

Book Review

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Scheuer, Jeffrey (2023). *Inside the Liberal Arts: Critical Thinking and Citizenship*. Rowan & Littlefield. 193 pages. ISBN: 9781475869873 (Cloth: acid free paper) \$38.

Jeffrey Scheuer conceptualizes his book *Inside the Liberal Arts: Critical Thinking and Citizenship* (2023), as a primer on advanced critical thinking and a map of liberal learning (p. 2). The book focuses on two interconnecting purposes – the nature and the purpose of liberal learning. Scheuer addresses three key questions - what is critical thinking? What are the liberal arts? And why are they connected? His intention with this book is to build critical thinkers and democratic citizens in higher education. To do so, he explores the history and the evolving liberal arts tradition, the relationship between philosophy and critical inquiry, systematic and systemic thinking, intersubjectivity, and how they all fit into citizenship and higher education. Scheuer expands on these ideas through what he terms as the six gateway concepts of critical inquiry - language, rationality, analysis, truth, causality, and complexity. He guides the reader through each concept with analogies, lucid prose and a case for why they are vital to critical learning and citizenship.

The intent of the book is clear, and it provides foundational knowledge to readers new to the world of critical thinking, and the liberal arts education. *Inside the Liberal Arts: Critical Thinking and Citizenship* is essential in today's world of fake news, and right-wing politics supporting readers to acquire the tools for critical thinking. The book starts with acknowledgment and preface pages, is divided into 14 chapters and ends with a page about the author. Each chapter begins with a short quote from renowned authors and philosophers including Albert Einstein, and John Dewey, and a brief introduction to the chapter. In the next few pages, I briefly summarize Scheuer's book.

Chapters 1 to 3 expound on the liberal arts idea, triangular citizenship, and the six gateways to critical inquiry. In these

chapters, Scheuer delves into the history and epistemological ideas of the liberal arts tradition, using a three-layered wedding cake as an analogy to illustrate his points on nature, knowledge, value, and liberal learning philosophy. He connects comprehensive liberal arts ideals to the notions of breath and well-roundness leading to clarity in knowledge. The author then introduces other concepts such as the three-cornered triangular model (p. 16) of social ecology to depict the connectedness of civic, economic, and cultural citizenship on both social and personal levels. The argument here is that liberal learning fosters vibrant and prosperous communities with broad and deep citizenry participation driven by critical thinking rationality and intersubjectivity. He claims that "citizenship is rationality in its public democratic form" (p. 21). Scheuer expands on these ideas through the six gateway concepts of critical inquiry - language, rationality, analysis, truth, causality, and complexity. The six gateway concepts are interrelated and form the core of critical thinking. The chapters continue with a discourse on language usage, the conjecture of liberal arts in contemporary times and in colleges, and the relationship between philosophy and critical inquiry.

In chapters 4 to 12, Scheuer expatiates on the six gateway concepts of critical inquiry - language, rationality, analysis, truth, causality, and complexity - defining each concept with regards to the liberal arts and their relationship. His aim is not to resolve the underlining philosophical questions that plague these concepts but to confront them. He posits three modes of rationality - subjective, objective and intersubjectivity. Scheuer is in fact arguing for a paradigm shift in thinking about intersubjective rationality as the essence of citizenship. His argument is that intersubjective rationality is social, collective, a public and communitarian discourse that can transform our subjective worlds. Zerubavel (1997) touched on the same concept, explaining that shared social experiences of communities could transcend their subjectivity, creating a balanced view of social cognition. In this case, democratic citizenship that transforms the subjective world.

In the last two chapters (thirteen and fourteen), Scheuer concludes his book by discussing the moral engagement of citizenship through six axes of: policy, communication, content, the learning process and its institutional setting, the student as a moral agent, and the mission of liberal education. His discussion raises critical questions regarding the need to acquire the shared skills of

citizenship and moral agnosticism on the part of the student, the teacher, and the institution.

The book offers insights that are beneficial to both faculty and students. A valuable attribute of the book are the various definitions provided by Scheuer, which lays a solid groundwork for the reader. Of particular value is Scheuer's use of analogies and metaphors which are crucial to the understanding of the epistemology ideas imbedded in the book. He seeks to raise critical consciousness and equip individuals with the perspectives, skills, and knowledge of democratic citizenship (Arnove, 2003).

Unfortunately, for non-American readers, Scheuer's work, is focused on the American audience, leaving non-American readers to grapple with understanding some of the examples and context in the book. However, the definitions and other ideas can be applicable to non-American readers. A personal critic is that Scheuer talks about transforming from subjective, and objective rationality to intersubjective rationality but omits to elaborate on how that transformation can happen, especially in a society that is deeply entrenched in the subjective world of identity politics, neoliberalism, white nationalistic views and supremacy, the commodification of knowledge and the increased use of artificial intelligence. In summary, the book is an excellent introduction to the understanding of the role that liberal education plays in higher education.

References

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