
The Ivory Tower of Babel

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Milton Mayer

The Ivory Tower of Babel

I RECENTLY SLIPPED AWAY from my enchanted bower in California to visit the scene of my second childhood at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. The scene was a little dejecting. The professor emeritus was confronted with the premonitory spectacle of the university emeritus. There were massive indications that education was to be retired in favor of vocational training—the same vocational training which John Dewey long ago denounced as *élitism* pure and simple. The young man or woman who emerged from the lower depths of the Commonwealth in earnest search of a little learning would be able to get it at Harvard, if only he had the money. For the rest, they would have access to programs designed to prepare them for jobs. The design is historically undemocratic. It is also historically unrealistic and impractical; the majority of vocationally trained young people do not enter—nor have they ever entered—the occupations for which they have been trained. And the overwhelming majority of those who do, do not remain in those occupations.

We are told that the hard fact is that these are hard times and that luxuries must be dispensed with. Marx himself seems to have written the scenario for the current and recurrent condition of the capitalist economy deprived simultaneously of war and colonial markets. Hard times in this Commonwealth, and in others like it; and the first of the luxuries to go is the kind of education which Jefferson (in his classic letter to Peter Carr) set forth as the keystone of the democratic arch.

I make bold to recall my beleaguered colleagues, in Amherst

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and elsewhere, to the grand abstractions on which their realistic and practical struggle to save education is grounded.

The university represents the cultivation of rationality or it represents nothing. It does not represent government or the state or industry or business. It does not represent the passions of the public or the public's passing interest. It does not represent the vagaries of the adolescent palate, the enhancement of the GNP, or the kaleidoscopic demands of the labor market. It does not represent progress or peace. Least of all does it represent war. The achievement of the self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction was a triumph of rationality; Hiroshima was the apotheosis of irrationality. The university is the only institution in the society that represents rationality and nothing else.

It may operate dormitories and dining facilities. It may operate psychiatric counseling and job placement services. It may operate pinball machines and parking lots and swimming pools and billiard halls. It may subsidize athletic teams and student publications. I am sure that these amenities are all salubrious and ornamental. But they are all incidental to—and dispensable from—a university's unique reason for being. The University of Paris has managed to stumble along for 800 years without any of them.

These are, as I say, hard times, and they are growing harder. We are told that we are running out of the raw materials of a mechanized society. We are ridden by disillusion and mistrust. Our reaction to all this is pervasive panic, to which rationality and its cultivation fall early victim. Our young people, like our old, understandably see their sudden situation in stark materialistic terms. We have never really seen it otherwise. Confronted by unexampled material challenge and opportunity, we and our ancestors here have tirelessly met that challenge and pursued that opportunity and left the ideals of the Declaration of Independence to take care of themselves and us. We care about thinking provided the thinking butters parsnips at home or abroad. Our national motto—unearthed by the Yippies in 1968—is, "Do It!"

What is honored in a country is cultivated there. As a

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whole people we do not cultivate rationality. The reality by which we have lived is, on the whole, a bigger bang and a better job. Education in our culture has always been associated with vocation. A high school diploma once, and then a college degree, was taken to be the first milestone on the highroad to riches. If it wasn't, what was it for? The fact that the men who traveled that highroad farthest, Rockefeller, Carnegie, Ford, did not have diplomas or degrees did not disturb the myth. My father wanted me to go to college so that I would be better off than he was; not better, but better off.

The fact is that Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Ford got to be better off by learning the job on the job, just as the great lawyers and doctors of yore were prepared by being articled to a Blackstone or a Lister. Truly vocational education—apart from the mere tricks of the trade—begins with apprenticeship. I'm a newspaperman by trade, and the last thing that is wanted by a good newspaper is a journalism school degree. What is wanted in a journalist is an irrepressible aptitude and a bowing acquaintance with the native tongue. The native tongue in these parts is English. Thus the separation of Communication Arts (*né* Journalism) from the English Department of a college or a university is nothing worse than a crime against nature. Outside of preprofessional study, job-training (call it career education or what you will) is preparation for the most humdrum of occupations. Strictly speaking, animals are trained—human beings are educated.

Education in this country, including higher education, has always been, if not altogether illiberal in content, largely illiberal in intent. Truly liberal education with a liberal intent was the province of Spiro Agnew's effete snobs who were so snobbish that it was not supposed that they would have to earn a living and so effete that it was not supposed that they could. It was not all that much different in England, as witness the case of the impoverished Cantabrigian who asked a don why he should study Greek and the don replied, "First, because it is the language of the Holy Ghost, and second, because it leads to great emoluments and preferments in the Church."

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Our early American universities, except for Clark and Johns Hopkins, and later Chicago and Stanford, arose from colleges privately established for the vocational training of ministers. Most of the state colleges were established, in the words of the Morrill Act of 1862, "to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts"—the function to which it was now proposed that the University of Massachusetts (and how many others similarly established) be reduced in principle.

The true university was conceived—on the German, not the British, model—as a seat of scholarly investigation and the preparation of scholarly investigators. But its historical genesis here confused its purposes. The professional schools which clustered around it were visibly utilitarian and ever more narrowly vocational, and their requirements pressed an increasingly preprofessional character on the university's work as a whole and on the curriculum at the collegiate level.

But the truly liberal college curriculum fell into desuetude at the turn of the century for two independent reasons. It was taught by deadly rote by men and women who had got their jobs through scholarly, not pedagogical, achievement and who did not want to teach but had to in order to do what they wanted to do, namely, scholarly work. The second reason for the deliquescence of the liberal curriculum was its increasing irrelevance to the condition of the undergraduate institutions which a hundred years ago accommodated less than 1% of the college-age population and now accommodate close to 45% in an economy which in peacetime can not think of any other way to keep the rising generation off the streets.

The democratic society, in which, as Aristotle says, we rule and are ruled in turn, elevates its every member to its highest and only permanent public office—the office of citizen. The citizen has the society at his mercy, and it is the recognition of this portentous fact that moves the citizens of enlightened Massachusetts to provide tax support for the schools of benighted Georgia, against the event, however unlikely, that a Georgian might one day be presiding over their destinies in the White House.

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The democratic society is the universally élite society. If it is to advance and endure, the ancient prerogative of the few—liberal education—will have to be the education of every man and woman in it. The difference between democracy and mobocracy is the insertion of the word “intelligent” before the word “man” and again before the word “vote,” in the doctrine of “one man, one vote.” The democratic society can not be uneducated and survive democratic.

This is not to say that sovereign citizenship, the vocation of every adult, is the end purpose of the liberal arts—as if they would be of no service to a subject or a slave. On the contrary; their objective, though they make a better American of a man, is to make of him not a better American, or a better working-man, but a better man; richer not in his purse, his politics, or his patriotism, richer, rather, in his person. John Stuart Mill took issue with the hit song of Gilbert and Sullivan’s *Pinafore* when he said, “I am a man before I am an Englishman.”

If we reject Karl Marx, it has got to be because Marx took man first and last for an economic animal, moved to every other end by his economic condition and his economic considerations. A Calvin Coolidge who says, “The business of this country is business,” has no quarrel with Marx except on the technical nicety of the management of the enterprise. The business of this country, and of every country, is liberation, liberation from political and economic servitude and from the subtler but more devastating servitudes of ignorance, bigotry, and boredom. Man is a thinking as well as a feeling animal whose self-realization, unlike that of the barnyard critters, requires the lifelong activity of a persistently inquiring intellect and a persistently discriminating taste. These are the objectives that the liberal arts serve, and liberal education is nothing but the beginning of their habituation. It is a platitude (but none the less valid for that) that the masterpieces of the liberal arts do not teach us what to think and feel, but how. There abides the great Latin pun—*Facio liberos ex liberis libras libraque*—“I make free men out of boys by means of books and balances.”

A playful Englishman once said, “Some people say that

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life is the thing, but I prefer books myself.” The great works of the mind and imagination all disagree with one another. But their disagreements are the important disagreements, no different now from what they were two thousand years ago or five. As long as man remains man the great questions remain the same. The cumulative wisdom of the race changes the face of the world and unveils the ancient mysteries of the universe, but the great questions abide, noncumulative, confronting us each and severally precisely as they confronted every one of our first forebears. Stringfellow Barr reminds us that the Greeks could not televise *Oedipus Rex*—but they could write it. So Scott Buchanan used to say that the questions that can be answered are not worth asking; and he said it at the same time that Gertrude Stein was saying, “Anything for which there is a solution is not interesting . . . the things that can be taught, not learnt but taught, are not interesting.”

The masterpieces of the liberal arts are the timeless environment in which we learn to ponder the things that are interesting; the environment in which we practice ourselves in thinking clearly and coherently about those things, and in thinking for ourselves; the environment in which we practice ourselves in disagreeing coherently and comprehensibly with our fellows. And the great works of the imagination and the fine arts similarly provide an environment in which we habituate ourselves to the discrimination of the beautiful. This is the environment that we call collectively the humanities, the congeries of disciplines that deal with man *qua* man.

There isn't a second-semester freshman who does not realize, vaguely or sharply, that the disorders of the day, public and private, are first and last, moral disorders. The political disorder is moral. The economic disorder is moral. The racial disorder is moral. The issue of human rights is a moral issue. The environmental issue is a moral (and in part an aesthetic) issue, as is the so-called “quality of life.” Moral and aesthetic enlightenment is the domain of the humanities. The humanities—and they alone in the secular order—together represent the implacable effort of the human race to preserve its

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humanity, an effort which the race relaxes at its mortal peril. But the vestiges of this effort are far to find in the higher learning these parlous days.

The decline and fall of the humanistic studies has been loosely ascribed to the rise of the empirical sciences after the 15th century and their phenomenal triumphs since the 18th. But the sciences, though their marvels inadvertently depreciated the arts, left the fundamental distinction in the great areas of learning undisturbed. Science was the study of the measurable, nonhumanistic aspects of the world (including the nonhumanistic aspects of human beings). It was the rise of the social sciences, in this century that, again inadvertently, muddied the distinction, perhaps irretrievably. The social sciences made themselves respectable by using measurement—the prime symbol of natural science; by asserting that they too had a laboratory, in the form of the world of people in the mass; and by boasting that they, like the “hard” disciplines, were value-free, without principles or predispositions (except, of course, as to method). Like the natural sciences, they followed the gleam wherever it led and suspended judgment in the manner of the respectable men in white.

Meanwhile men in and out of white had to make moral and political and aesthetic judgments every day—unsuspended judgments based on values in which the humanities, and the humanities alone, had credentials. The humanities, and the humanities alone, examining the axioms of science, could assert a competence to establish the order and hierarchy of all the other studies and their application in the learned professions.

The end is the first principle of human action. The purpose determines the procedure, the instruments, and the materials. But value-free science has no purpose of its own. It is human beings, scientific, nonscientific, or anti-scientific, who have purposes, and (as Robert M. Hutchins said long ago) they do not get their purposes from science. The sociologist can tell us what the social situation is, but not whether it should or shouldn't be that way; the medical man can tell us how, but

not why, to perpetuate a comatose life; the engineer can tell us how, but not if, we should build a freeway rather than, say, a hospital to accommodate its victims. A recent dispatch from darkest New Jersey informs us that "scientists at Princeton University have urged the school to begin genetic research which they say could either lead to a cure for cancer or produce a 'doomsday organism' that could destroy mankind." So much for the gleam. In July of 1945, 65 of the great physicists and chemists who made the atomic bomb went to the President to ask him not to use it. They could not get in to see the President, or anybody who could get them in. They were finally informed that the decision was a political, not a scientific, decision. So much for the gleam.

But science, and its application, satisfied the ruling passion reflected in the national motto, "Do It!" It produced sure cures at home and sure kills abroad. It had something to *show* for its arcane exertions. It was not necessary that its beneficiaries know how it was done, but only that it was.

It had two other things going for it which the humanities hadn't. As specialization proceeded apace, and fields became subjects, and subjects became fragments of subjects, and vocabularies became mutually exclusive, a Spenser man meeting a Milton man could talk about the weather and nothing else, and neither of them could talk to a James man, and none of them could talk to a Beowulf man. As the humanities disintegrated into snippets, the sciences had the solidarity of a common vocabulary of mathematics, and the solidarity of a common method. Even the oldest of them, astronomy, has in the past fifty years advanced from observation to empiricism.

But the most exemplary triumph of the scientists has been their realization, going back 500 years, that everything in all their fields is related to everything else. Interdisciplinary study is no curricular game with them, no pretense of cooperation on a lip-service basis. It is of the essence of all their work. In terms of humanistic knowledge the natural scientists may be uneducated specialists, more grievously uneducated all the time as their mastery of all their related fields increasingly commands their energies; but in terms of their own vocabulary

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and their own method, they are the only men of general education left in the academic world.

One of the many disintegrative horrors perpetrated at the University of Massachusetts since my departure, and, doubtless, because of my departure, has been the separation of the sciences from the College of Arts and Sciences, now, *horribile dictu!* the College of Humanities and Fine Arts. I dare say the scientists, those uneducated specialists, were glad to go; what use had they for reading and writing?—and the Humanities were, I suppose, too enervated to resist the dissolution. Only the university could have been expected to save the unity in the diversity. Where was the university? Where is it?

I do not mean to suggest that there is villainy or even malfeasance in connection with the balkanization of the university into a pluribus without a unum. The innocent misfeasance was perpetrated a century ago when the most influential man in the history of American education reintroduced the elective system at Harvard College and fastened it on the country. President Eliot was reacting, and rightly reacting, against the sterility of the fixed curriculum of Greek, Latin, and mathematics, “the education of a gentleman” who would have no use for it. But like all reactors, including John Dewey, the next most influential American educator, Eliot overreacted by throwing the educational baby out with the dishwater—if I may mix the metaphor to a fare-thee-well. In principle Dewey was right, of course, as Eliot was. Education had to be meaningful to the educatee, and it would not be meaningful unless it was interesting to him. But the most meaningful education is that which serves a person his whole life and tackles the problems which life brings down upon us all like a ton of bricks. Of course the problems interest the students, and will interest them more profoundly as they grow older. The problems are, in their most elementary form, What is the good? What is the good for man? What is the good for society?

By 1886, seventeen years after Eliot was inaugurated, Harvard had only one required course in the College, freshman composition. I suppose that there is not a college in the country

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today any more repugnant to education than Harvard was 90 years ago. But there was at least one college, a decade ago, that was better than Eliot's Harvard, and that was the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. A year-long course in the great works of the human mind and imagination was required of every second-year student in the then College of Arts and Sciences. Sophomore English was the vermiform vestige of liberal education in America. But everybody outside the humanities was after its vermiform scalp—and no wonder. It taught everything—or, rather, students and instructors knocked their heads together under the tutelage of the greatest teachers who have ever lived. With our students we read and argued ethics, politics, philosophy, psychology, economics, theology, speech, drama, rhetoric, composition, and, yes-m'am, comparative literature and linguistics and sociology and jurisprudence and history and art. We talked about getting some of our colleagues in the natural sciences and mathematics in to teach us—us and our students—something about method in terms of the great theories and the classic experiments. We met each week—the instructors—to argue the ideas we were arguing with our students.

Don't misunderstand me. Sophomore English wasn't a very good saloon, but it was the only saloon in town. It was the only general education that most of our students—and most of us—had ever got or would ever get. It reprobated the compartmentalization of life and the life of the mind and the spirit. It asserted that all humanistic subjects were inseparably related, all inseparably relevant to every human life. It was a standing insolence in the proud and jealous shambles of the modern university. We fought for it in vain. We were bucking the dismemberment of the higher learning. Sophomore English was vermiformed out of the university and its place was taken (in terms of enrollment) by electives with course titles like "The Gangster in Film." *Sic transit*—as I learned to say in required Latin—*gloria aeternitatis*.

The curse of the elective system is simply its denial that there is such a thing as the education of a human being, that

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there is something that every schoolboy and every schoolgirl ought to know, that there is a way to construct a curriculum and a competence to construct it, a qualification to judge a student's progress, a distinction between the learned and the unlearned, and a utility of the former to the latter. In the end electivism had to place the teacher and the student on an equal footing and make a mockery of schooling altogether—on a worse than equal footing, for the time came when the teacher was terrified of judging the student lest the student burn the place down and the student judged the teacher by means of the atrocity of evaluation—one student, one vote. Thus knowledge and ignorance, preparation and improvidence, industry and ecstasy, experience and inexperience, were equated, and this and almost every other college stood on its head in the circus of the permissiveness which Brother Agnew both denominated and exemplified. Thus Eliot, thus Dewey, and thus, in the end, their gung-ho successors running amok until, in the 1960's, their sorcerer's apprentices ran amok with them. The student demands reflected their contempt of us. They recognized that we didn't believe in what we were doing, that we didn't *know* what we were doing. Any group of them who asserted a special interest furiously enough—"furious" was the operative term—got what they wanted, whatever it was they wanted. They had only to rush into the great vacuum. We could not resist them because we had nothing to resist them with. We had no common body of professional principles: We had no philosophy of education.

Why aren't the perennial challenges of every human life—the subject matter of the humanities—more challenging than nonhumanistic matters? The supposition that they aren't, that young people are not interested in love and hate, in ambition, frustration, failure, treachery, jealousy, betrayal, pride, liberty, tyranny, slavery, greed, anger, lust, fear, sorrow, repentance, reform, redemption, justice, competition, cooperation, benevolence, wealth and poverty, fame and infamy, happiness, tragedy, death, immortality—the supposition is untenable on its face. Their case-hardened elders may

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be too stuffy to argue these issues; not the young. It is patently absurd to say that Socrates, Sophocles, Dante and Machiavelli, Dostoevski, Goethe, Sterne, Fielding, Melville, Emerson, Thoreau, T. S. Eliot, Marx, Freud, Joyce are uninteresting or can not be interestingly taught. What is not absurd is that they can be made uninteresting, even stultifying, by teachers who are not themselves fired by teaching and who pour their hard-won and harder-wrought store of dead information over the nodding heads of students held ransom for a passing grade. The agonies of Othello, Macbeth, and Lear never die; but the precise dimensions of the Elizabethan stage and the conflicting accounts of Shakespeare's ancestry are stillborn.

The humanistic studies had a modest resurgence after the Second World War to save the World for Democracy. The bestialities of Dachau and Hiroshima, the empty-handedness of victory and the hypocrisy of victors' justice at Nuremberg, the idiocies of chauvinism and its monstrous spawn in McCarthyism, were beginning to come home to us. We were beginning to understand what the Greeks meant when they said that the ingenuities of man undirected by the moral virtues made him lower than the lowest brute. At the end of the 1940's college after college hurried to introduce more or less (usually less) adequately designed general courses emphasizing the liberal arts and the relation of science to society. Specialization was deferred or reduced. Interdisciplinary programs were everywhere projected. If there was to be a new world—as there had to be—it would have to be erected by a new generation schooled in human values and the comprehension of social processes and personal development. A date can be put to the end of that modest resurgence of the humanities: December 30, 1957, two months after the first space ship had been launched by the Soviet Union. On that date President Eisenhower summoned up enough elementary school grammar to ask Congress for what would now be a pittance but what was then the astronomical amount of one billion eight hundred million dollars “to expand scientific education.” This—not television—was the beginning of the educational catastrophe

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that is now upon us—the catastrophe, unique in history, in which a people have plunged over night from literacy into illiteracy. Out went the humanities (or the superficial survey courses that passed for humanities), in went the superficial survey courses that passed for science, and up went the preprofessional preparation of technologists and technicians. We were a backward country; we had to catch up with the Russians, who did not pretend to teach the liberal arts and couldn't care less about teaching students to disagree intelligently or unintelligently.

And along came government grantsmanship and government control. The colleges and universities were put on notice by President Johnson that unless they reinstated university course credits for the anti-intellectual shenanigans of ROTC, their federal grants would be jeopardized—and the faculties rolled over. And along came the legion of administrators, supposed to be mere ministers to the faculty, mere custodians of the plant, men who were not, and did not need to be, learned, men appointed because they knew their way around corporate practice and the government agencies that had the money. The faculties abdicated their sovereignty; they were glad to be let alone to do their work and get their wages. Their wages rose to baronial heights at the senior level, and the wages of the administrators were positively Byzantine; they had to be, to be competitive with the rest of big business. In no time at all the administrators—and their system analysts and their management engineers—took over the governance of an institution whose peculiar character they were peculiarly unequipped to understand. I am told that their ratio to faculty and their share of the instructional budget has doubled at Massachusetts since 1970.

They were not bad men, these quantitativists and operationalists, not in the least. What they were was value-free men, like the television executives who have only a few hours of prime time in which to do anything at all and find themselves compelled to fill those few hours with whatever the market demands. The educational marketeers, with only four years of

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a human being's prime time at their disposal, would like to see everything taught—the more important with the less important, the durable with the transient, the serious with the trivial—but they are under the tyranny of the market. The ratings determine the programs. Like the television executives, the educational administrators are managing a service institution. They have no other master than clamor. They are value-free men. Nowhere, except in television, has the managerial revolution moved so far so fast as it has in the university.

And nobody cared—until the money stopped. Then the faculties came back to life, not to recapture their professional responsibilities and prerogatives but to organize—these faculties, mind you, who were meant to *be* the bosses—against the bosses—and fight it out in the usual adversary relationship of the corporate world on the issues of wages, hours, and working conditions. Whatever else it has done or will do, unionization will not restore the unity of the university or recapture the shattered concept of education.

The end of education, says Carlyle, is not a mind but a man. It's a big order—too big an order. It is the city that educates the man. So education, including humanistic education, has reason to be humble and restrain its claims. Most of what the student will ever be he brings to school, certainly to college, with him. Humanistic education will not humanize him except to the extent that it can nourish his consideration of the good and the bad, the honorable and the shady, the decent and the callous, and the harmonious and the cacaphonic. I submit that this country would not be much worse off today if, somewhere down the line, somebody had tried to direct Mr. Nixon's attention to the difference between right and wrong, and in case you think that somebody did, I give you the recent words of Mr. John Ehrlichman, a graduate of an expensive college and a still more expensive law school: "I lived fifty years of my life without ever really coming to grips with a very basic question of what is and is not important to me, what is and is not right and wrong, what is and is not valuable and worthwhile. . . ."

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The man or woman we want does not need to know the discreet content of particular sciences. He will be no better or worse a man for knowing how an internal combustion engine works; he will not even be a better driver for it. It is enough—if it is a better man that is wanted—that his technician in white knows whether the blood goes around the heart or the heart goes around the blood and his technician in blue knows how to take his refrigerator apart and perhaps put it together some day. The formula for measuring the hypotenuse on a right-angle triangle will no more make a man just, courageous, and temperate, than his mastery of the eccentricities of the aorist optative middle in the minor poems of Menander. The virtues he might fortify in such studies, the virtues of application, precision, and persistence, are the virtues of a competent scientist, a competent philosopher, and a competent bank robber.

What our humanistically educated man or woman wants is the comprehension of the procedures of science, the estimation of its possibilities and its limits, and the heady analysis of the “givens” it employs unexamined—the principles of being and becoming, essence and accident, change and motion, continuity and discontinuity, gradation and classification, simplicity and complexity, and the levels of causation, so that he can distinguish nonhumanistic from humanistic materials, methods, and uses. He will be a sharper and more discriminating mind (if not a better and more discriminating man) for his work in the basic fields of mathematics, the most implacably logical of all learnings. But there is no behavioristic evidence that he will be able to transfer his training, in mathematics or any other discipline, to the achievement of the great desideratum—a better man.

To hold before him what Livingstone called the habitual vision of greatness, in the great works of the intellect and the imagination, may (I say only may) focus his attention on his and all men’s perennial problems. For the rest, the liberal arts, like all arts, are acquired by their practice, and practice is active, not passive. Our student will no more learn to think for him-

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self by being lectured to than he will be reformed by being preached to. He will learn by challenge, and by meeting challenge—or he won't learn at all. He will learn, in a word, by what the Middle Ages called dialectic, or reasoned disputation. I give you the words of Rabanus, *primus praeceptor Germania*, written before the Middle Ages, before there was any higher learning except in natural and dogmatic theology, and before the laboratory was ever dreamed of: “*Dialectic . . .* is the *disciplina* of rational investigation, of defining and discussing, and distinguishing the true from the false. It is therefore the *disciplina disciplinarum*. It teaches how to teach and how to learn; in this same study, reason itself demonstrates what it is and what it wills. This art alone knows how to know, and is willing and able to make knowers. Reasoning in it, we learn what we are, and whence, and also to know Creator and creature; through it we trace truth and detect falsity, we argue and discover what is consequent and what inconsequent, what is contrary to the nature of things, what is true, what is probable, and what is intrinsically false in disputations.” That was the Ninth Century.

I bring you exactly one thousand years forward to Mill: “. . . He who knows only his own side of the case, knows little of that. His reasons may be good, and no one may have been able to refute them. But if he is equally unable to refute the reasons on the opposite side; if he does not so much as know what they are, he has no ground for preferring either opinion. Nor is it enough that he should hear the arguments of adversaries from his own teachers, presented as they state them, and accompanied by what they offer as refutations. He must be able to hear them from persons who actually believe them; who defend them in earnest, and do their very utmost for them. He must know them in their most plausible and persuasive form; he must feel the whole force of the difficulty; else he will never really possess himself of the portion of truth which meets and removes that difficulty.”

I put it to you: Is it possible, after all these aeons, that we have no least glimmering of what every one of us as human

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beings most needs to know in this life and to know how to do?—no order and importance of the myriad kinds of knowledge spread out before us?—no body of experience that informs us of the most effective methods of teaching and learning?—of transmitting the wisdom of the race from generation to generation and describing and prescribing a course of study for doing so?—in a word, that we do not know what education is? The legend, apocryphal or not, rearises to taunt us, of the little boy who came home from the progressive school and said to his mother, “I’m tired of doing what I want to do. I want to learn how to read and write.”

Amid the fantasies of high pressure recruitment, of burgeoning athleticism and tasty courses in baton-twirling, cosmetology, and wine-tasting, and food science—of pressure-group programs and the service institution concept of doing anything that enough people want right here and right now; amid the cost-cutting alarums of larger and larger teaching loads, audio-visual substitutes, and auditorium lecture courses, there are some small signs of revulsion, some small indication of an answer to the old hymn-book prayer, “Reclothe Us in Our Rightful Mind.” Recently *The Chronicle of Higher Education* carried this headline and subhead across the top of its front page: “Many Colleges Re-Appraising Their Undergraduate Curricula—Movement to reinstate required courses gains; institutions trying to define a ‘common core’ of knowledge they would deem essential for all students.” Equally recently the *New York Times* reported that Worcester Polytechnic Institute now requires a humanities minor of all its students, to prepare what it calls “technological humanists.” The Institute admits—hear this now—that most job offers in commerce and industry are indifferent to the applicants’ humanistic background—but it is, nevertheless, determined to graduate students who have some comprehension of the relationship of science to society and the common life.

If they can do it at a polytechnic institute in Worcester, why can’t they do it at a university in Amherst? A union—a professional union professionally motivated—may bring a faculty

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together at last. If it brings them together to decide what a university is and what a college in a university has got to be, their demands upon the managerial usurpers may bear the most glorious educational fruit. But the issue before the house is not educational alone. The social issue has been thrust upon it. The faculty of the American university is called to the struggle against a retrogressive social doctrine that would restrict humanistic education to the children of the rich and condemn the children of the poor to the undemocratic—undemocratic and fraudulent—training for the treadmill.