**Speaker**: Margarita Mooney Clayton, Scala Foundation and Princeton Theological Seminary

**Topic**: Culture, Freedom, and Education Policy: How Debates about the Human Person Shape Educational Policy and Teaching

**Acton University, 2024**

**Overview**

Many American schools and universities have lost their sense of purpose and, as such, fail to transmit meaning to the next generation or form responsible citizens. The crisis of American education has led to a reduction of knowledge to power and a crisis of anxiety and despair plaguing so many young people. In our current climate of increasing social and political divisions along with rising depression and anxiety among young adults, why should educational institutions embrace a liberal arts mission over a social justice mission or a purely scientific-technical mission? What is the role of Christian faith, tradition, and rituals in the context of a liberal arts educational mission?

Good education promotes human happiness, freedom, and a robust notion of culture that includes the aesthetic dimension of the human person open to encountering the sacred in all forms of knowledge. That’s why understanding the philosophical and theological underpinnings of many of today’s educational institutions and culture is crucial to building new educational ventures that support human freedom in all its dimensions. Although much has been written about ideological influences in education that undermine commitments to human freedom grounded in classical Greek and Judeo-Christian anthropology, less has been written about how to respond to Neil Postman’s argument in *Amusing Ourselves to Death* that our minds are being dumbed down by forms of entertainment that are seen as news or education. Although the student mental illness crisis has been well-documented, less is known about how to guide students towards developing aesthetic virtues like the contemplation of beauty in both abstract thinking and the material world that integrate the mind, body, and soul.

In this session, participants will learn about four key thinkers whose ideas have shaped educational policy and teaching methods: the pragmatist John Dewey, the Marxist Paolo Freire, the Christian philosopher Jacques Maritain, and the Catholic priest and educator Luigi Giussani.

Some of the key questions this session addresses include:

* What are some key differences in understandings of the human person across pragmatist, Marxist, classical liberal and religious approaches to education?
* What implications do those differences have for the curriculum and methods of teaching?
* What is classical liberal arts approach to education?
* Why is freedom of conscience important in education?
* How are beauty, love and friendship related to truth-seeking?
* Can experiential education and tradition be reconciled?
* How can student moral character be formed (or de-formed) in the classroom?
* What does the Christian traditional generally speaking, and the Benedictine tradition in particular, offer to contemporary education?

***Key quotes from 4 philosophers who have shaped education policy and methods of teaching: John Dewey, Jacques Maritain, Paolo Freire, and Luigi Giussani***

1. John Dewey and the Problem of Human Nature

“I believe that it is the business of everyone interested in education to insist upon the school as the primary and most effective interest of social progress and reform in order that society may be awakened to realize what the school stands for, and aroused to the necessity of endowing the educator with sufficient equipment properly to perform his task.” John Dewey, *My Pedagogic Creed*

“In the discussion I shall develop another conception of the nature of the religious phase of experience, one that separates it from the supernatural and the things that have grown up about it. I shall try to show that these derivations are encumbrances and that what is genuinely religious will undergo an emancipation when it is relieved from them; that then, for the first time, the religious aspect of experience will be free to develop freely on its own account.” John Dewey, *A Common Faith*

“The significant bearing for my purpose of all this is that new methods of inquiry and reflection have become for the educated man today the final arbiter of all questions of fact, existence, and intellectual assent. Nothing less than a revolution in the "seat of intellectual authority" has taken place.” John Dewey*, A Common Faith*

1. Jacques Maritain and the Recovery of Reality

The aim of education is “to guide man in the evolving dynamism through which he shapes himself as a human person—armed with knowledge, strength of judgment, and moral virtues—while at the same time conveying to him the spiritual heritage of the nation and the civilization in which he is involved, and preserving in this way the century-old achievements of generations.” (Jacques Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads*)

A person is: “An animal endowed with reason, whose supreme dignity is in the intellect; and man as a free individual in personal relation with God, whose supreme righteousness consists in voluntarily obeying the law of God; and man as a sinful and wounded creature called to the divine life and to the freedom of grace, whose supreme perfection consists of love.” (Jacques Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads*)

1. Paolo Freire and the Transformative Imperative

“If men and women are searchers and their ontological vocation is humanization, sooner or later they may perceive the contradiction in which banking education seeks to maintain them, and then engage themselves in the struggle for their liberation.” Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

“The dominated consciousness is dual, ambiguous, full of fear and mistrust….the internalization of the oppressor by the dominated consciousness of the peasants [in Bolivia] explains their fear and their inefficiency.” Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

1. Giussani and Finding Purpose Through Tradition and Community

“If we consider our nature to be the image of the mystery that made us, to be participation in this mystery, and if we understand that this mystery is mercy and compassion, then we will try to practice mercy, compassion, and fraternity as our very nature whatever the effort involved.” Luigi Giussani, *The Risk of Education*

“Our nature senses that what it experiences, what it has at hand, refers to something else…we have called this the ‘vanishing point. It is the vanishing point that exists in every human experience; that is, a point that does not close, but rather refers beyond.” Luigi Giussani, *The Risk of Education*

“Loyalty to the given, to the tradition from which the young person’s mind originates, is the backbone of every responsible education. First of all, it lays the foundation for a sense of dependence, without which we violate and manipulate reality through presumptuousness, alter it through fantasy, or empty it through delusion. Second, it accustoms us to facing reality with the certainty that a solution exists. Without this, our very capacity to discover and energy to create relationships with things wither away.” Luigi Giussani, *The Risk of Education*

**Suggested Readings**

Books

Margarita A. Mooney. *The Love of Learning: Seven Dialogues on the Liberal Arts.* Providence, RI:Cluny Media, 2021.

Margarita Mooney Suarez. *The Wounds of Beauty: Seven Dialogues on Art and Education.* Providence, RI. Cluny Media, 2022.

Henry T.Edmondson III. *John Dewey & The Decline of American Education: How the Patron Saint of Schools Has Corrupted Teaching & Learning.* First Edition. Wilmington: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2006.

Paulo Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 4th Edition. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.

Luigi Giussani. *The Risk of Education: Discovering Our Ultimate Destiny*. With a Foreward by Stanley Hauerwas. Montreal: Queens-McGill University Press, 2019.

Jacques Maritain. *Education at the Crossroads*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960.

Articles

Margarita Mooney Clayton. “Graced Imagination: Recovering True Creativity in the Age of Authenticity.” Published online by Public Discourse. May 13, 2024. <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2024/05/94903/>

Margarita A. Mooney. “Educating the Human Person.” Published online by *Real Clear Policy*, October 4, 2019. <https://www.realclearpolicy.com/articles/2019/10/04/educating_the_human_person_111282.html>

Margarita Mooney. *The Poetic Body of the Benedictine Charism*. Published Online by *Church Life Journal*. <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/the-poetic-body-of-the-benedictine-charism/>

Margarita A. Mooney. “[Tradition and Authority in the Luigi Giussani’s Educational Method](https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2019/04/50901/).” Published online by *Public Discourse*, April 15, 2019.

Margarita Mooney Suarez. “[How Can Education Unite Us Rather than Fragment Us? Mystery is Greater than Ideology.](https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2021/12/79518/)” Published online by *Public Discourse*, December 16, 2021.

John Dewey, “My Pedagogical Creed.” <https://infed.org/mobi/john-dewey-my-pedagogical-creed/>

Herbert Marcuse. 1968. “Repressive Tolerance.” <https://www.marcuse.org/herbert/publications/1960s/1965-repressive-tolerance-fulltext.html>

Podcasts and Videos

Margarita Mooney Clayton interview about *The Wounds of Beauty* with Annika Nordquist of Madison’s Notes, the podcast of the James Madison Program at Princeton University. “[Beauty is Truth, and Truth is Beauty](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8tMY6zzpuy8).” February 14, 2023.

Margarita Mooney Clayton interviewed by Jeremy Tate on Anchored, the podcast of the Classical Learning Test podcast “[On the Power of Great Books to Heal and Unify](https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/margarita-mooney-clayton-on-the-power-of-great-books/id1530053338?i=1000619291650).” July 4, 2023.

Margarita Mooney Clayton interviewed by Robert Jackson of the Great Heart Institute for YouTube and a podcast. “[Educating for Virtue](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9LlNQ08ZcF4).” June 20, 2023

Margarita Mooney Clayton interviewed by Eric Metaxas for [the Eric Metaxas Radio Show/YouTube](https://rumble.com/v2q77si-margarita-mooney-suarez-the-wounds-of-beauty-seven-dialogues-on-art-and-edu.html) about The Wounds of Beauty: Seven Dialogues on Art and Education. June 5, 2023.

June 23, 2021. Margarita Mooney and Dan Hugger. Acton Line podcast, “[The Love of Learning](https://www.acton.org/audio/love-learning?fbclid=IwAR0KeyyV8ny10dN6B2LVhorJCVdpaSEbnlXebXZtRV89Dym3pFI5pfqVT5M&bbeml=tp-_U8bUHIOGkCMPOSnHFzzrw.jYUO_0ObzUUa2ZVZwzcvQ9A.rPiO7hwnx2UOVCoRKAZSt-Q.l-nmwPwIW0UqlmoaEooau9A).”