

# The Great Conversation

BY ROBERT M. HUTCHINS



Until lately the West has regarded it as self-evident that the road to education lay through great books. No man was educated unless he was acquainted with the masterpieces of his tradition. There never was very much doubt in anybody's mind about which the masterpieces were. They were the books that had endured and that the common voice of mankind called the finest creations, in writing, of the Western mind.

In the course of history, from epoch to epoch, new books have been written that have won their place in the list. Books once thought entitled to belong to it have been superseded; and this process of change will continue as long as men can think and write. It is the task of every generation to reassess the tradition in which it lives, to discard what it cannot use, and to bring into context with the distant and intermediate past the most recent contributions to the Great Conversation. This set of books is the result of an attempt to reappraise and re-embody the tradition of the West for our generation.

The Editors do not believe that any of the social and political changes that have taken place in the last fifty years, or any that now seem imminent, have invalidated or can invalidate the tradition or make it irrelevant for modern men. On the contrary, they are convinced that the West needs to recapture and re-emphasize and bring to bear upon its present problems the wisdom that lies in the works of its greatest thinkers and in the discussion that they have carried on.

This set of books is offered in no antiquarian spirit. We have not seen our task as that of taking tourists on a visit to ancient ruins or to the quaint productions of primitive peoples. We have not thought of providing our readers with hours of relaxation or with an escape from the dreadful cares that are the lot of every man in the second half of the twentieth century after Christ. We are as concerned as anybody else at the headlong plunge into the

Editor's Note: Mr. Hutchins' essay was written for the 1st edition of *Great Books of the Western World* in 1952, and it will be clear to the reader that some of his references to events are dated, but the Editors believe that the basic argument of this essay is as valid today—if not more so—as when it was written.

abyss that Western civilization seems to be taking. We believe that the voices that may recall the West to sanity are those which have taken part in the Great Conversation. We want them to be heard again—not because we want to go back to antiquity, or the Middle Ages, or the Renaissance, or the Eighteenth Century. We are quite aware that we do not live in any time but the present, and, distressing as the present is, we would not care to live in any other time if we could. We want the voices of the Great Conversation to be heard again because we think they may help us to learn to live better now.

We believe that in the passage of time the neglect of these books in the twentieth century will be regarded as an aberration, and not, as it is sometimes called today, a sign of progress. We think that progress, and progress in education in particular, depends on the incorporation of the ideas and images included in this set in the daily lives of all of us, from childhood through old age. In this view the disappearance of great books from education and from the reading of adults constitutes a calamity. In this view education in the West has been steadily deteriorating; the rising generation has been deprived of its birthright; the mess of pottage it has received in exchange has not been nutritious; adults have come to lead lives comparatively rich in material comforts and very poor in moral, intellectual, and spiritual tone.

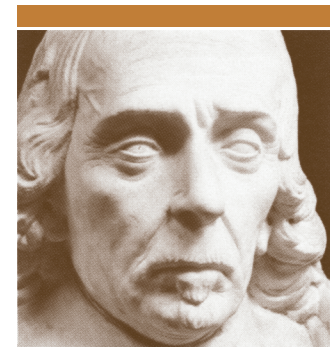
We do not think that these books will solve all our problems. We do not think that they are the only books worth reading. We think that these books shed some light on all our basic problems, and that it is folly to do without any light we can get. We think that these books show the origins of many of our most serious difficulties. We think that the spirit they represent and the habit of mind they teach are more necessary today than ever before. We think that the reader who does his best to understand these books will find himself led to read and helped to understand other books. We think that reading and understanding great books will give him a standard by which to judge all other books.

Though we do not recommend great books as a panacea for our ills, we must admit that we have an exceedingly high opinion of them as an educational instrument. We think of them as the best educational instrument for young people and adults today. By this we do not mean that this particular set is the last word that can be said on the subject. We may have made errors of selection. We hope that this collection may some day be revised in the light of the criticism it will receive. But the idea that liberal education is the education that everybody ought to have, and that the best way to a liberal education in the West is through the greatest works the West has produced, is still, in our view, the best educational idea there is.

Examining the chronological structure of the set, the reader will also note that the Great Conversation covers more than twenty-five centuries. But he may wonder at its apparent termination with the end of the nineteenth century. With the exception of some of Freud's writings, all the other works here assembled were written or published before 1900; and some of Freud's important works were published before that date.

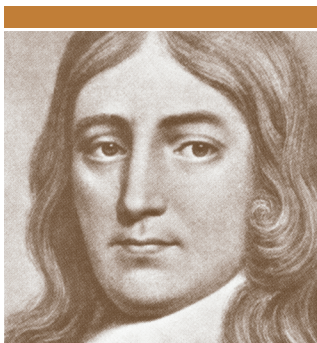
The Editors did not seek to assemble a set of books representative of various periods or countries. Antiquity and the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and modern times, are included in proportion as the great writers of these epochs contributed to the deepening, extension, or enrichment of the tradition of the West. It is worth noting that, though the period from 1500 to 1900 represents less than one-sixth of the total extent of the literary record of the Western tradition, the last four hundred years is represented in this set by more than one-half the volumes of *Great Books of the Western World*.

The Editors did not, in short, allot a certain space to a certain epoch in terms of the amount of time in human history that it consumed. Nor did we arbitrarily allot a certain space to a certain country. We tried to find the most important voices in the Conversation, without regard to the language they spoke. We did encounter some difficulties with language that we thought insurmountable.



. . . Almost everything we yet possess of note or credit in philosophy, has been transmitted to us through the industry of ancient Greece.

Harvey, *On the Motion of the Heart and Blood in Animals*



Where there is much  
desire to learn, there of  
necessity will be much  
arguing, much writing,  
many opinions; for  
opinion in good men is  
but knowledge in the  
making.

Milton, *Areopagitica*

Where the excellence of a book depended principally on the excellence of its language, and where no adequate translation could be found or made, we were constrained reluctantly to omit it.

Since the set was conceived of as a great conversation, it is obvious that the books could not have been chosen with any dogma or even with any point of view in mind. In a conversation that has gone on for twenty-five centuries, all dogmas and points of view appear. Here are the great errors as well as the great truths. The reader has to determine which are the errors and which the truths. The task of interpretation and conclusion is his. This is the machinery and life of the Western tradition in the hands of free men.

The conversation presented in this set is peculiar to the West. We believe that everybody, Westerners and Easterners, should understand it, not because it is better than anything the East can show, but because it is important to understand the West. We hope that editors who understand the tradition of the East will do for that part of the world what we have attempted for our own tradition in *Great Books of the Western World* and the *Syntopicon*. With that task accomplished for both the West and the East, it should be possible to put together the common elements in the traditions and to present Great Books of the World. Few things could do as much to advance the unity of mankind.

The Editors must record their gratitude to the Advisory Board and to their Editorial Consultants in the British Empire.

The Advisory Board consisted of Stringfellow Barr, Professor of History in the University of Virginia, and formerly President of St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland; Scott Buchanan, philosopher, and formerly Dean of St. John's College; John Erskine, novelist, and formerly Professor of English in Columbia University; Clarence Faust, President of the Fund for the Advancement of Education and formerly Dean of the Humanities and Sciences in Leland Stanford University; Alexander Meiklejohn, philosopher, and formerly Chairman of the School for

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The Editorial Consultants were A. F. B. Clark, Professor of French Literature in the University of British Columbia, Canada; F. L. Lucas, Fellow and Lecturer of King's College, Cambridge, England; and Walter Murdoch, Professor of English Literature in the University of Western Australia.

The Editors would also express their gratitude to Rudolph Ruzicka, designer and typographer, who planned the format of this set of books and designed the typography of its individual works in the light of his reading of them.

The Editors wish especially to mention their debt to the late John Erskine, who over thirty years ago began the movement to reintroduce the study of great books into American education, and who labored long and arduously on the preparation of this set. Their other special obligation is to Senator William Benton, who as a member of a discussion group in Great Books proposed the publication of this collection, and who as Publisher and Chairman of the Board of *Encyclopædia Britannica* has followed and fostered it and finally brought it out.

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## The Tradition of the West

The tradition of the West is embodied in the Great Conversation that began in the dawn of history and that continues to the present day. Whatever the merits of other civilizations in other respects, no civilization is like that of the West in this respect. No other civilization can claim that its defining characteristic is a dialogue of this sort. No dialogue in any other civilization can compare with that of the West in the number of great works of the mind that have contributed to this dialogue. The goal toward which Western society moves is the Civilization of the Dialogue. The spirit of Western civilization is the spirit of inquiry. Its

dominant element is the *Logos*. Nothing is to remain undiscussed. Everybody is to speak his mind. No proposition is to be left unexamined. The exchange of ideas is held to be the path to the realization of the potentialities of the race.

At a time when the West is most often represented by its friends as the source of that technology for which the whole world yearns and by its enemies as the fountainhead of selfishness and greed, it is worth remarking that, though both elements can be found in the Great Conversation, the Western ideal is not one or the other strand in the Conversation, but the Conversation itself. It would be an exaggeration to say that Western civilization means these books. The exaggeration would lie in the omission of the plastic arts and music, which have quite as important a part in Western civilization as the great productions included in this set. But to the extent to which books can present the idea of a civilization, the idea of Western civilization is here presented.

These books are the means of understanding our society and ourselves. They contain the great ideas that dominate us without our knowing it. There is no comparable repository of our tradition.

To put an end to the spirit of inquiry that has characterized the West it is not necessary to burn the books. All we have to do is to leave them unread for a few generations. On the other hand, the revival of interest in these books from time to time throughout history has provided the West with new drive and creativeness. Great books have salvaged, preserved, and transmitted the tradition on many occasions similar to our own.

The books contain not merely the tradition, but also the great exponents of the tradition. Their writings are models of the fine and liberal arts. They hold before us what Whitehead called “the habitual vision of greatness.” These books have endured because men in every era have been lifted beyond themselves by the inspiration of their example. Sir Richard Livingstone said: “We are tied down, all our days and for the greater part of our days, to the commonplace. That is where contact with great thinkers,

great literature helps. In their company we are still in the ordinary world, but it is the ordinary world transfigured and seen through the eyes of wisdom and genius. And some of their vision becomes our own.”

Until very recently these books have been central in education in the West. They were the principal instrument of liberal education, the education that men acquired as an end in itself, for no other purpose than that it would help them to be men, to lead human lives, and better lives than they would otherwise be able to lead.

The aim of liberal education is human excellence, both private and public (for man is a political animal). Its object is the excellence of man as man and man as citizen. It regards man as an end, not as a means; and it regards the ends of life, and not the means to it. For this reason it is the education of free men. Other types of education or training treat men as means to some other end, or are at best concerned with the means of life, with earning a living, and not with its ends.

The substance of liberal education appears to consist in the recognition of basic problems, in knowledge of distinctions and interrelations in subject matter, and in the comprehension of ideas.

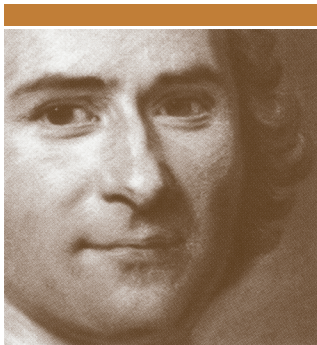
Liberal education seeks to clarify the basic problems and to understand the way in which one problem bears upon another. It strives for a grasp of the methods by which solutions can be reached and the formulation of standards for testing solutions proposed. The liberally educated man understands, for example, the relation between the problem of the immortality of the soul and the problem of the best form of government; he understands that the one problem cannot be solved by the same method as the other, and that the test that he will have to bring to bear upon solutions proposed differs from one problem to the other.

The liberally educated man understands, by understanding the distinctions and interrelations of the basic fields of subject matter, the differences and connections between poetry and history, science and philosophy, theo-



Wisdom is the fruit of a balanced development. It is this balanced growth of individuality which it should be the aim of education to secure.

Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*



Public education . . . is one of the fundamental rules of popular or legitimate government.

Rousseau, *On Political Economy*

retical and practical science; he understands that the same methods cannot be applied in all these fields; he knows the methods appropriate to each.

The liberally educated man comprehends the ideas that are relevant to the basic problems and that operate in the basic fields of subject matter. He knows what is meant by soul, state, God, beauty, and by the other terms that are basic to the discussion of fundamental issues. He has some notion of the insights that these ideas, singly or in combination, provide concerning human experience.

The liberally educated man has a mind that can operate well in all fields. He may be a specialist in one field. But he can understand anything important that is said in any field and can see and use the light that it sheds upon his own. The liberally educated man is at home in the world of ideas and in the world of practical affairs, too, because he understands the relation of the two. He may not be at home in the world of practical affairs in the sense of liking the life he finds about him; but he will be at home in that world in the sense that he understands it. He may even derive from his liberal education some conception of the difference between a bad world and a good one and some notion of the ways in which one might be turned into the other.

The method of liberal education is the liberal arts, and the result of liberal education is discipline in those arts. The liberal artist learns to read, write, speak, listen, understand, and think. He learns to reckon, measure, and manipulate matter, quantity, and motion in order to predict, produce, and exchange. As we live in the tradition, whether we know it or not, so we are all liberal artists, whether we know it or not. We all practice the liberal arts, well or badly, all the time every day. As we should understand the tradition as well as we can in order to understand ourselves, so we should be as good liberal artists as we can in order to become as fully human as we can.

The liberal arts are not merely indispensable; they are unavoidable. Nobody can decide for himself whether he is going to be a human being. The only question open to him

is whether he will be an ignorant, undeveloped one or one who has sought to reach the highest point he is capable of attaining. The question, in short, is whether he will be a poor liberal artist or a good one.

The tradition of the West in education is the tradition of the liberal arts. Until very recently nobody took seriously the suggestion that there could be any other ideal. The educational ideas of John Locke, for example, which were directed to the preparation of the pupil to fit conveniently into the social and economic environment in which he found himself, made no impression on Locke's contemporaries. And so it will be found that other voices raised in criticism of liberal education fell upon deaf ears until about a half-century ago.

This Western devotion to the liberal arts and liberal education must have been largely responsible for the emergence of democracy as an ideal. The democratic ideal is equal opportunity for full human development, and, since the liberal arts are the basic means of such development, devotion to democracy naturally results from devotion to them. On the other hand, if acquisition of the liberal arts is an intrinsic part of human dignity, then the democratic ideal demands that we should strive to see to it that all have the opportunity to attain to the fullest measure of the liberal arts that is possible to each.

The present crisis in the world has been precipitated by the vision of the range of practical and productive art offered by the West. All over the world men are on the move, expressing their determination to share in the technology in which the West has excelled. This movement is one of the most spectacular in history, and everybody is agreed upon one thing about it: we do not know how to deal with it. It would be tragic if in our preoccupation with the crisis we failed to hold up as a thing of value for the world, even as that which might show us a way in which to deal with the crisis, our vision of the best that the West has to offer. That vision is the range of the liberal arts and liberal education. Our determination about the distribution of the fullest measure of these arts and this education will

measure our loyalty to the best in our own past and our total service to the future of the world.

The great books were written by the greatest liberal artists. They exhibit the range of the liberal arts. The authors were also the greatest teachers. They taught one another. They taught all previous generations, up to a few years ago. The question is whether they can teach us. To this question we now turn.

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## Modern Times

Until recently great books were central in liberal education; but liberal education was limited to an elite. So great books were limited to an elite and to those few of the submerged classes who succeeded in breaking into them in spite of the barriers that society threw up around them. Where anybody bothered to defend this exclusion, it was done on the basis that only those with exceptional intelligence and leisure could understand these books, and that only those who had political power needed to understand them.

As the masses were admitted to political activity, it was assumed that, though they must be educated, they could not be educated in this way. They had to learn to read the newspaper and to write a business letter and to make change; but how could they be expected to study Plato or Dante or Newton? All that they needed to know about great writers could be translated for them in textbooks that did not suffer from the embarrassment of being either difficult or great.

The people now have political power and leisure. If they have not always used them wisely, it may be because they have not had the kind of education that would enable them to do so.

It is not argued that education through great books and the liberal arts was a poor education for the elite. It is argued that times have changed and that such an education would be a poor education for anybody today, since it is

outmoded. It is remote from real life and today's problems. Many of the books were written when men held slaves. Many were written in a prescientific and preindustrial age. What can they have to say to us, free, democratic citizens of a scientific, industrial era?

This is a kind of sociological determinism. As economic determinism holds that all activity is guided and regulated by the conditions of production, so sociological determinism claims that intellectual activity, at least, is always relative to a particular society, so that, if the society changes in an important way, the activity becomes irrelevant. Ideas originating in one state of society can have no bearing on another state of society. If they seem to have a bearing, this is only seeming. Ideas are the rationalizations

Sir Isaac Newton

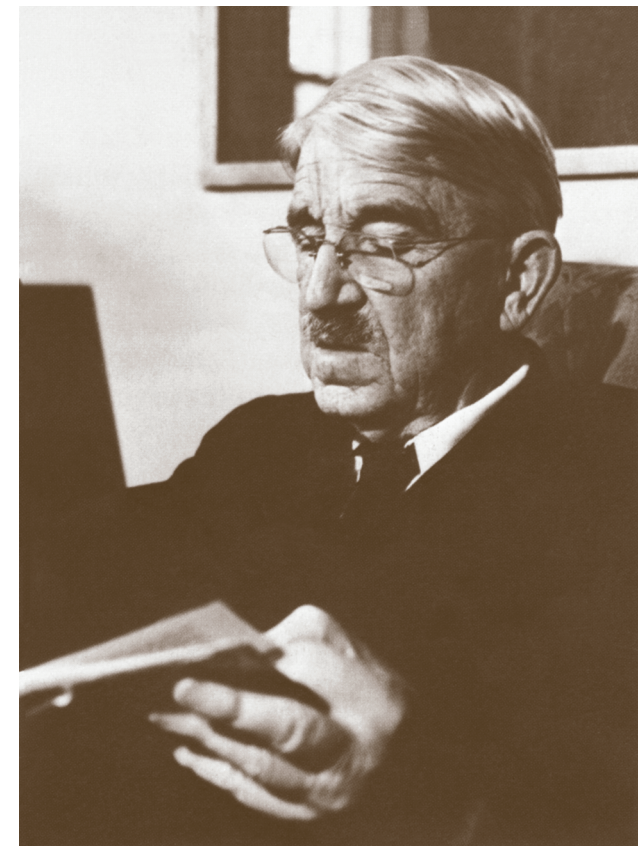


of the social conditions that exist at any given time. If we seek to use in our own time the ideas of another, we shall deceive ourselves, because by definition these ideas have no application to any other time than that which produced them.

History and common sense explode sociological determinism, and economic determinism, too. There is something called man on this earth. He wrestles with his problems and tries to solve them. These problems change from epoch to epoch in certain respects; they remain the same in others. What is the good life? What is a good state? Is there a God? What is the nature and destiny of man? Such questions and a host of others persist because man persists, and they will persist as long as he does. Through the ages great men have written down their discussion of these persistent questions. Are we to disdain the light they offer us on the ground that they lived in primitive, far-off times? As someone has remarked, "The Greeks could not broadcast the Aeschylean tragedy; but they could write it."

This set of books explodes sociological determinism, because it shows that no age speaks with a single voice. No society so determines intellectual activity that there can be no major intellectual disagreements in it. The conservative and the radical, the practical man and the theoretician, the idealist and the realist will be found in every society, many of them conducting the same kind of arguments that are carried on today. Although man has progressed in many spectacular respects, I suppose it will not be denied that he is today worse off in many respects, some of them more important than the respects in which he has improved. We should not reject the help of the sages of former times. We need all the help we can get.

The chief exponent of the view that times have changed and that our conception of the best education must change with them is that most misunderstood of all philosophers of education, John Dewey. It is one of the ironies of fate that his followers who have misunderstood him have carried all before them in American education; whereas the plans he proposed have never been tried. The



John Dewey

notion that is perhaps most popular in the United States, that the object of education is to adjust the young to their environment, and in particular to teach them to make a living, John Dewey roundly condemned; yet it is usually advanced in his name.

Dewey was first of all a social reformer. He could not advocate adjustment to an environment the brutality and injustice of which repelled him. He believed in his own conception of liberal education for all and looked upon any kind of training directed to learning a trade, solely to make a living at it, as narrowing and illiberal. He would especially repudiate those who seek to differentiate among the young on the basis of their capacity in order to say that only some are capable of acquiring a liberal education, in Dewey's conception of it or any other. . .

*Democracy and Education* was written before the assembly line had achieved its dominant position in the in-

dustrial world and before mechanization had depopulated the farms of America. The signs of these processes were already at hand; and Dewey saw the necessity of facing the social problems they would raise. One of these is the humanization of work. His book is a noble, generous effort to solve this and other social problems through the educational system. Unfortunately, the methods he proposed would not solve these problems; they would merely destroy the educational system.

The humanization of work is one of the most baffling issues of our time. We cannot hope to get rid of work altogether. We cannot say that we have dealt adequately with work when we have urged the prolongation of leisure.

Whatever work there is should have as much meaning as possible. Wherever possible, workmen should be artists; their work should be the application of knowledge or science and known and enjoyed by them as such. They should, if possible, know what they are doing, why what they are doing has the results it has, why they are doing it, and what constitutes the goodness of the things produced. They should understand what happens to what they produce, why it happens in that way, and how to improve what happens. They should understand their relations to others cooperating in a given process, the relation of that process to other processes, the pattern of them all as constituting the economy of the nation, and the bearing of the economy on the social, moral, and political life of the nation and the world. Work would be humanized if understanding of all these kinds were in it and around it.

To have these kinds of understanding the man who works must have a good mind. The purpose of education is to develop a good mind. Everybody should have equal access to the kind of education most likely to develop such a mind and should have it for as long as it takes to acquire enough intellectual excellence to fix once and for all the vision of the continuous need for more and more intellectual excellence.

This is the educational path to the humanization of work. The man who acquires some intellectual excellence

and intends to go on acquiring more will, to borrow a phrase from Dewey, “reconstruct and reorganize his experience.” We need have few fears that he will not be able to learn how to make a living. In addition to performing this indispensable task, he will inquire critically about the kind of life he leads while making a living. He will seek to understand the manner in which the life of all is affected by the way he and his fellow workers are making a living. He will develop all the meaning there is in his work and go on to see to it that it has more and better meaning.

This set of books is offered not merely as an object upon which leisure may be expended, but also as a means to the humanization of work through understanding.

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## Education and Economics

A part from John Dewey and those few of his followers who understand him, most writers on education hold that, though education through great books and the liberal arts is still the best education for the few, it cannot be the best education for the many, because the many have not the capacity to acquire it.

It would seem that this education is the best for everybody, if it is the best for the best, provided everybody can get it. The question, then, is: Can everybody get it? This is the most important question in education. Perhaps it is the most important question in the world.

Nobody knows the answer to this question. There has never been a time in history when everybody has had a chance to get a liberal education. We can, however, examine the alternatives, and the consequences of each.

If leisure and political power are a reason for liberal education, then everybody in America now has this reason, and everybody where democracy and industrialization penetrate will ultimately have it. If leisure and political power require this education, everybody in America now requires it, and everybody where democracy and industrialization penetrate will ultimately require it. If the people

... Those who receive with most pains and difficulty, remember best; every new thing they learn, being, as it were, burnt and branded in on their minds.  
Plutarch, *Lives*



are not capable of acquiring this education, they should be deprived of political power and probably of leisure. Their uneducated political power is dangerous, and their uneducated leisure is degrading and will be dangerous. If the people are incapable of achieving the education that responsible democratic citizenship demands, then democracy is doomed, Aristotle rightly condemned the mass of mankind to natural slavery, and the sooner we set about reversing the trend toward democracy the better it will be for the world.

On the other hand, the conclusion that everybody should have the chance to have that education which will fit him for responsible democratic citizenship and which will develop his human powers to the fullest degree does not require the immediate adoption in any given country of universal liberal education. This conclusion states the ideal toward which the society should strive. Any number of practical reasons may prevent the society from moving rapidly toward this ideal. But this does not mean that the statement of and devotion to the ideal are without value. On the contrary, the educational policy of a country will depend on the clarity and enthusiasm with which its educational ideal is stated and believed.

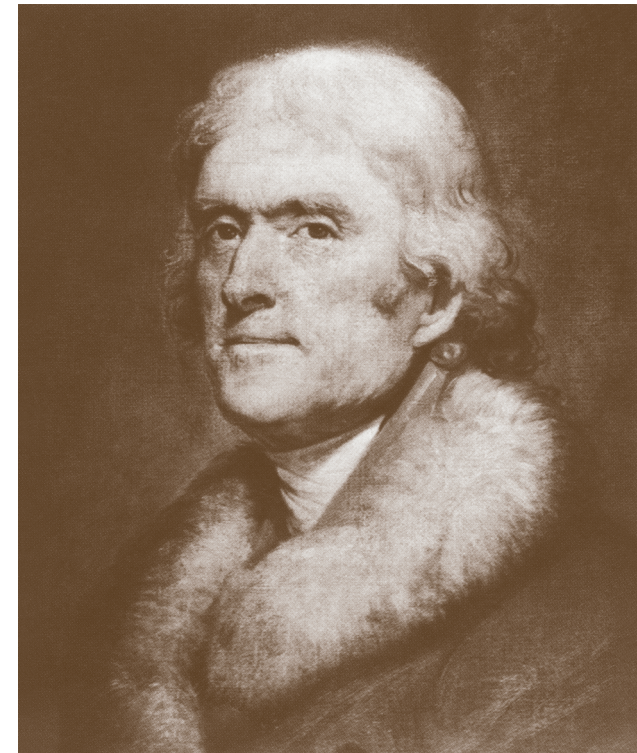
The poverty of a country may seem to prevent it from rapid approximation of its educational ideal. In the past the education of the few rested on the labor of the many. It was assumed, perhaps rightly, that the few could not have education unless the many were deprived of it. Thomas Jefferson's proposal of three years of education for all could have been, and probably was, opposed on the ground that the economy of Virginia could not survive it. Whatever may have been the case in that state 150 years ago, and whatever may be the case today in underdeveloped countries, it can no longer be claimed that liberal education for all, from childhood to the grave, is beyond the economic powers of the United States.

The economic question can arise in another way. It can be suggested that liberal education is no good to a man who is starving, that the first duty of man is to earn a living,

and that learning to earn a living and then earning it will absorb the time that might be devoted to liberal education in youth and maturity.

This argument is persuasive in countries where people are actually starving and where the economic system is at so rudimentary a stage that all a man's waking hours must be dedicated to extracting a meager livelihood from the soil. Undoubtedly the first task of the statesman in such countries is to raise the standard of living to such a point that the people may be freed from economic slavery and given the time to get the education appropriate to free men. Millions of men throughout the world are living in economic slavery. They are condemned to subhuman lives. We should do everything we can to strike the shackles from them. Even while we are doing so, we must remember that

Thomas Jefferson



economic independence is not an end in itself; it is only a means, though an absolutely necessary one, to leading a human life. Even here, the clarity of the educational ideal that the society holds before itself, and the tenacity with which that ideal is pursued, are likely to be decisive of the fate of the society.

I have no doubt that a hundred years ago we thought of dear, little, far-off, feudal Japan in the same way in which we think of the underdeveloped countries today. With our assistance Japan became a full-fledged, industrialized world power in the space of forty years. We and the Japanese thought, in the 1860s, how wonderful it would be if this result could be achieved. We and they fixed our minds on the economic development of Japan and modified the educational system of that country on “American lines” to promote this economic development. So the rich got richer, the poor got poorer, the powerful got more bellicose; and Japan became a menace to the world and to itself.

No one can question the desirability of technical training in underdeveloped countries. No one can be satisfied with technical training as an ideal. The ideal is liberal education, and technical training can be justified only because it may help to supply the economic base that will make universal liberal education possible.

In developed countries technical training is also necessary, just as work is necessary in such countries. But the West has already achieved such a standard of living that it cannot use economic backwardness as an excuse for failing to face the task of making liberal education available to all. As far as the United States is concerned, the reorganization of the educational system would make it possible for the system to make its contribution to the liberal education of the young by the time they reached the age of eighteen.

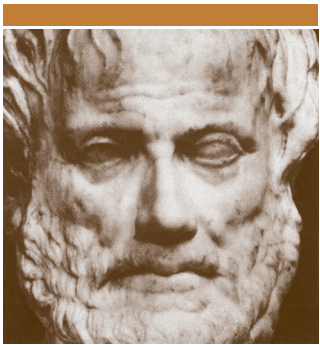
Think of the time that could be saved by the simple process of squeezing the waste, water, and frivolity out of American education. The American scheme of an eight-year elementary school, a four-year high school, and a four-

year college, with graduate and professional work on top of that, is unique in the world, and we cannot congratulate ourselves on its uniqueness. No other country could afford the duplication that occurs in passing from one unit in the American system to another, or the inordinate length of time that is consumed by each unit. The tremendous waste of time in the American educational system must result in part from the fact that there is so much time to waste. A six-year elementary school, a three- or four-year high school, and a three- or four-year college would eliminate from two to four years of lost motion and leave plenty of time for liberal education.

The degree of leisure now enjoyed by the whole American people is such as to open liberal education to all adults if they knew where to find it. The industrial worker now has twenty hours of free time a week that his grandfather did not have. Neither in youth nor in his adult life does he need much training in order to learn how to make a living. The constant drive to simplify industrial operations will eventually mean—and means in many industries today—that only a few hours will be required to give the worker all the training he can use.

If we assume that the object of concentration on vocational training in the schools is what John Dewey’s mistaken followers think it is, to help young people to achieve economic independence, then we must admit that under present conditions in the United States the effort is disproportionate to the results. And the effort to do something that is not worth doing drives out of education the kind of activity that should characterize it. This effort diverts our attention from the enormously difficult task of discovering what education should be and then introducing it into the schools.

Even before mechanization had gone as far as it has now, one factor prevented vocational training, or any other form of *ad hoc* instruction, from accomplishing what was expected of it, and that factor was the mobility of the American population. This was a mobility of every kind—in space, in occupation, and in economic position. Training



That education should be regulated by law and should be an affair of state is not to be denied, but what should be the character of this public education, and how young persons should be educated, are questions which remain to be considered.

Aristotle, *Politics*, 1337<sup>a</sup>33

given in one place for work in that place was thrown away because the persons trained were almost certain to live and work in another place, or in several other places. Training given in one kind of work was equally useless because the persons trained usually did several other kinds of work rather than the kind they were trained to do. The failure of *ad hoc* instruction is so obvious that it has contributed to the notion that education, or schooling, is really irrelevant to any important activities of life and is merely a period through which the young must pass because we do not know what else to do with them. Actually the failure of *ad hoc* instruction shows nothing but the failure of *ad hoc* instruction. It does not show that education is unimportant or that in a mobile, industrial society there is no education that can meet the needs of the people.

If we are to take the assembly line as the characteristic feature of Western industry, we must regard industrialization as at best a mixed blessing. The monotony, impersonality, and uncreativity of such work supply strong justification for the movement toward a steady reduction in the hours of labor. But what if the time that is gained for life off the assembly line is wasted, as much of it is today, in pursuits that can only be described as subhuman? What if the man as he works on the line has nothing in his head?

As the business of earning a living has become easier and simpler, it has also become less interesting and significant; and all personal problems have become more perplexing. This fact, plus the fact of the disappearance of any education adequate to deal with it, has led to the development of all kinds of cults, through which the baffled worker seeks some meaning for his life, and to the extension on an unprecedented scale of the most trivial recreations, through which he may hope to forget that his human problems are unsolved.

Adam Smith stated the case long ago: "A man without the proper use of the intellectual faculties of a man, is, if possible, more contemptible than even a coward, and seems to be mutilated and deformed in a still more essential part of the character of human nature." He points

out that this is the condition of "the great body of the people," who, by the division of labor are confined in their employment "to a few very simple operations" in which the worker "has no occasion to exert his understanding, or to exercise his invention in finding out expedients for removing difficulties which never occur." The result, according to Smith, is that "the torpor of his mind renders him, not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, but of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment, and consequently of forming any just judgment concerning many even of the ordinary duties of private life."

Yet the substitution of machines for slaves gives us an opportunity to build a civilization as glorious as that of the Greeks, and far more lasting because far more just. I do not concede that torpor of mind is the natural and normal condition of the mass of mankind, or that these people are necessarily incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, or of conceiving generous, noble, and tender sentiments, or of forming just judgments concerning the affairs of private and public life. If they are so, and if they are so as a result of the division of labor, then industrialization and democracy are fundamentally opposed; for people in this condition are not qualified to govern themselves. I do not believe that industrialization and democracy are inherently opposed. But they are in actual practice opposed unless the gap between them is bridged by liberal education for all. That mechanization which tends to reduce a man to a robot also supplies the economic base and the leisure that will enable him to get a liberal education and to become truly a man.

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## The Disappearance of Liberal Education

The countries of the West are committed to universal, free, compulsory education. The United States first made this commitment and has extended it further than any other. In this country 92.5 percent of the children



who are fourteen years old and 71.3 percent of those between fourteen and seventeen are in school. It will not be suggested that they are receiving the education that the democratic ideal requires. The West has not accepted the proposition that the democratic ideal demands liberal education for all. In the United States, at least, the prevailing opinion seems to be that the demands of that ideal are met by universal schooling, rather than by universal liberal education. What goes on in school is regarded as of relatively minor importance. The object appears to be to keep the child off the labor market and to detain him in comparatively sanitary surroundings until we are ready to have him go to work.

The results of universal, free, compulsory education in America can be acceptable only on the theory that the object of the schools is something other than education, that it is, for example, to keep the young from cluttering up homes and factories during a difficult period of their lives, or that it is to bring them together for social or recreational purposes.

These last purposes, those which are social and recreational, the American educational system, on a very low level, achieves. It throws young people together. Since this does not take any greater effort than is required to pass compulsory school laws and build buildings, the accomplishment of this purpose would not at first blush seem to be a matter for boasting. Yet we often hear of it as something we should be proud of, and even as something that should suggest to us the main line of a sound educational policy. We often hear that bringing young people together, having them work and play together, and having them organize themselves “democratically” are the great contributions to democracy that the educational system can make. This is an expansion of the doctrine that was popular in my youth about the moral benefits conferred on everybody through intercollegiate athletics, which was, in turn, an adaptation of the remark dubiously imputed to the Duke of Wellington about the relationship between the battle of Waterloo and the playing fields of Eton.

No one can deny the value of getting together, of learning to get along with others, of coming to appreciate the methods of organization and the duties of membership in an organization any more than one can deny the importance of physical health and sportsmanship. It seems on the face of it a trifle absurd, however, to go to the trouble of training and engaging teachers, of erecting laboratories and libraries, and of laying out a program of instruction and learning if, in effect, the curriculum is extra and the extra-curriculum is the heart of the matter.

It seems doubtful whether the purposes of the educational system can be found in the pursuit of objects that the Boy Scouts, the Y.M.C.A., and the local country club, to say nothing of the family and the church, purport to be pursuing. The unique function of the educational system would appear to have something to do with the mind. No other agency in the community sets itself up, or is set up, to train the mind. To the extent to which the educational system is diverted to other objects, to that extent the mind of the community is neglected.

This is not to say that the educational system should not contribute to the physical, social, and moral development of those committed to its charge. But the method of its contribution, apart from the facilities for extra-curriculum activities that it provides, is through the mind. The educational system seeks to establish the rational foundations for good physical, moral, and social behavior.

Education is supposed to have something to do with intelligence. It was because of this connection that it was always assumed that if the people were to have political power they would have to have education. They would have to have it if they were to use their power intelligently. This was the basis of the Western commitment to universal, free, compulsory education. I have suggested that the kind of education that will develop the requisite intelligence for democratic citizenship is liberal education, education through great books and the liberal arts, a kind of education that has all but disappeared from the schools, colleges, and universities of the United States.



We must not believe the many, who say that free persons only ought to be educated, but we should rather believe the philosophers, who say that the educated only are free.

Epictetus, *Discourses*, II, 1

Why did this education disappear? It was the education of the Founding Fathers. It held sway until fifty years ago. Now it is almost gone. I attribute this phenomenon to two factors, internal decay and external confusion.

By the end of the first quarter of this century great books and the liberal arts had been destroyed by their teachers. The books had become the private domain of scholars. The word “classics” came to be limited to those works which were written in Greek and Latin. Whitehead refers to Wordsworth’s remark about men of science who “murder to dissect” and properly observes: “In the past, classical scholars have been veritable assassins compared to them.” The classical books, it was thought, could be studied only in the original languages, and a student might attend courses in Plato and Lucretius for years without discovering that they had any ideas. His professors were unlikely to be interested in ideas. They were interested in philological details. The liberal arts in their hands degenerated into meaningless drill.

Their reply to criticism and revolt was to demand, forgetting that interest is essential in education, that their courses be required. By the end of the first quarter of this century the great Greek and Latin writers were studied only to meet requirements for entrance to or graduation from college. Behind these tariff walls the professors who had many of the great writers and much of the liberal arts in their charge contentedly sat, oblivious of the fact that they were depriving the rising generation of an important part of their cultural heritage and the training needed to understand it, and oblivious also of the fact that they were depriving themselves of the reason for their existence.

Philosophy, history, and literature, and the disciplines that broke away from philosophy—political science, sociology, and psychology—suffered from another kind of decay, which resulted from a confusion that I shall refer to later, a confusion about the nature and scope of the scientific method. This confusion widened the break between those disciplines that split off from philosophy; it led professors of these disciplines up many blind alleys; and

it produced profound changes in philosophical study. The same influences cut the heart out of the study of history and literature.

In general the professors of the humanities and the social sciences and history, fascinated by the marvels of experimental natural science, were overpowered by the idea that similar marvels could be produced in their own fields by the use of the same methods. They also seemed convinced that any results obtained in these fields by any other methods were not worth achieving. This automatically ruled out writers previously thought great who had had the misfortune to live before the method of empirical natural science had reached its present predominance and who had never thought of applying it to problems and subject matters outside the range of empirical natural science. The insights of these writers were at once out of date; for they could, in the nature of the case, represent little but prejudice or guesswork, which it would be the object of the scientific method to sweep out of the way of progress.

Since the aim of philosophers, historians, and critics of literature and art, to say nothing of social scientists, was to be as “scientific” as possible, they could not concern themselves much with ideas or with the “unscientific” tradition of the West. Nor could they admit the utility of the liberal arts, apart from those associated with mathematics.

Meanwhile the idea of education for all became firmly established in the United States. The school-leaving age steadily rose. An unprecedented flood of pupils and students overwhelmed the schools, colleges, and universities, a flood that has gone on growing, with minor fluctuations, to this day. Merely to house and staff the educational enterprise was an undertaking that would have put a strain on the wealth and intelligence of any country.

The triumphs of industrialization, which made this educational expansion possible, resulted from triumphs of technology, which rested on triumphs of science, which were promoted by specialization. Specialization, experimental science, technology, and industrialization were new. Great books and the liberal arts were identified in

the public mind with dead languages, arid routines, and an archaic, prescientific past. The march of progress could be speeded by getting rid of them, the public thought, and using scientific method and specialization for the double purpose of promoting technological advance and curing the social maladjustments that industrialization brought with it. This program would have the incidental value of restoring interest to its place in education and of preparing the young to take part in the new, specialized, scientific, technological, industrial, democratic society that was emerging, to join in raising the standard of living and in solving the dreadful problems that the effort to raise it was creating.

The revolt against the classical dissectors and drillmasters was justified. So was the new interest in experimental science. The revolt against liberal education was not justified. Neither was the belief that the method of experimental science could replace the methods of history, philosophy, and the arts. As is common in educational discussion, the public had confused names and things. The dissectors and drillmasters had no more to do with liberal education than the ordinary college of liberal arts has to do with those arts today. And the fact that a method obtains sensational results in one field is no guarantee that it will obtain any results whatever in another.

Do science, technology, industrialization, and specialization render the Great Conversation irrelevant?

We have seen that industrialization makes liberal education more necessary than ever, and that the leisure it provides makes liberal education possible, for the first time, for everybody.

We have observed that the reorganization of the educational system would enable everybody to get a liberal education and to become a specialist as well.

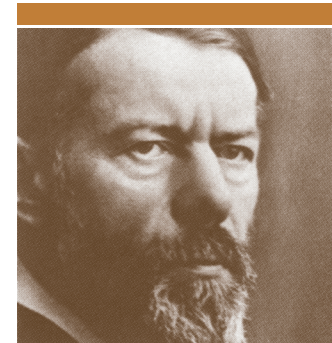
I should like to add that specialization, instead of making the Great Conversation irrelevant, makes it more pertinent than ever. Specialization makes it harder to carry on any kind of conversation; but this calls for greater effort, not the abandonment of the attempt.

There can be little argument about the proposition that the task of the future is the creation of a community. Community seems to depend on communication. This requirement is not met by improvements in transportation or in mail, telegraph, telephone, or radio services. These technological advances are frightening, rather than reassuring, and disruptive, rather than unifying, in such a world as we have today. They are the means of bringing an enemy's bombs or propaganda into our homes.

The effectiveness of modern methods of communication in promoting a community depends on whether there is something intelligible and human to communicate. This, in turn, depends on a common language, a common stock of ideas, and common human standards. These the Great Conversation affords. Reading these books should make a man feel himself a member of the species and tradition that these books come from. He should recognize the ties that bind him to his fellow members of the species and tradition. He should be able to communicate, in a real sense, with other men.

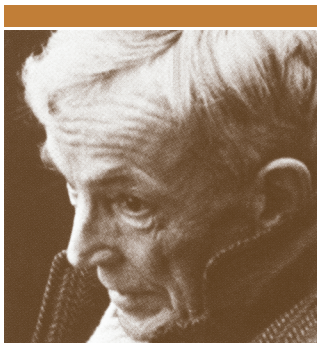
Must the specialist be excluded from the community? If so, there can hardly be one; for increasingly in the West everybody is a specialist. The task is to have a community nevertheless, and to discover means of using specialties to promote it. This can be done through the Great Conversation. Through it the expert can discover the great common principles that underlie the specialties. Through it he can bring ideas to bear upon his experience. In the light of the Great Conversation his special brand of knowledge loses its particularistic vices and becomes a means of penetrating the great books. The mathematical specialist, for example, can get further faster into the great mathematicians than a reader who is without his specialized training. With the help of great books, specialized knowledge can radiate out into a genuine interfiltration of common learning and common life.

Imagine the younger generation studying great books and learning the liberal arts. Imagine an adult population continuing to turn to the same sources of strength, inspi-



Scientifically, a dilettante's idea may have the very same or even a greater bearing for science than that of a specialist.

Weber, *Essays in Sociology*



It is indeed rather astonishing how little practical value scientific knowledge has for ordinary men, how dull and commonplace such of it as has value is, and how its value seems almost to vary inversely to its reputed utility.

Hardy, *A Mathematician's Apology*

ration, and communication. We could talk to one another then. We should be even better specialists than we are today because we could understand the history of our specialty and its relation to all the others. We would be better citizens and better men. We might turn out to be the nucleus of the world community.

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### Experimental Science

The Great Conversation began before the beginnings of experimental science. But the birth of the Conversation and the birth of science were simultaneous. The earliest of the pre-Socratics were investigating and seeking to understand natural phenomena; among them were men who used mathematical notions for this purpose. Even experimentation is not new; it has been going on for hundreds of years. But faith in the experiment as an exclusive method is a modern manifestation. The experimental method has won such clear and convincing victories that it is now regarded in some quarters not only as the sole method of building up scientific knowledge, but also as the sole method of obtaining knowledge of any kind.

Thus we are often told that any question that is not answerable by the empirical methods of science is not really answerable at all, or at least not by significant and verifiable statements. Exceptions may be made with regard to the kinds of questions mathematicians or logicians answer by their methods. But all other questions must be submitted to the methods of experimental research or empirical inquiry.

If they are not answerable by these methods, they are the sort of questions that should never have been asked in the first place. At best they are questions we can answer only by guesswork or conjecture; at worst they are meaningless or, as the saying goes, nonsensical questions. Genuinely significant problems, in contrast, get their meaning in large part from the scientific operations of observation, experiment, and measurement by which they can be solved;

and the solutions, when discovered by these methods, are better than guesswork or opinion. They are supported by fact. They have been tested and are subject to further verification.

We are told furthermore that the best answers we can obtain by the scientific method are never more than probable. We must free ourselves, therefore, from the illusion that, outside of mathematics and logic, we can attain necessary and certain truth. Statements that are not mathematical or logical formulae may look as if they were necessarily or certainly true, but they only look like that. They cannot really be either necessary or certain. In addition, if they have not been subjected to empirical verification, they are, far from being necessarily true, not even established as probable. Such statements can be accepted provisionally, as working assumptions or hypotheses, if they are acceptable at all. Perhaps it is better, unless circumstances compel us to take another course, not to accept such statements at all.

Consider, for example, statements about God's existence or the immortality of the soul. These are answers to questions that cannot be answered—one way or the other—by the experimental method. If that is the only method by which probable and verifiable knowledge is attainable, we are debarred from having knowledge about God's existence or the immortality of the soul. If modern man, accepting the view that he can claim to know only what can be demonstrated by experiment or verified by empirical research, still wishes to believe in these things, he must acknowledge that he does so by religious faith or by the exercise of his will to believe; and he must be prepared to be regarded in certain quarters as hopelessly superstitious.

It is sometimes admitted that many propositions that are affirmed by intelligent people, such as that democracy is the best form of government or that world peace depends upon world government, cannot be tested by the method of experimental science. But it is suggested that this is simply because the method is still not fully devel-



David Hume

oped. When our use of the method matures, we shall find out how to employ it in answering every genuine question.

Since many propositions in the Great Conversation have not been arrived at by experiment or have not been submitted to empirical verification, we often hear that the Conversation, though perhaps interesting to the antiquarian as setting forth the bizarre superstitions entertained by “thinkers” before the dawn of experimental science, can have no relevance for us now, when experimental science and its methods have at last revealed these superstitions for what they are. We are urged to abandon the reactionary notion that the earlier voices in the Conversation are even now saying something worth listening to, and supplicated to place our trust in the experimental method as the only source of valid or verifiable answers to questions of every sort.

One voice in the Great Conversation itself announces this modern point of view. In the closing paragraph of his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, David Hume writes: “When we run over libraries, persuaded of these

principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume . . . let us ask, *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?* No. *Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence?* No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.”

The books that Hume and his followers, the positivists of our own day, would commit to burning or, what is the same, to dismissal from serious consideration, do not reflect ignorance or neglect of Hume’s principles. Those books, written after as well as before Hume, argue the case against the kind of positivism that asserts that everything except mathematics and experimental science is sophistry and illusion. They state and defend propositions quite opposite to those of Hume.

The Great Conversation, in short, contains both sides of the issue that in modern times is thought to have a most critical bearing on the significance of the Great Conversation itself. Only an unashamed dogmatist would dare to assert that the issue has been finally resolved now in favor of the view that, outside of logic or mathematics, the method of modern science is the *only* method to employ in seeking knowledge. The dogmatist who made this assertion would have to be more than unashamed. He would have to blind himself to the fact that his own assertion was not established by the experimental method, nor made as an indisputable conclusion of mathematical reasoning or of purely logical analysis.

With regard to this issue about the scientific method, which has become central in our own day, the contrary claim is not made for the Great Conversation. It would be equally dogmatic to assert that the issue has been resolved in favor of the opposite point of view. What can be justly claimed, however, is that the great books ably present both sides of the issue and throw light on aspects of it that are darkly as well as dogmatically treated in contemporary discussion.

They raise the question for us of what is meant by science and the scientific method. If all that is meant is



that a scientist is honest and careful and precise, and that he weighs all the evidence with discrimination before he pronounces judgment, then we can agree that the scientific method is the only method of reaching and testing the truth in any field. But this conception of the scientific method is so broad as to include the methods used by competent historians, philosophers, and theologians since the beginning of time; and it is not helpful, indeed it is seriously misleading, to name a method used in all fields after one of them.

Sometimes the scientific method seems to mean that we must pay attention to the facts, which carries with it the suggestion that those who do not believe that the method of experimental science is appropriate to every other field of inquiry do not pay attention to the facts and are therefore remote from reality. The great books show, on the contrary, that even those thinkers of the past who are now often looked upon as the most reactionary, the medieval theologians, insisted, as Aristotle had before them, that the truth of any statement is its conformity to reality or fact, and that sense-experience is required to discover the particular matters of fact that test the truth of general statements about the nature of things.

“In the knowledge of nature,” Aristotle writes, the test of principles “is the unimpeachable evidence of the senses as to each fact.” He holds that “lack of experience diminishes our power of taking a comprehensive view of the admitted facts. Hence those who dwell in intimate association with nature and its phenomena grow more and more able to formulate, as the foundation of their theories, principles such as to admit of a wide and coherent development; while those whom devotion to abstract discussions has rendered unobservant of the facts are too ready to dogmatize on the basis of a few observations.” Theories should be credited, Aristotle insists, “only if what they affirm agrees with the observed facts.” Centuries later, an experimental physiologist such as William Harvey says neither more nor less when he declares that “to test whether anything has been well or ill advanced, to ascertain whether

some falsehood does not lurk under a proposition, it is imperative on us to bring it to the proof of sense, and to admit or reject it on the decision of sense.”

To proclaim the necessity of observing the facts, and all the facts, is not to say, however, that merely collecting facts will solve a problem of any kind. The facts are indispensable; they are not sufficient. To solve a problem it is necessary to think. It is necessary to think even to decide what facts to collect. Even the experimental scientist cannot avoid being a liberal artist, and the best of them, as the great books show, are men of imagination and of theory as well as patient observers of particular facts. Those who have condemned thinkers who have insisted on the importance of ideas have often overlooked the equal insistence of these writers on obtaining the facts. These critics have themselves frequently misunderstood the scientific method and have confused it with the aimless accumulation of data.

When the various meanings of science and the scientific method are distinguished and clarified, the issue remains whether the method associated with experimental science, as that has developed in modern times, is the only method of seeking the truth about what really exists or about what men and societies should do. As already pointed out, both sides of this issue are taken and argued in the Great Conversation. But the great books do more than that. They afford us the best examples of man’s efforts to seek the truth, both about the nature of things and about human conduct, by methods other than those of experimental science; and because these examples are presented in the context of equally striking examples of man’s efforts to learn by experiment or the method of empirical science, the great books provide us with the best materials for judging whether the experimental method is or is not the only acceptable method of inquiry into all things.

That judgment the reader of the great books must finally make for himself. When he makes it in the light of the best examples of the employment of different methods to solve the problems of different subject matters, he will not have begged the question, as do those who, before

reading the great books, judge them in terms of the dogma that there is only one method and that, though there are obvious differences among subject matters, no knowledge about any subject matter can be achieved unless this one method is applied.

On one point there seems to be no question. The contemporary practices of scientific research, as well as the scientific efforts that the great books record, show beyond doubt that the method of the controlled experiment under artificial conditions is not the only method used by men who regard themselves and are regarded as scientists. It may represent the most perfect form of empirical inquiry. It may be the model on which all the less exact forms of scientific investigation are patterned. But as the work of astronomers, biologists, and social scientists reveals, experiment in the strict sense is not always possible.

The method of the controlled experiment under artificial conditions is exclusively the method of that part of science the subject matter of which permits it to be experimental. On the assumption that nonliving matter always behaves in the same way under the same conditions, we are justified in concluding from experiment that we have discovered how certain nonliving matter behaves under certain conditions. On the assumption that living matter, when very large numbers of units are taken into account, is likely to exhibit uniformities of behavior under identical conditions, we are justified in concluding that if we know the conditions are identical, which is possible only in the laboratory, and if we know that the number of units under examination is large enough, then probably such uniformities of behavior as we detect will recur under identical conditions.

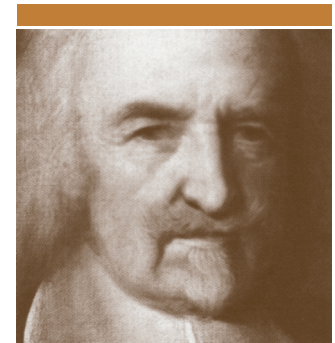
The griefs and losses sustained by those social scientists who predict the outcome of horse races and presidential elections are sufficient to indicate the difficulties of their subject. No one would propose that the social scientists should not keep on trying. The more refined and complete our knowledge of society, the better off we shall be. But it would be helpful to the social scientists if they

recognized that in understanding human beings, who often cannot be subjected to experiment in the laboratory like guinea pigs and atoms, the method of experimental science cannot, in the nature of things, produce results that can compare with those which science achieves in dealing with matters more susceptible to experimentation.

One eminent social scientist, Professor Robert Redfield, has suggested that his colleagues consider their relation to the humanities as well as to the natural sciences. "The imitation of the physical and biological sciences," he says, "has proceeded to a point where the fullest development of social science is hampered." Identification with the natural sciences shelters the social scientist "from a stimulation from philosophy and the arts and literature which social science needs . . . The stimulation which the social scientists can gain from the humanities can come from the arts and literature themselves, and through an understanding of some of the problems which interest philosophers and the more imaginative students of the creative productions of mankind."

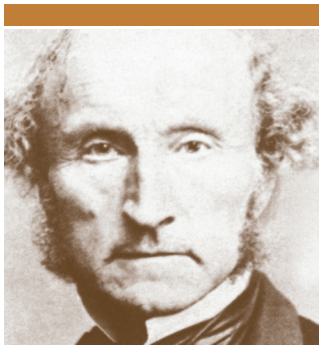
According to Professor Redfield, the bond that links the social scientist and the humanist is their common subject matter. "Humanity," he says, "is the common subject-matter of those who look at men as they are represented in books or works of art, and of those who look at men as they appear in institutions and in directly visible action. It is the central and essential matter of interest to social scientist and humanist alike." Though they differ in their methods, they "share a common effort, a common interest"; and Redfield adds, "it may be doubted if the results so far achieved by the social scientists are more communicative of the truth about human nature than are the results achieved by the more personal and imaginative methods of the artist."

We should remember such sound advice when we are urged to abandon methods that have yielded important insights in favor of one that will doubtless be helpful, but may not be able to tell us everything we need to know. It may be unwise to reject the sources of wisdom that have



By this it appears how necessary it is for any man that aspires to true knowledge to examine the definitions of former authors; and either to correct them, where they are negligently set down, or to make them himself.

Hobbes, *Leviathan*



Is it not almost a self-evident axiom, that the State should require and compel the education, up to a certain standard, of every human being who is born its citizen?

J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*

been traditionally found in history, philosophy, and the arts. These disciplines do not give us mathematical knowledge or knowledge acquired in the laboratory, but to say that for these reasons what they give us is not knowledge in any sense is to disregard the facts and to put the world of knowable things in a dogmatic straitjacket.

The rise of experimental science has not made the Great Conversation irrelevant. Experimental science is a part of the Conversation. As Étienne Gilson has remarked, “our science is a part of our humanism” as “the science of Pericles’ time was a part of Greek humanism.” Science is itself part of the Great Conversation. In the Conversation we find science raising issues about knowledge and reality. In the light of the Conversation we can reach a judgment about the question in dispute: How many valid methods of inquiry are there?

Because of experimental science we now know a very large number of things about the natural world of which our predecessors were ignorant. In this set of books we can observe the birth of science, applaud the development of the experimental technique, and celebrate the triumphs it has won. But we can also note the limitations of the method and mourn the errors that its misapplication has caused. We can distinguish the outlines of those great persistent problems that the method of experimental natural science may never solve and find the clues to their solutions offered by other disciplines and other methods.

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## Education for All

**W**e have seen that education through the liberal arts and great books is the best education for the best. We have seen that the democratic ideal requires the attempt to help everybody get this education. We have seen that none of the great changes, the rise of experimental science, specialization, and industrialization, makes this attempt irrelevant. On the contrary, these changes make the effort to give everybody this education more necessary and urgent.

We must now return to the most important question, which is: Can everybody get this education? When an educational ideal is proposed, we are entitled to ask in what measure it can be achieved. If it cannot be achieved at all, those who propose it may properly be accused of irresponsibility or disingenuousness.

Such accusations have in fact been leveled against those who propose the ideal of liberal education for all. Many sincere democrats believe that those who propose this ideal must be antidemocratic. Some of these critics are carried away by an educational version of the doctrine of guilt by association. They say, “The ideal that you propose was put forward by and for aristocrats. Aristocrats are not democrats. Therefore neither you nor your ideal is democratic.”

The answer to this criticism has already been given. Liberal education was aristocratic in the sense that it was the education of those who enjoyed leisure and political power. If it was the right education for those who had leisure and political power, then it is the right education for everybody today.

That all should be well acquainted with and each in his measure actively and continuously engaged in the Great Conversation that man has had about what is and should be does not seem on the face of it an antidemocratic desire. It is only antidemocratic if, in the name of democracy, it is erecting an ideal for all that all cannot in fact achieve. But if this educational ideal is actually implicit in the democratic ideal, as it seems to be, then it should not be refused because of its association with a past in which the democratic ideal was not accepted.

Many convinced believers in liberal education attack the ideal of liberal education for all on the ground that if we attempt to give liberal education to everybody we shall fail to give it to anybody. They point to the example of the United States, where liberal education has virtually disappeared, and say that this catastrophe is the inevitable result of taking the dogma of equality of educational opportunity seriously.

The two criticisms I have mentioned come to the same thing: that liberal education is too good for the people. The first group of critics and the second unite in saying that only the few can acquire an education that was the best for the best. The difference between the two is in the estimate they place on the importance of the loss of liberal education.

The first group says that, since everybody cannot acquire a liberal education, democracy cannot require that anybody should have it. The second group says that, since everybody cannot acquire a liberal education, the attempt to give it to everybody will necessarily result in an inferior education for everybody. The remedy is to segregate the few who are capable from the many who are incapable and see to it that the few, at least, receive a liberal education. The rest can be relegated to vocational training or any kind of activity in school that happens to interest them.

The more logical and determined members of this second group of critics will confess that they believe that the great mass of mankind is and of right ought to be condemned to a modern version of natural slavery. Hence there is no use wasting educational effort upon them. They should be given such training as will enable them to survive. Since all attempts to do more will be frustrated by the facts of life, such attempts should not be made.

Because the great bulk of mankind have never had the chance to get a liberal education, it cannot be “proved” that they can get it. Neither can it be “proved” that they cannot. The statement of the ideal, however, is of value in indicating the direction that education should take. For example, if it is admitted that the few can profit by liberal education, then we ought to make sure that they, at least, have the chance to get it.

It is almost impossible for them to do so in the United States today. Many claims can be made for the American people; but nobody would think of claiming that they can read, write, and figure. Still less would it be maintained that they understand the tradition of the West, the tradition in which they live. The products of American high schools are

illiterate; and a degree from a famous college or university is no guarantee that the graduate is in any better case. One of the most remarkable features of American society is that the difference between the “uneducated” and the “educated” is so slight.

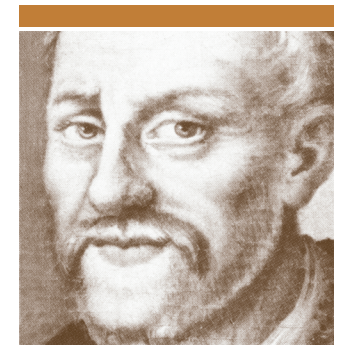
The reason for this phenomenon is, of course, that so little education takes place in American educational institutions. But we still have to wrestle with the question of why this should be so. Is there so little education in the American educational system because that system is democratic? Are democracy and education incompatible? Do we have to say that, if everybody is to go to school, the necessary consequence is that nobody will be educated?

Since we do not know that everybody cannot get a liberal education, it would seem that, if this is the ideal education, we ought to try to help everybody get it. Those especially who believe in “getting the facts” and “the experimental method” should be the first to insist that until we have tried we cannot be certain that we shall fail.

The business of saying, in advance of a serious effort, that the people are not capable of achieving a good education is too strongly reminiscent of the opposition to every extension of democracy. This opposition has always rested on the allegation that the people were incapable of exercising intelligently the power they demanded. Always the historic statement has been verified: you cannot expect the slave to show the virtues of the free man unless you first set him free. When the slave has been set free, he has, in the passage of time, become indistinguishable from those who have always been free.

There appears to be an innate human tendency to underrate the capacity of those who do not belong to “our” group. Those who do not share our background cannot have our ability. Foreigners, people who are in a different economic status, and the young seem invariably to be regarded as intellectually backward, and constitutionally so, by natives, people in “our” economic status, and adults.

In education, for example, whenever a proposal is made that looks toward increased intellectual effort on



I see robbers, hangmen, free-booters, tapsters, ostlers, and such like, of the very rubbish of the people, more learned now than the doctors and preachers were in my time.

Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*

the part of students, professors will always say that the students cannot do the work. My observation leads me to think that what this usually means is that the professors cannot or will not do the work that the suggested change requires. When, in spite of the opposition of the professors, the change has been introduced, the students, in my experience, have always responded nobly.

We cannot argue that, because those Irish peasant boys who became priests in the Middle Ages or those sons of American planters and businessmen who became the Founding Fathers of our country were expected as a matter of course to acquire their education through the liberal arts and great books, every person can be expected as a matter of course to acquire such an education today. We do not know the intelligent quotients of the medieval priests or of the Founding Fathers; they were probably high.

But such evidence as we have in our own time, derived from the experience of two or three colleges that have made the Great Conversation the basis of their course of study and from the experience of that large number of groups of adults who for the past eight years have been discussing great books in every part of the United States, suggests that the difficulties of extending this educational program to everybody may have been exaggerated.

Great books are great teachers; they are showing us every day what ordinary people are capable of. These books came out of ignorant, inquiring humanity. They are usually the first announcements of success in learning. Most of them were written for, and addressed to, ordinary people.

If many great books seem unreadable and unintelligible to the most learned as well as to the dullest, it may be because we have not for a long time learned to read by reading them. Great books teach people not only how to read them, but also how to read all other books.

This is not to say that any great book is altogether free from difficulty. As Aristotle remarked, learning is accompanied by pain. There is a sense in which every great book is always over the head of the reader; he can never



Desiderius Erasmus

fully comprehend it. That is why the books in this set are infinitely rereadable. That is why these books are great teachers; they demand the attention of the reader and keep his intelligence on the stretch.

As Whitehead has said, "Whenever a book is written of real educational worth, you may be quite certain that some reviewer will say that it will be difficult to teach from it. Of course it will be difficult to teach from it. If it were easy, the book ought to be burned; for it cannot be educational. In education, as elsewhere, the broad primrose path leads to a nasty place."

But are we to say that because these books are more difficult than detective stories, pulp magazines, and textbooks, therefore they are to remain the private property of scholars? Are we to hold that different rules obtain for books on the one hand and painting, sculpture, and music on the other? We do not confine people to looking at poor pictures and listening to poor music on the ground that they cannot understand good pictures and good music. We urge them to look at as many good pictures and hear as much good music as they can, convinced that this is the

way in which they will come to understand and appreciate art and music. We would not recommend inferior substitutes, because we would be sure that they would degrade the public taste rather than lead it to better things.

If only the specialist is to be allowed access to these books, on the ground that it is impossible to understand them without “scholarship,” if the attempt to understand them without “scholarship” is to be condemned as irredeemable superficiality, then we shall be compelled to shut out the majority of mankind from some of the finest creations of the human mind. This is aristocracy with a vengeance.

Sir Richard Livingstone said, “No doubt a trained student will understand Aeschylus, Plato, Erasmus, and Pascal better than the man in the street; but that does not mean that the ordinary man cannot get a lot out of them. Am I not allowed to read Dante because he is full of contemporary allusions and my knowledge of his period is almost nil? Or Shakespeare, because if I had to do a paper on him in the Oxford Honours School of English literature, I should be lucky to get a fourth class? Am I not to look at a picture by Velasquez or Cézanne, because I shall understand and appreciate them far less than a painter or art critic would? Are you going to postpone any acquaintance with these great things to a day when we are all sufficiently educated to understand them—a day that will never come? No, no. Sensible people read great books and look at great pictures knowing very little of Plato or Cézanne, or of the influences which moulded the thought or art of these men, quite aware of their own ignorance, but in spite of it getting a lot out of what they read or see.”

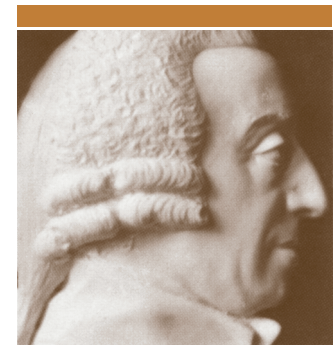
Sir Richard goes on to refer to the remarks of T. S. Eliot: “In my own experience of the appreciation of poetry I have always found that the less I knew about the poet and his work, before I began to read it, the better. An elaborate preparation of historical and biographical knowledge has always been to me a barrier. It is better to be spurred to acquire scholarship because you enjoy the poetry, than to suppose that you enjoy the poetry because you have acquired the scholarship.”

Even more important than the dogma of scholarship in keeping people from the books is the dogma of individual differences. This is one of the basic dogmas of American education. It runs like this: all men are different; therefore, all men require a different education; therefore, anybody who suggests that their education should be in any respect the same has ignored the fact that all men are different; therefore, nobody should suggest that everybody should read some of the same books; some people should read some books, some should read others. This dogma has gained such a hold on the minds of American educators that you will now often hear a college president boast that his college has no curriculum. Each student has a course of study framed, or “tailored” is the usual word, to meet his own individual needs and interests.

We should not linger long in discussing the question of whether a student at the age of eighteen should be permitted to determine the content of his education. As we tend to underrate the intelligence of the young, we tend to overrate their experience and the significance of the expression of interests and needs on the part of those who are inexperienced. Educators ought to know better than their pupils what an education is. If educators do not, they have wasted their lives. The art of teaching consists in large part of interesting people in things that ought to interest them, but do not. The task of educators is to discover what an education is and then to invent the methods of interesting their students in it.

But I do not wish to beg the question. The question, in effect, is this: Is there any such thing as “an education”? The answer that is made by the devotees of the dogma of individual differences is No; there are as many different educations as there are different individuals; it is “authoritarian” to say that there is any education that is necessary, or even suitable, for every individual.

So Bertrand Russell once said to me that the pupil in school should study whatever he liked. I asked whether this was not a crime against the pupil. Suppose a boy did not like Shakespeare. Should he be allowed to grow up without



In the universities the youth neither are taught, nor always can find any proper means of being taught, the sciences which it is the business of those incorporated bodies to teach.

Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*

knowing Shakespeare? And, if he did, would he not look back upon his teachers as cheats who had defrauded him of his cultural heritage? Lord Russell replied that he would require a boy to read one play of Shakespeare; if he did not like it, he should not be compelled to read any more.

I say that Shakespeare should be a part of the education of everybody. The point at which he is introduced into the course of study, the method of arousing interest in him, the manner in which he is related to the problems of the present may vary as you will. But Shakespeare should be there because of the loss of understanding, because of the impoverishment, that results from his absence. The comprehension of the tradition in which we live and our ability to communicate with others who live in the same tradition and to interpret our tradition to those who do not live in it are drastically affected by the omission of Shakespeare from the intellectual and artistic experience of any of us.

If any common program is impossible, if there is no such thing as an education that everybody ought to have, then we must admit that any community is impossible. All men are different; but they are also the same. As we must all become specialists, so we must all become men. In view of the ample provision that is now made for the training of specialists, in view of the divisive and disintegrative effects of specialism, and in view of the urgent need for unity and community, it does not seem an exaggeration to say that the present crisis calls first of all for an education that shall emphasize those respects in which men are the same, rather than those in which they are different. The West needs an education that draws out our common humanity rather than our individuality. Individual differences can be taken into account in the methods that are employed and in the opportunities for specialization that may come later.

In this connection we might recall the dictum of Rousseau: "It matters little to me whether my pupil is intended for the army, the church, or the law. Before his parents chose a calling for him, nature called him to be a man. . . . When he leaves me, he will be neither a magistrate, a soldier, nor a priest; he will be a man."

If there is an education that everybody should have, how is it to be worked out? Educators are dodging their responsibility if they do not make the attempt; and I must confess that I regard the popularity of the dogma of individual differences as a manifestation of a desire on the part of educators to evade a painful but essential duty. The Editors of this set believe that these books should be central in education. But if anybody can suggest a program that will better accomplish the object they have in view, they will gladly embrace him and it.

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### The Education of Adults

The Editors believe that these books should be read by all adults all their lives. They concede that this idea has novel aspects. The education of adults has uniformly been designed either to make up for the deficiencies of their schooling, in which case it might terminate when these gaps had been filled, or it has consisted of vocational training, in which case it might terminate when training adequate to the post in question had been gained.

What is here proposed is interminable liberal education. Even if the individual has had the best possible liberal education in youth, interminable education through great books and the liberal arts remains his obligation; he cannot expect to store up an education in childhood that will last all his life. What he can do in youth is to acquire the disciplines and habits that will make it possible for him to continue to educate himself all his life. One must agree with John Dewey in this: that continued growth is essential to intellectual life.

The twin aims that have animated mankind since the dawn of history are the conquest of nature and the conquest of drudgery. Now they seem in a fair way to be achieved. And the achievement seems destined, at the same time, to end in the trivialization of life. It is impossible to believe that men can long be satisfied with the kind of recreations that now occupy the bulk of their free time.

After all, they are men. Man, though an animal, is not all animal. He is rational, and he cannot live by animal gratifications alone; still less by amusements that animals have too much sense to indulge in. A man must use his mind; he must feel that he is doing something that will develop his highest powers and contribute to the development of his fellowmen, or he will cease to be a man.

The trials of the citizen now surpass anything that previous generations ever knew. Private and public propaganda beats upon him from morning till night all his life long. If independent judgment is the *sine qua non* of effective citizenship in a democracy, then it must be admitted that such judgment is harder to maintain now than it ever has been before. It is too much to hope that a strong dose of education in childhood and youth can inoculate a man to withstand the onslaughts on his independent judgment that society conducts, or allows to be conducted, against him every day. For this, constant mental alertness and mental growth are required.

The conception of liberal education for adults that is here advanced has an important effect on our conception of education in childhood and youth, its purpose and its content. If we are to expect the whole adult population to engage in liberal education, then the curriculum of schools, colleges, and universities should be constructed with this end in view. At present it is built upon the notion, which is unfortunately correct, that nobody is ever going to get any education after he gets out of school. Here we encounter the melancholy fact that most of the important things that human beings ought to understand cannot be comprehended in youth.

Although I have known several astronomers who were contributing to the international journals before the age of sixteen, I have never known a child of any age who had much that was useful to say about the organization of human society or the ends of human life. The great books of ethics, political philosophy, economics, history, and literature do not yield up their secrets to the immature. In the United States, if these works are read at all, they are

read in school and college, where they can be only dimly understood, and are never read again. Hence Americans are unlikely to understand them fully; we are deprived of the light they might shed upon our present problems.

Here the theory that education must meet immediate needs comes in to complete the chaos in our educational institutions. If the aim of education is to meet the immediate needs of the person educated, and if he is never to have any more education after he gets out of educational institutions, then he must learn everything he might ever need while he is in these institutions. Since there is no way of telling what the graduate might need, the only way out is to offer him a little bit of everything, hoping that he will find some bits useful. So the American high school and college are jammed with miscellaneous information on every conceivable subject from acrobatics to zymurgy; for who can say that some future high-wire artist or brewer will not be found among the students? The great, wild proliferation of the curriculum of American schools, colleges, and universities is the result of many influences; but we can say with some assurance that if adult life had been looked upon as a time for continued learning, the pressure toward proliferation would have been measurably reduced.

A concern with liberal education for all adults is necessary if we are to have liberal education for anybody; because liberal education can flourish in the schools, colleges, and universities of a country only if the adult population understands and values it. The best way to understand and value something is to have it yourself.

We hear a great deal today about the neglect of the liberal arts colleges and the decay of humanistic and social studies. It is generally assumed that all that these colleges and scholars require is money. If they had more money, their problems would be solved. We are led to believe that their failure to get money results from the obtuseness or perversity of college and university presidents. These officers are supposed to be interested in the development of natural science and technology at the expense of the liberal arts and the humanistic and social studies.



We take other men's knowledge and opinions upon trust; which is an idle and superficial learning. We must make it our own.

Montaigne, *Essays*





Minds, nevertheless,  
are not conquered by  
arms, but by love and  
generosity.  
Spinoza, *Ethics*

One may be permitted to doubt whether the colleges of liberal arts and scholars in the humanities and the social studies could wisely spend more money than they have. The deficiencies of these institutions and individuals do not seem to result from lack of funds, but from lack of ideas. When the appeal for support of a college is based on the fact that its amenities are almost as gracious as those of the local country club; when scholars in the humanities and social studies, misled by their misconception of the scientific method and by the prestige of natural science, dedicate themselves to the aimless accumulation of data about trivial subjects, the problem does not seem to be financial. Unfortunately, the only problems that money can solve are financial problems.

Institutions and subjects develop because people think they are important. The importance comes first, and the money afterward. The importance of experimental science is obvious to everybody. Science produced the atomic bomb; and the medical schools are doing almost as much to lengthen life as the departments of physics and chemistry are doing to shorten it. Many colleges of liberal arts and the researches of many scholars in the humanities and the social studies are important only to those whose livelihood depends upon them.

Yet the great issues are there. What is our destiny? What is a good life? How can we achieve a good society? What can we learn to guide us through the mazes of the future from history, philosophy and religion, literature, and the fine arts?

These questions lie, for the most part, in the areas traditionally assigned to the liberal arts, the humanities, and the social studies. If through this set of books, or in any other way, the adult population of laymen came to regard these issues as important; if scholars in these fields were actually engaged in wrestling with these problems; if in a large number of homes all over the country these questions were being discussed, then two things would happen. It would become respectable for intelligent young people, young people with ideas, to devote their lives to the study

of these issues, as it is respectable to be a scientist or an engineer today; and the colleges of liberal arts and scholars in the humanities and the social sciences would receive all the support they could use.

An axiomatic educational proposition is that what is honored in a country will be cultivated there. One object of this set of books is to do honor to the great tradition of the West, in the conviction that this is the way in which to promote its cultivation, elaboration, and extension, and to perpetuate it to posterity.

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## The Next Great Change

Since education is concerned with the future, let us ask ourselves what we know positively about the future.

We know that all parts of the world are getting closer together in terms of the mechanical means of transportation and communication. We know that this will continue. The world is going to be unified, by conquest or consent.

We know that the fact that all parts of the world are getting closer together does not by itself mean greater unity or safety in the world. It may mean that we shall all go up in one great explosion.

We know that there is no defense against the most destructive of modern weapons. Both the victor and the defeated will lose the next war. All the factors that formerly protected this country, geographical isolation, industrial strength, and military power, are now obsolete.

We know that the anarchy of competing sovereign states must lead to war sooner or later. Therefore we must have world law, enforced by a world organization, which must be attained through world cooperation and community.

We know that it will be impossible to induce all men to agree on all matters. The most we can hope for is to induce all men to be willing to discuss all matters instead of shooting one another about some matters. A civilization in which all men are compelled to agree is not one in

which we would care to live. Under such circumstances one world would be worse than many; for in many worlds there is at least the chance of escape from one to another. The only civilization in which a free man would be willing to live is one that conceives of history as one long conversation leading to clarification and understanding. Such a civilization presupposes communication; it does not require agreement.

We know that time is of the essence. Every day we read announcements of advances in transportation and “advances” in destruction. We can now go round the world in the time it used to take to go from New York to Boston; and we can kill a quarter of a million people with one bomb. We are promised bigger and better instruments of mass murder in every issue of our daily papers. At the same time the hostility among sovereign states is deepening by the hour.

How can we prepare for a future like this?

We see at once that the primary, not the incidental, participants in an educational program designed to cope with a future like this must be adults. They are in charge of the world. The rising generation, unless the adults in charge of the world can find some way of living together immediately, may never have a chance to rise. . .

The United States is now the most powerful country in the world. It has been a world power for a very short time. It has not had centuries of experience in which to learn how to discharge the responsibilities of a position into which it was catapulted against its will. Nor has it had the kind of education, in the last fifty years, that is conducive to understanding its position or to maintaining it with balance, dignity, and charity. An educational system that aims at vocational training, or social adjustment, or technological advance is not likely to lead to the kind of maturity that the present crisis demands of the most powerful nation in the world.

A country that is powerful, inexperienced, and uneducated can be a great danger to world peace. The United States is unlikely to endanger peace through malevolence.

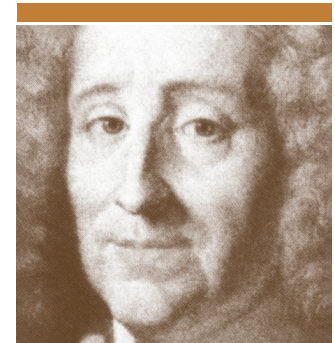
The people of this country do not appear to bear any ill will toward any other people; nor do they want anything that any other people have. Since they are devoted to their own kind of society and government, they do not want any other nation to threaten the continued prosperity of their society and government. Any military moves made by the United States will be made in the conviction that they are necessary for the defense of this country.

But this conviction may be mistaken. It may be hysterical, or it may be ignorant. We can easily blunder into war. Since we may have committed such a blunder even before these words appear in print, I must repeat that I do not wish to exaggerate the importance of these books, or any other means of adult education, as a method of preventing such a blunder. The time is short, and education is long. What I am saying is that, since education is long, and since it is indispensable, we should begin it right away.

When Marshal Lyautey was in Africa, he asked his gardener to plant a certain tree, the foliage of which he liked very much. The gardener said that a tree of this kind took two hundred years to reach maturity. “In that case,” said the marshal, “there is no time to lose. Plant it today.”

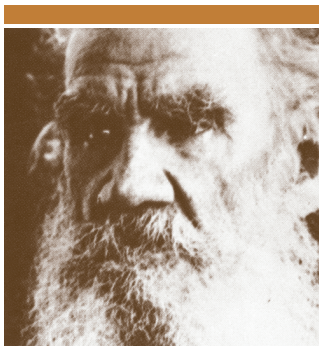
The Great Conversation symbolizes that Civilization of the Dialogue which is the only civilization in which a free man would care to live. It promotes the realization of that civilization here and now. This set of books is organized on the principle of attaining clarification and understanding of the most important issues, as stated by the greatest writers of the West, through continuous discussion. Its object is to project the Great Conversation into the future and to have everybody participate in it. The community toward which it is hoped that these books may contribute is the community of free minds.

Now the only defense that any nation can have is the character and intelligence of its people. The adequacy of that defense will depend upon the strength of the conviction that the nation is worth defending. This conviction must rest on a comprehension of the values for which that nation stands. In the case of the United States those values



The climate which influences one nation to take pleasure in being communicative, makes it also delight in change . . .

Montesquieu, *Spirit of Laws*, XIX, 8



In a word, we must found a form of government holding universal sway, which should be diffused over the whole world without destroying the bonds of citizenship, . . .  
Tolstoy, *War and Peace*

are to be found in the tradition of the West. The tradition of the West is the Great Conversation.

We have repeated to ourselves so much of late the slogan, “America must be strong,” that we have forgotten what strength is. We appear to believe that strength consists of masses of men and machines. I do not deny that they have their role. But surely the essential ingredients of strength are trained intelligence, love of country, the understanding of its ideals, and such devotion to those ideals that they become a part of the thought and life of every citizen.

We cannot hope to make ourselves intelligible to the rest of the world unless we understand ourselves. We now present a confusing picture to other peoples largely because we are ourselves confused. To take only one example, how can we say that we are a part of the great tradition of the West, the essence of which is that nothing is to be undiscussed, when some of our most representative citizens constantly demand the suppression of freedom of speech in the interest of national security? Now that military power is obsolescent, the national security depends on our understanding of and devotion to such ancient Western liberties as free speech. If we abandon our ideals under external pressure, we give away without a fight what we would be fighting for if we went to war. We abandon the sources of our strength.

How can we say that we are defending the tradition of the West if we do not know what it is? An educational program, for young people or adults, from which this tradition has disappeared, fails, of course, to transmit it to our own people. It also fails to convince other people that we are devoted to it as we claim. Any detached observer looking at the American educational system can see that the bulk of its activity is irrelevant to any of the things we know about the future.

Vocationalism, scientism, and specialism can at the most assist our people to earn a living and thus maintain the economy of the United States. They cannot contribute to the much more important elements of national strength:

trained intelligence, the understanding of the country’s ideals, and devotion to them. Nor can they contribute to the growth of a community in this country. They are divisive rather than unifying forces. Vocational training, scientific experimentation, and specialization do not have to supplant liberal education in order to make their economic contribution. We can have liberal education for all and vocational training, scientific experimentation, and specialization, too.

We hear a great deal nowadays about international understanding, world community, and world organization. These things are all supposed to be good; but nothing very concrete is put forward as to the method by which they can be attained. We can be positive on one point: we are safe in saying that these things will not be brought about by vocational training, scientific experiment, and specialization. The kind of education we have for young people and adults in the United States today will not advance these causes. I should like to suggest one or two ways in which they may be advanced.

We should first dispose of the proposition that we cannot have world organization, a world of law, without a world community. This appears to overlook the obvious interaction between legal institutions and culture. As Aristotle pointed out long ago, law is itself an educational force. The Constitution of the United States educates the people every day to believe in and support the Constitution of the United States.

World community, in the sense of perfect understanding among all peoples everywhere, is not required in order to have the beginnings of world law. What is required is that minimum understanding which is sufficient to allow world law to begin. From that point forward world law will support world community and world community will support world law.

For example, there are those who oppose the discussion of universal disarmament on the ground that disarmament is an effect and not a cause. They say that, until the tensions in the world are removed, disarmament cannot

take place and that we shall simply deceive ourselves if we talk about it instead of doing something about the tensions.

Actually one way to do something about the tensions is to talk about disarmament. The manifestation of a general willingness to disarm under effective international regulation and control would do more to relieve the tensions in the world than any other single thing. Getting together to see whether such a plan could be formulated would relieve tension. No doubt there would be disappointments, and the risk of exacerbating international irritations; but to refuse to discuss the principal method of mitigating tensions on the ground that they have to be mitigated before it is discussed does not seem to be the best way to mitigate them.

What are the best ways of promoting that minimum of understanding which is necessary to permit world law to begin? If community depends on communication, we must ask what kinds of things can be most readily communicated to and comprehended by the largest number of people, and what kinds of things tell the most about the people who are doing the communicating? It appears that the kind of things that are most intelligible and most revealing are ideas and artistic objects. They are most readily understood; they are most characteristic of the peoples who have produced or stated them.

We can learn more about another people from their artistic and intellectual productions than we can from all the statistics and data that can ever be collected. We can learn more, that is, of what we need to know in order to found a world community. We can learn more in the sense that we can understand more. What we have in this set of books is a means by which people who can read English can understand the West. We in the West can understand ourselves and one another; peoples in other parts of the world can understand us.

This leads to the idea that Scott Buchanan has put forward, the idea of a world republic of law and justice and a world republic of learning mutually supporting each other. Any republic maintains its justice, peace, freedom,

and order by the exercise of intelligence. Every assent on the part of the governed is a product of learning. A republic is a common educational life in process. So Montesquieu said that as the principle of an aristocracy was honor, and the principle of a tyranny was fear, the principle of a democracy was education. Thomas Jefferson took him seriously. Now we discover that a little learning is a dangerous thing. We see now that we need more learning, more real learning, for everybody.

The republic of learning is that republic toward which all mere political republics gravitate, and which they must serve if they are to be true to themselves. No one saw this before yesterday, and we only today are able to begin to measure what we should do about it tomorrow. The immediate inference from this insight is a utopia for today, the extension of universal education to every man and woman, from childhood to the grave. It is time to take education away from the scholars and school teachers and to open the gates of the republic of learning to those who can and will make it responsible to humanity.

Learning is in principle and should be in fact the highest common good, to be defended as a right and worked for as an end. All men are capable of learning, according to their abilities. Learning does not stop as long as a man lives, unless his learning power atrophies because he does not use it. Political freedom cannot last without provision for the free unlimited acquisition of knowledge. Truth is not long retained in human affairs without continual learning and relearning. A political order is tyrannical if it is not rational.

If we aim at a world republic of law and justice, we must recover and revive the great tradition of liberal human thought, rethink our knowledge in its light and shadow, and set up the devices of learning by which everybody can, perhaps for the first time, become a citizen of the world. The kind of understanding that comes through belonging to the world republic of learning is the kind that constitutes the world community. The world republic of law and justice is nothing but the political expression of the world republic of learning and the world community.