996, p. 87).
- See, for example, Peters, 1973; Cooper, 1983, 1996; Midgley, 1989
- Midgley, 1989
- Brockbank and McGill, Facilitating Reflective Learning in Higher Education, p.4.
- NCIHE, National Report, 9.4
- Walton, 1989
- Barnett, 1997: 110
- Barnett, 1997: 72-3
- Barnett, 1997: 18
- Pithers and Soden, 2000: 237
- Different disciplines will prioritize different critical thinking skills, and there might be a case for saying that the form of critical thinking associated with a particular discipline cannot be meaningfully abstracted from that discipline. Even if this is right, a person's approach to work, and to their life as a whole is surely benefitted by a reasoned approach that is more or less generalizable (at least within a culture). For instance Pithers and Soden say, regarding the 'Australian context', that abilities such as problem solving and 'collecting, analysing and organizing information ' are 'seen to be at the core of life-long learning to improve students' flexibility and adaptability when they enter the workforce.' (2000: 238)
- As described in Heron, 2006: 212-213
- See, for example, Barnett et al, 2004, pp. 148-149.
- See, for example, Cottrell, 2003, Ch.5
- <http://www.palgrave.com/skills4study/pdp/about/index.asp>. Accessed 25.1.07
- See, e.g., Cottrell, 2003, Ch.7.
- Dunlop, 1984, p.108
- Dunlop, 1984, p.109.
- Barnett, 1997, p.172

- Barnett, 1997, p. 45
- Cited in Rorty, R., 1989: 61
- 1989: xv
- 1997: 45
- 1997: 98
- I will brush over the view that accuracy of perceptions about the world and our selves has been found to impede happiness, well-being and growth. If this is correct (which I suspect it is not) then at least reasonable accuracy is required, and that will do for my point about authenticity.
- Barnett, 1997: 21
- Barnett, 1997: 22
- Barnett, 1997: 174
- Flanagan, O., 1996: 207
- Kierkegaard, 1941: 223
- Barnett, 1997: 173 (my emphasis)
- deBeauvoir, 1994: 137-138
- A related worry is expressed by Francis Dunlop like this: 'It is important, too, that these attempts to prepare children for autonomy do not result in promoting selfstudy or introspection ... If people become too interested in themselves they become less capable of intervening in their own internal economy. The stress should be on responsible action; self-scrutiny ... should be more 'glancing' and incidental than direct.' (1984: 110)
- Barnett, 1997: 109
- Barnett, 1997: 19.
- NCIHE, National Report, 9.6
- See Franks, B., 2006: 129-132.
- Barnett, 1997: 19
- Barnett, 2000: 104
- Cooper, 1983: 139
- Specifically, pragma-dialectics and post-modernist critiques of argument.
- Barnett, 1997: 19.
- Barnett, 1997: 70-1
- Barnett, 1997: 71
- Jarvis, 1992
- The title of Martha Nussbaum's 2002 book on the intelligence of emotions.

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