EDUCATING LIBERALLY

By

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FOREWORD

JUST BEFORE HIS DEATH on June 13, 1944, Hoyt Hudson had written a little more than the first half of what he intended to be a comprehensive consideration of liberal education. It is that completed part which is printed here. The first portion he had chosen to call "The Discourse of Reason." Part Two, tentatively entitled "The Course of Education" (of which only the first section, "Things as They Are," had been completed), was to probe what seemed to him many of the fallacies of modern curriculum-making, to lay down certain principles for guidance, and to outline some plans and methods to implement those principles.

What Hoyt Hudson had completed, however, was by no means fragmentary. It forms a whole in itself, and amid a welter of recent books on liberal education it stands out as one of the sanest contributions to a lively discussion. He had no ideological ax to grind, no startling panacea to hold out to an ailing academic world. His analysis of the aims and assumptions of liberal education, his presentation of the foes which must be fought and the weapons which must be laid hold of to defeat them are informed with the rich gusto and the profound humanity which were so much a part of his own nature. His treatment of the theme is lucid, as he was clear; unpretentious, as he was modest; and brilliantly acute, as he was perceptive.

The measure of his loss to the profession of humane letters is his fusion of sound scholarship within a chosen field and his affinity for the whole range of life outside that field. His wisdom and his understanding are on every page of this book. Their influence should be felt by all who share with him his zeal for the best in education and his determination that the best should be made available to the student. The

student often is forgotten in the busy-work of curriculum-makers. For Hoyt Hudson nothing else in education was so important as the young man or woman for whose illumination, presumably, we draft out blueprints and appoint our committees.

JOHN W. DODDS

STANFORD UNIVERSITY, CALIFORNIA
October 24, 1944

How often in the past have we depended upon war to bring out the supreme loyalties of mankind. Its life and death struggles are obvious and dramatic; its results in changing the course of history are evident and striking. When shall we realize that in every school building in the land a struggle is also being waged against all that hems in and distorts human life? The struggle is not with arms and violence; its consequences cannot be recorded in statistics of the physically killed and wounded, nor set forth in terms of territorial changes. But in its slow and imperceptible processes the real battles for human freedom and for the pushing back of the boundaries that restrict human life are ultimately won. We need to pledge ourselves to engage anew and with renewed faith in the greatest of all battles in the cause of human liberation, to the end that all human beings may lead the life that is alone worthy of being entitled wholly human.—JOHN DEWEY, Dedication Address, University of California at Los Angeles, March 28, 1930.

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INTRODUCTION

THIS IS AN ATTEMPT to set down in nontechnical language what a liberal education must be and do. An attempt will also be made to show how American colleges and universities may do more than they have been doing to provide that education for students. The first part of the essay, then, will be in the nature of philosophy, using that word very broadly; and the second part will be pedagogical, in that it deals with the planning and administration of a curriculum of studies. The use of the word "nontechnical" in the first sentence denotes an intention to avoid the special language of professional philosophers and that of professors of education. Yet, facing the present task, how one longs for the rigorous thinking, the powers of definition, of those philosophers! And for the stores of information, the practical grasp, the pedagogical ingenuity of those professors! It merely seems reasonable that a matter which affects nothing less than the welfare of our nation and race ought to be discussed, if possible, in a language understandable of all men.

We have a traditional "liberal arts" course in American colleges and universities. This course has undergone great and accelerated changes in the past sixty years. There were alterations earlier, but they were more gradual and cut less deeply. The liberal arts course of 1880 could be recognized as being identical in essence with what had been offered under that name, or a similar one, since about 1500; whereas the course in many American institutions of 1940 had virtually no identity with what was offered in 1875. In some institutions the name has been retained without the substance; from others the name has disappeared.

Yet the purpose that was served by the traditional liberal arts course remains an important purpose of education. Almost anyone who thinks about education beyond the secondary schools—or in the secondary schools, for that matter—comes to believe that to discard the aim of educating liberally, and to substitute for it the aim of training directly for separate vocations and professions, would be dangerous to the social and political fabric. Yet the same person will also come to believe that high schools, colleges, and universities have not been succeeding, by and large, in providing a liberal education—or in accomplishing, by some other means, the purpose sought in it—even for students who have satisfied requirements at one or another institution for as long as four years.

Concern over this posture of affairs has animated a vast body of criticism and discussion in recent decades. This same concern has impelled one teacher, with other interesting and unfinished tasks calling to him, to make this attempt to describe the ways—not the way, for there is more than one—in which a liberal education can be offered and administered.

Any suggestions for still more changes, or for the restoration of old practices, must take into account the system that now prevails in the majority of American colleges and universities. That is, one realizes that any administrator or academic planner must begin with what he has—the structure of departments, schools, courses, and academic usages and traditions already existing. There is a place for the experimental college, for a St. John's with its four-year course based upon the thorough and intelligent reading of selected books, for an Antioch with its alternation of terms of study with periods of industrial labor, or for some other experiment. Most teachers and administrators must work within a scheme of things that cannot be molded immediately to such a pattern or to any other entirely new pattern. Whatever is done must be done with the teachers already on the ground, or

with those recently trained. If a different kind of teacher is needed, recruiting can be done; but rules of academic tenure make impossible any sudden or complete change of staff.

The secondary schools represent another determining factor in the situation, and the present essay has little or nothing to say concerning how they contribute, or might contribute more, to a liberal education. Perhaps the wiser thing, the better strategy, would have been to examine education upon the elementary and secondary levels; but I do not find myself equipped for that task. Changes that have taken place in the schools have matched, or even outrun, the changes in college education. Time was when the college teacher could expect members of his freshman class already to know algebra and geometry, to have read some of Caesar, Cicero, and Virgil in Latin, and to be at least half-familiar with a few of the classics of English literature. He can count upon none of these from a freshman now. For purposes of this discussion, entrance into college will be considered as a fresh beginning, though one is aware that a liberal attitude and some measure of a liberal education can be arrived at in the secondary school.

Thinking of obstacles to change, some people will at once call to mind the alumni, who are usually counted upon as a conservative force. But, like liberal education itself, the attempt to construct the means to a liberal education is in great measure a conservative process—with emphasis upon holding fast to that which is good, while testing all things—and the interest of the alumni need not be set against the carrying out of this process.

I. AIMS AND ASSUMPTIONS

WE MUST KNOW WHAT WE WANT, and why we want it rather than something else. I have read, as any teacher must read, many definitions of a liberal education and statements of its aims. The interesting fact is that I found myself agreeing with nearly all of them. The only statement of aim I recall with which I disagree violently is one to the effect that liberal education is education for one's leisure time, or for one's avocations. That seems to me nonsense. To get the taste of it out of our mouths, let us repeat John Milton's one-sentence definition: "I therefore call that a complete and generous education which fits a man to perform justly and magnanimously all of the duties, both public and private, of peace and war." That is a large order, phrased with befitting spaciousness. And yet, when a modern American goes beyond the definition and reads over Milton's curriculum, he is assailed by the suspicion that the great poet did not consider that making a living was a duty, even a private one. This excellent definition seems, then, to have in view the producing of a public-spirited, cultured, and competent gentleman—who has an assured income. If such a man received remuneration for his public services, in peace or war, even so he did not look to such remuneration for his livelihood. Or if circumstances forced him to apply his education to making an income, he could become a teacher, or perhaps a clergyman.

We see how this whole business bristles with questions. Though we have but set foot on the threshold of our inquiry, a fundamental question rears up to face us. Can this liberal education, historically the education of young men (and a few young women) who expected never to be under the necessity of earning their daily bread—can such an education

possibly have any place, any relevance, in a society whose members are all supposed to find useful and gainful employment, or at least to be capable of following a trade, profession, or business? Perhaps we should look into this question at once, because there is a widespread tendency to reason in this fashion: liberal education is aristocratic, hence undemocratic; we don't want it.

But we need to be reminded daily that a concept of democracy which requires the democrat to discount and to shun excellence is a badly flawed concept. If democratic people were to renounce any and every privilege, distinction, pleasure, accomplishment, and power which in the past was limited to people of high birth or position, and cherished by them as a mark of superiority, then democracy would mean universal brutishness. Because courtesy had its genesis in royal courts, must the democratic person be discourteous? Even virtue and decency have never been universal human possessions, and the class of good men has been a limited one. Shall we then abolish this class distinction too, and vilify goodness? A more generous conception makes the essence of democracy to be the opening to all people of opportunities to attain to the best and highest levels of life, and to enjoy privileges and accomplishments that were reserved, in less happy times and societies, to the few; and reserved by the few, because power was concentrated in their hands. A public library containing only best-sellers, "comics," and newspapers and periodicals of widest circulation would not be a democratic institution. To be democratic the public library must make available to all members of the public the best literature there is.

But this is too easy; and the argument that a liberal education is unsuited to a democratic society must have a more solid core. If a liberal education is by its very nature a preparation for the enjoyment of special privileges, or for a way of living that has disappeared, then the objection to it is that

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it will not work, and of course we don't want it. The argument, then, is that excellence is a relative matter, and what was excellent in an earlier century or another country is not excellent in our time and place. The full answer to this argument must wait upon further consideration of what a liberal education is and does, and that answer should emerge as we go on. To be summary at this point, one might observe that, in spite of amazing transformations in society and in modes of travel and daily living, there has continued to be great unanimity in people's recognition of human distinction and human values. That is, we ordinarily and popularly suppose that George Washington would be an able and admirable man even if he were living today. We recognize the excellence of the poems of Homer, of the thought of Plato, the drama of Shakespeare, the heroism of William Tell, the competence of Franklin, the spirit of Jesus, the humanism of Erasmus, the comprehension of Newton, the art of Michelangelo, the music of Bach, and so on and on.

> But there is neither East nor West, border nor
> breed nor birth,
> When two strong men stand face to face, though
> they come from the ends of the earth!

So Kipling exclaimed, in the lines which follow his "East is East, and West is West" but which are always overlooked by quoters of him. Human excellence seems to emerge as a recognizable quality even though different periods of time, different races of people, or different social organizations environ it.

But human excellence does not emerge, it has difficulty indeed in existing, without some degree of recognition of it. And so some have stated the aim of liberal education in terms of the recognition of excellence. "To have great poets," Walt Whitman wrote, "there must be great audiences too." And it would be no unworthy aim, this of educating persons

as an audience for those who excel in human achievement. If no one appreciates the goodness of a good book, or is able to distinguish between a good one and a poor one, then fewer good books are likely to be written. If no one can tell science from pseudo-science, then quackery will flourish. And if no one, or only a few, can tell a shyster from a statesman, then the body politic will suffer from the worst of disorders.

Etymological definitions are curious and attractive, but often quite misleading. A *liberal* education would seem to have something to do with freedom. According to one line of etymological and historical explanation, a liberal education means the education of the Roman *liber,* the free man, or, more exactly, the freeman or citizen of the republic. Another interpretation might read the adjective as equivalent to *liberalizing* or *liberating,* so that a liberal education means one that frees the mind—frees it *from* such ignorances as are baneful, from superstitions, from unexamined prejudices, from popular fallacies, and so on; and frees it *to* an intellectual life which can be distinguished, on one side, from purely utilitarian mental operations, and, on the other side, from self-indulgent dilettantism and day-dreaming. Thus a liberal education gives one a franchise, a freehold in the realm of the mind.

This line of thought suits me so well that, if I could be satisfied by any general or abstract statement of aims, I should probably arrive at it by pursuing this line. I might be led to say, for instance, that the essence of a liberal education lies in the expanded freedom of the person educated, in the multiplication of his opportunities for making real choices—in judgment, in belief, in purpose, in action. The liberally educated person has a wider choice of things to think about. He even has a choice among ways of thinking about them. He has a wider choice of activities and vocations open to him. We recognize the illiberal person by the fact that he simply cannot choose. His vocational training is so narrow that he

can do but one thing; his mind is limited to a single stereotyped response within a given situation; his imagination is so undeveloped that he cannot conceive of other ways of life or other systems of belief than the one he has arrived at, by inheritance or some other accidental chain of circumstance.

This idea could be developed at greater length and with sharper definition. But the general direction of our essay must be toward the concrete rather than toward the abstract. Hence the aim of a liberal education can best be presented, not in a single statement, but by way of examining actual personal and social needs to be met, dangers to be avoided, and modes of healthful activity to be pursued. The hard-boiled positivist or pragmatist will say that I am begging the question by such an expression as healthful activity," not to mention "excellence" and "human values" used earlier. Who am I, who is any one person, to say what is the healthful activity of the mind? By what standards are we to figure these values?

The questions mean no more than that I am beginning, as anyone must begin, with some assumptions. Yet these are not many or startling. So far as I recognize them, at this stage of our investigation, they include a few propositions such as the following:

It is better to know than not to know one's physical, social, and political environment.

Knowledge that may be termed "understanding"—that is, knowledge that involves sympathetic insight and realization in experience—is better than knowledge that may be termed "recognition" or "acquaintance."

An examined life is better than an unexamined life.

Freedom is better than bondage or external compulsion.

My friends in the Department of Philosophy could embarrass me by asking my definitions of some terms used in these propositions, and my friends who are excited about

semantics could prove that I use the same word in several senses—or in no exact sense. For all that, I venture to believe that the propositions I have set down, and others to be set down, will carry a fairly clear meaning to any serious reader, whether or not he is acquainted with academic life and language. Yet I must be allowed this much, that the meaning in question is to be arrived at, and made clear, not by means of the first brief statement of any proposition, but from a consideration of it in its context; that is, from the entire essay.

II. THREE FOES AND THREE ARMS OF ATTACK

THERE ARE THREE FOES against which liberal education—or the educated person—must fight unremitting warfare, whether one meets them in his own mind and action or in those of others. They are ignorance, muddleheadedness, and crassness. Or call them lack of information, lack of operative logic, and lack of imagination—except that this negative wording fails to suggest the positive forces that they are. All three—sheer ignorance, muddled or fuzzy thinking, insensitivity or spiritual blindness—are entrenched and privileged in political life, in journalism, in popular arts, in professions, in academic life itself. They pay. They provide occupations for their supporters, or their victims. They are real. That is a circumstance which the academic person is likely to forget—that his fight is a real fight. By a real fight I mean one that may be lost.

Let us examine these important matters a little further. These foes, these defects or diseases, imply three opposite forces, positive and sanative. I have already suggested what they are—information, operative logic, and imagination. They may be regarded as the three branches of our armed service. What is more significant for our purpose, they seem to represent three phases of a single activity, or perhaps three steps in the art of knowing. When Hamlet wished to distinguish a man from other specimens of animal life, he mentioned "a beast, that wants discourse of reason." That is, Shakespeare seemed to assume that a beast, as distinguished from a man, lacks "discourse of reason." Now we customarily say that a rational operation, an exercise of the discourse of reason, involves facts and inferences. If we look into it further we may find that this rational discourse includes the

establishing or recognition of relations not only between facts but also between and among our inferences. This may be spun out still more; that is, we may find relations between and among our relations, fresh facts may be drawn into the process at any point, facts may be discovered in the course of the process, and so on. At any rate, we have two general levels or phases: we have, first, the recognition and acquisition of pieces of factual knowledge; and we have, second, what I have called operative logic.

But we are aware that there is a third phase or level in the complete discourse of reason—the level of imaginative insight or sympathetic contemplation. My terms, you see, multiply; for the process itself is complex and difficult to define. It takes several forms, as the double-barreled terms imply, yet all seem to stand on a recognizably single plane of operation. On this plane comes the act of domesticating or humanizing the knowledge dealt with by operations upon the first two levels. In everyday language we often distinguish between learning something and assimilating what we have learned. We may hear a speaker using a word, and using it correctly, yet by some token we judge that he has just recently learned it. The distinction between a family or person of established wealth and the *nouveau riche* was noted by Aristotle.

More than this, imaginative insight (or sympathetic contemplation) gives to an object of knowledge a form and identity of its own; yet at the same time it finds a place for it as a part of a larger whole. If we stress this last idea, our activity on this third level may seem to be only a special kind of operative logic—activity on the second level. I think it is different, for the new element of appreciation has entered in—appreciation as distinguished from evaluation. I should like to get in the word "experience" or the adjective "experiential" also, for knowledge that is complete has an experiential quality which we do not find in other mental activity which we must still class as knowledge of a sort. Or,

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