

Chapter 10

Universal Public Education**§ 1. The Role of Education in the Political Community**

We do not enter in to the Social Contract in order that each of us should devote all his time to affairs of government. We do so to protect our own private affairs from the predations of jungle law in the state of nature. The society of companionship is part of natural human psyche, but political society is not. It is an established convention and one that developed historically through a slow process of analogy with models of family, clan, and tribe. It might well be the case that the Kalahari Bushmen of Africa are the freest and most democratic people on earth. All civic relationships in a band of Kalahari are personal and intimate, but few of us would wish to live out our lives as Bushmen. The failure of the commune movement during America's civil strife of the 1960s and early 1970s testifies to the fact that humanity in the main has moved long past the idyllic of Bushman life and there is no going back.

Modern political communities are not natural things. They are things of convention, pragmatic answers to real issues affecting the lives of the people who live in them. Their establishment did not change human nature, which remains a free nature by which every person ultimately answers to no one but himself. In *Discourses on Davila* John Adams wrote,

Nature has taken effectual care of her own work. She has wrought the passions into the texture and essence of the soul, and has not left it in the power of art to destroy them. To regulate and not to eradicate them is the province of policy. It is of the highest importance to education, to life, and to society, not only that they should not be destroyed, but that they should be gratified, encouraged, and arranged on the side of virtue.

In 1811 French diplomat and writer Joseph de Maistre noted,

Every nation has the government it deserves.

Perhaps this might sound cynical, but the sentiment he expressed has long been well recognized by the great political theorists of Western civilization. Could the Huns in the time of Attila survived as a nation under democracy? Would Germany exist today if Bismarck had never lived or would it have remained a collection of petty kingdoms? Would there ever have been a France if not for the Franks? John Stuart Mill wrote,

Governments must be made for human beings as they are, or as they are capable of speedily becoming; and in any state of cultivation which mankind, or any class among them, have yet attained, or are likely soon to attain, the interests by which they will be led, when they are thinking only of self-interest, will be almost exclusively those which are obvious at first sight, and which operate on their present condition. It is only a disinterested regard for others, and especially for what comes after them, for the idea of posterity, of their country, or of mankind, whether grounded on sympathy or on a conscientious feeling, which ever directs the minds and purposes of classes or bodies of men towards distant or unobvious interests. And it cannot be

maintained that any form of government would be rational which required as a condition that these exalted principles of action should be the guiding and master motives in the conduct of average human beings.

Yet it would be and is a great error to presume human civic behaviors and attitudes are immutable and invulnerable to the effects of education. What is unobvious to an uneducated person is often so clear and obvious to an educated person that the differences in "the interests by which they will be led" in their own freedom of self-determination could not be more marked. Self-improvement always walks hand in hand with civic improvement when its foundations in education are broadly laid across the length and breadth of the political community.

Without the enlightenment of a liberal education, a human being is thrown back upon his own native resources of experience and judgment, and the most pervasive influences at work upon his mind in the absence of high quality liberal education are the influences of self-preservation and self-defense – precisely the natural influences needed to survive in the state of nature. *Homo sapiens* is the same species today as in the days of the Paleolithic people of prehistory. Mill wrote,

When we talk of the interest of a body of men, or even of an individual man, as a principle determining their actions, the question [of] what would be considered their interest by an unprejudiced observer is one of the least important parts of the whole matter. As Coleridge observes, the man makes the motive, not the motive the man. What it is the man's interest to do or refrain from depends less on any outward circumstances than upon what sort of man he is. If you wish to know what is practically a man's interest, you must know the cast of his habitual feelings and thoughts. Everybody has two kinds of interests, selfish and unselfish interests, and a selfish man has cultivated the habit of caring for the former, and not caring for the latter. Every one has present and distant interests, and the improvident man is he who cares for the present interests and does not care for the distant. It matters little that on any correct calculation the latter may be the more considerable if the habits of his mind lead him to fix his thoughts and wishes solely on the former. . . . On the average, a person who cares for other people, for his country, or for mankind, is a happier man than one who does not; but of what use is it to preach this doctrine to a man who cares for nothing but his own ease or his own pocket? . . . It is like preaching to the worm who crawls on the ground how much better it would be for him if he were an eagle.

A cynic might point to this and argue that this proves man is a creature of essentially low character. But this cynicism is unwarranted. We can and should note that Mill speaks here of *habitual* feelings and thoughts. All habits, including mental ones, are the products of *exercise* from repeated actions. All of us learn what we know from experience, and a part of this learning concerns the habits of thinking and reflecting we come to develop out of this experience. What formal education accomplishes is to shape the direction these habits will take.

No one has the power to improve another person. That power belongs by human nature to the individual himself and is called the power of *self-improvement*. There is no other kind, but the ability and capacity for self-improvement is within the free power of every individual. What education does is provide assistance to and stimulation of this native human power. The sort of education one receives is

a fundamental determining factor in the sort of self-improvement a person undertakes. It plays a key and fundamental role in the individual's self-formed habits of considering or not considering what Mill called his present and his distant interests. Of these, it is the latter class that pertains to the social compact of the political community in which he lives. His reason for committing himself to the compact in the first place is, as we have seen earlier, in service of his selfish interests – those connected with his duties to himself – and for the sake of which he exchanges his freedom to act as he would in the state of nature for the civil liberties of membership in the body politic. But to *realize* the benefit of the compact, the community demands that his interests must then extend further and encompass his roles and civic duties within that political community. The extent to which he will so extend them depends most fundamentally on his understanding of the nature of civic society. And this is precisely the topic of *true* liberal education. Educator Robert M. Hutchins wrote,

The aim of liberal education is human excellence, both private and public . . . 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.

Very few living Americans have had the benefit of a liberal education, and almost none at all have had the *formal* opportunity of or exposure to one for *at least* the past forty years. Formal liberal education in the United States was in feeble health by the 1960s and the turmoils of that decade finally planted it in its grave. But this was the education of the Founding Fathers of this country, and without the benefits of it the American Republic would have never been born. Without it today, the prosperity of the Republic has become not merely frozen but is in actual decline. Thomas Jefferson wrote with force and eloquence on the role and importance of liberal education in *Report of the Commissioners for the University of Virginia* in 1818:

[The] Commissioners were first to consider at what point it was understood that university education should commence? Certainly not with the alphabet, for reasons of expediency and impracticability, as well from the obvious sense of the Legislature [of Virginia] who, in the same act, make other provision for the primary education of the poor children . . . The objects of this primary education determine its character and limits. These objects would be,

To give to every citizen the information he needs for the transaction of his own business;

To enable him to calculate for himself, and to express and preserve his ideas, his contracts and accounts, in writing;

To improve by reading his morals and faculties;

To understand his duties to his neighbors and country, and to discharge with competence the functions confided to him by either;

To know his rights; to exercise with order and justice those he retains; to choose with discretion the fiduciary of those he delegates; and to notice their conduct with diligence, with candor, and judgment;

And, in general, to observe with intelligence and faithfulness all the social relations under which he shall be placed. . .

. . . And this brings us to the point at which we are to commence the higher branches of education, of which the Legislature require the development; those, for example, which are,

To form the statesmen, legislators and judges, on whom public prosperity and individual happiness are so much to depend;

To expound the principles and structure of governments, the laws which regulate the intercourse of nations, those formed municipally for our own government, and a sound spirit of legislation, which, banishing all arbitrary and unnecessary restraint on individual action, shall leave us free to do whatever does not violate the equal rights of another;

To harmonize and promote the interests of agriculture, manufactures and commerce, and by well informed views of political economy to give a free scope to the public industry;

To develop the reasoning faculty of our youth, enlarge their minds, cultivate their morals, and instill into them the precepts of virtue and order;

To enlighten them with mathematical and physical sciences, which advance the arts and administer to the health, the subsistence, and comforts of human life;

And, generally, to form them to habits of reflection and correct action, rendering them examples of virtue to others, and of happiness within themselves.

These are the objects of that higher grade of education, the benefits and blessings of which the Legislature now propose to provide for the good and ornament of their country, the gratification and happiness of their fellow citizens, of the parent especially, and his progeny, on which all his affections are concentrated.

In entering on this field, the Commissioners are aware that they have to encounter much difference of opinion as to the extent which it is expedient that this institution should occupy. . . But the Commissioners are happy in considering the statute under which they are assembled as proof that the Legislature is far from the abandonment of objects so interesting. They are sensible that the advantages of well-directed education, moral, political and economical, are truly above all estimate. Education generates habits of application, of order, and the love of virtue; and controls, by the force of habit, any innate obliquities in our moral organization. We should be far, too, from the discouraging persuasion that man is fixed, by the law of his nature, at a given point; that his improvement is a chimera, and the hope delusive of rendering ourselves wiser, happier or better than our forefathers were. . . Education . . . engrafts a new man on the native stock, and improves what in his nature was vicious and perverse into qualities of virtue and social worth. And it cannot be but that each generation succeeding to the knowledge acquired by all those who preceded it, adding to it their own acquisitions and discoveries, and handing the mass down for successive and constant accumulation, must advance the knowledge and well-being of mankind, not *infinitely*, as some have said, but *indefinitely*, and to a term which no one can fix and foresee. . . That these are not the vain dreams of sanguine hope, we have before our eyes real and living examples. What, but education, has advanced us beyond the condition of our indigenious neighbors? . . . And how much more encouraging to the achievements of science and improvement is this, than the desponding view that the condition of man cannot be ameliorated, that what has been must ever be, and that to secure ourselves where we are, we must tread with awful reverence in the footsteps of our fathers. This doctrine is the genuine fruit of the alliance between Church and State; the tenants of which, finding themselves but too well in their present condition, oppose all advances which might unmask their

usurpations, and monopolies of honors, wealth, and power, and fear every change, as endangering the comforts they now hold. Nor must we omit to mention, among the benefits of education, the incalculable advantage of training up able counselors to administer the affairs of our country in all its departments, legislative, executive, and judiciary, and to bear their proper share in the councils of our national government; nothing more than education advancing the prosperity, the power, and the happiness of a nation.

Jefferson is quoted at length here because this is what true *liberal* education brings to the political community; and this is what we have utterly lost in public education at all levels.

§ 2. The Death of Liberal Education in America

It has been almost a century now since it was the habit of Americans to look upon liberal education as one of the load-bearing pillars upholding liberty, justice, and democracy, or even to recognize it as the vital and indispensable aliment of good government. Yet it is both these things. Its role in the latter was recognized at the end of the eighth and beginning of the ninth centuries A.D. by Charles the Great, better known as Charlemagne. It is possible that the Dark Ages in Europe might have ended three centuries sooner if Charlemagne's ambitious program of education, one of the most distinctive features of what is known to history as the Carolingian Renaissance, had succeeded. Historian Olaf Pedersen tells us,

[The] emperor's chief difficulty was this: while his kingdom in its extent could nearly measure itself by the old Roman empire of the west, in the beginning at least it completely lacked the administrative structure that had determined the existence of Rome. The Roman balance between centralized and decentralized control was gone, and the primary task of the new central power was to create an expedient administration. . .

The central administration itself – which presumably only functioned through the emperor's constant journeys around the kingdom – presupposed the existence of a special class of officials capable of drawing up in the royal chancellery the steady stream of decrees that went out to all corners of the empire. It was surely Charles' need for such civil servants as much as for local administrators which led to that concern for education which became one of the most interesting features of Charles' personality.

This concern, however, had a cause in the third of the difficulties Charles met in his newly created empire – in its very disparate populations. In the Frankish provinces the after-effects of the Roman civilization had never wholly disappeared, and already in the second and third centuries Christianity had taken firm root, with the result that paganism had totally disappeared in all but a few backwaters. But in the new provinces to the east the Germanic population was as good as untouched by Latin or Christian civilization . . . After suppression of the Saxons, Charles threw himself into a fervent attempt to achieve political unity with the aid of religion . . . With this development there grew an additional need for educated administrators, and it was at this time that Charles saw the possibility of using precisely these new bishoprics and monasteries as a basis for an organized system of education.

Unfortunately, the Carolingian effort to re-establish a broad system of education did not succeed and the light of the renaissance did not long survive the death of Charlemagne. Pedersen tell us,

It was Charlemagne's wish to involve the monasteries in the enlightenment of his people, by linking public education to the already existing training of monks. . . It is obvious that the lay

school was meant to be kept sharply separate from the novices [in the monastery] and that different teaching methods were to be used there. How far this sketch was really followed . . . is hard to say. At any rate, it is certain that the Carolingian monasteries provided the real framework for intense teaching throughout large parts of Europe.

Even if this development proceeded by and large along parallel lines in England . . . it is the Carolingian school system in particular that impresses, in its conception and in the strength with which the emperor sought to establish it. On the other hand it cannot be denied that these schools never came to fulfill their original aims, that is, to shape a system of general popular education supplemented with higher training of such character that the new empire was provided with enough administrators to keep its coherence, and with teachers in sufficient numbers to create a somewhat uniform culture for the ironing out of tensions between individual elements in the population. There were several reasons for this.

Firstly, the lack of teachers worked against the successful conclusion of the project. The schools were supposed to build up in unison the necessary number of teachers by their own instruction; according to the nature of the case this would have to take rather a long time. Added to this, the Benedictine monasteries did not seem to be as willing to cooperate on this task as has been claimed. . .

The internal difficulties of building up a general system of schools were far from the only ones. A much greater hindrance to the execution of the program was the external political and military events caused by the Viking raids, of which the effects were first felt in England. . . On the continent the Scandinavian expansion was also strongly felt, especially in Flanders and northern France, where in 885 the Vikings set up winter quarters outside Paris itself. This shows that the Carolingian society at this time was severely weakened, in such a way that it would be wrong here to attribute its cultural regression to the Viking army alone. It had become clear much earlier that the tension between different population groups was too great, and that the school system had not had time enough to smooth them out by making a more uniform culture that could have held the empire together.

Where historical records exist to inform us, the decline and fall of great empires has gone hand in hand with the dissolution of education. This was true of the Western Roman Empire in the fifth century just as much as with the Islamic empire in the thirteenth. It is historically incorrect to assume that the dissolution of education is the *consequence* of the decline or fall of past great civilizations. Rather, the historical record shows that the dissolution of education was a major factor *contributing to* the decline or fall. Islamic civilization, which towered above Dark Age Europe in culture and achievement in the arts and sciences, has yet to recover from its fall after the zenith of Muslim Scholasticism peaked and declined in the 13th century. Contrary to popular supposition, dark ages are not caused by the sword. The historical record bears grim testimony to the fact that once education is smashed and broken the damage lasts for generation after generation. If you wish to bring about the fall of a mighty civilization, there is no surer way to do it than to first bring about the fall of its system of education. Do this and you set it on the pathway back to the state of nature. The unraveling of its social compact and of the society itself will follow upon this as surely as night follows day.

Again, the political community is not a natural thing. If individuals really possessed sufficient personal power and resources to do without it, they would; when the political community cannot provide them with the extra help and security they need and desire, they do turn their backs on it. The

keystone of Western civilization is, and always has been, widespread public *liberal* education. Hutchins wrote,

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. . .

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 are as concerned as anybody else at the headlong plunge into the 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 [the great books] 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 believe that the reduction of the citizen to an object of propaganda, private and public, is one of the greatest dangers to democracy. A prevalent notion is that the great mass of the people cannot understand and cannot form an independent judgment upon any matter; they cannot be educated, in the sense of developing their intellectual powers, but they can be bamboozled. The reiteration of slogans, the distortion of the news, the great storm of propaganda that beats upon the citizen twenty-four hours a day all his life long mean either that democracy must fall a prey to the loudest and most persistent propagandists or that the people must save themselves by strengthening their minds so that they can appraise the issues for themselves.

When your author says that liberal education in America is dead, he is not exaggerating to make a point. He means it quite specifically. Most universities in America – although not all – require every student to complete what is most often called "the core curriculum." This is the part of the curriculum that is supposed to ensure that graduates are truly educated people with a firm foundation in liberal education. The fact, however, is quite different. At almost every institution of higher education, the core curriculum – particularly in its humanities and social sciences components – is worthless trash. It does nothing to prepare the average college student to be an able citizen, to understand his duties to his country, to make a lifelong habit of applying moral reasoning in his daily life, or to competently participate in the preservation of liberty with justice for himself and all his fellow citizens. It does not prepare him to understand, much less help to solve, broad social issues or even to recognize the approaches of despotism and predation that would reduce him to the status of a serf. It does nothing to

help him understand what will bring to his life a greater measure of happiness, nor a sense of broader self-worth or purpose, nor even an appreciation of what is required to sustain the American Republic. It neither prepares him to lead nor prepares him to follow. The student who wishes to get this sort of education is on his own. The formal education he is provided prepares him for nothing other than subjugation. Higher education has abandoned liberal education and offers nothing but vocational training in its place. The critics and enemies of higher education are right about one thing: the political community has no duty to support, nor even any common interest in supporting or providing, a public education that has become strictly vocational in its character. This is not the system of education of which Jefferson so eloquently wrote.

We have been a long time in coming to this dangerous situation. The decline and death of liberal education in America took a slow and poisoned route through almost the entire twentieth century. Almost sixty years ago, Hutchins wrote a blistering criticism of the course education had taken:

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. . . It will not be suggested that [students] 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. . .

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 an 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.

Why did this education disappear? It was the education of the Founding Fathers. It held sway until fifty years ago [1901]. 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. . . 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 the 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 about the nature and scope of the scientific method. This confusion widened the break between these disciplines . . . ; 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 to be great who had had the misfortune to live before the method of empirical 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 triumphs of industrialization, which made [the expansion of the reach of education] 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, pre-scientific 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 whatsoever in another.

Harsh words these, well deserved and well spoken. Some people may be surprised to learn that college professors are not required to have – and most never receive – any training in either how to teach or what the purpose of their jobs are in regard to the political community that supports them through taxes. The majority teach in the same way as they were taught as students, and often come to adopt the same attitudes regarding their students they perceived their teachers to take towards them. At the same time, the system of rewards and recognition in the university system is based primarily on external factors such as the scope of a professor's scholarly reputation, the extent of his fame in the academic community at large, and the sterile counting of the number of his publications without the least attention paid to the quality, importance, or content of those publications. It is a system that promotes hubris and forgets the purpose of public education.

When the student radicals of the 1960s challenged their humanities and social sciences professors to prove that the ideas of men long dead were relevant to them or to the present day, these professors failed to be able to do so. When it came time to actually *apply* the knowledge of which they were supposed to be the masters and caretakers, they did not know how. No one had ever taught them how to apply it or even that its purpose was in its application. They had never learned this for themselves, never realized that all this heritage of knowledge was born out of real problems and was produced as the best real solutions that our forebears could find for their times. No one had ever taught them that any theory that is not reduced to practice is *useless* theory. How they could concurrently *feel* that this knowledge was vitally important but not know how to *use* it, or not know that their job was to *teach* students how to use it, is one of the great puzzles of that time. Once branded as useless, its expurgation from education followed with the hopelessness of Hegelian inevitability.

We have today a system of education crisply divided into neat and isolated specialties – silos of partial knowledge unable to bridge the complexities of real issues in real life. It is educational autism long in the making. Only recently has there been a sign of growing awareness of this; it is reflected by a present day rising call for more interdisciplinary learning. It is accompanied by a rising call for better education in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics – the so-called STEM disciplines. It is not accompanied by any apparent realization that the most crucial of real problems, and those of greatest menace to the preservation of the American Republic, will never be solved by STEM education alone. These problems are problems of the nature of human society and political community in general. They are the precisely the problems and issues that once constituted the core concerns of liberal education. Until this is realized and acted upon with real effect, all the interdisciplinary studies or STEM education in the world will do nothing to solve larger problems and issues. But it does seem that our problem has grown to such a monstrous size that even the keenest observers can see no more than the warts and scars lining the face of education; the monster itself has grown too large and too omnipresent for the eye to see its whole body at once.

The decay and rotting away of *civic* scholarship at the college level has, again with easily foreseeable inevitability, seeped down into the primary public school system and infected every grade from kindergarten through high school. The teachers in the primary school system are trained – not educated – by the collegiate system; their civic education is as bankrupt and uncivic as that offered and delivered to everyone else in every other discipline. It is part of the same educational malaise: the future teachers do not receive a liberal education because *their* teachers never received one. The parallelism here between the present crisis in education for the Republic and the teacher shortage problem confronting Charlemagne is all too clear if one just takes the trouble to look. The malaise has now become so deep and chronic that, while a great many people are cognizant to some degree of its

consequences, *ignorance of the root cause* is nearly universal. American politicians boast that America offers the finest system of education in the world; if so, God help the world.

We got here over the course of a century through two concurrent disasters: loss of purpose on the part of turn-of-the-twentieth-century educators – Hutchins' dissectors and drillmasters – and a catastrophically misguided experiment in specialization now institutionalized. The first disaster has completed its course and the second continues on unabated even as these words are being written. It is entirely wrong to blame the present state of affairs on today's educators. Are they to teach what they themselves not only have not been taught but, indeed, have been taught to regard as irrelevant? Are they likely to revolt – at the cost of their teaching careers – against an uncivic system of performance evaluation jealously guarded by self-appointed Bishops of Paris whose self interests lie in conserving the system in which they stand at the top? Would a peasant back sass Sargon the Great?

Many recognize that something is wrong in American education. Few know what it actually is. Today it is common for many well-meaning amateurs to offer up remedies, sometimes in a productive way, often in a vindictive and wholly counterproductive way. One group that bears special mentioning is the group of educational critics who presume that all educational ills would be cured if schools were run like commercial businesses. The hubris and ignorance of this argument could hardly be greater. The remedy presses for an educational climate that would produce nothing but a new generation of drillmasters. It tends to view the process of education as being like a factory assembly line where the task of the teacher is to fill the students' empty skulls with knowledge like pouring beer into beer bottles. The human mind does not work that way. If one is to use silly business analogies at all, the one to use is agriculture. The farmer does not grow the corn. The corn grows itself. All the farmer can do is prepare the field, plant the seeds, and provide the conditions under which the corn can do this. Likewise, a teacher cannot "learn his students some math." All a teacher can do is provide the conditions under which the student *finds within himself the motivation and ability to learn*.

And that is the second part of the issue: the motivation to learn. Most parents and most students regard the purpose of education as vocational. One goes to school in order to be able to get a good job later. The vocational aspect is, of course, important. But it ignores the fact that for the student this factor is not a motivation so much as a coercion. A good job is only a means to an end and is never an end in itself. The real end is *always* one's own life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. If *schooling* is what most Americans commonly view it as being, it becomes merely a *means to a means* to this end and is made a full step removed from its actual purpose. Furthermore, job skills in demand today will change tomorrow. *Education* is and must always be *the direct means to the real end*: a better life enriched with civil liberty and empowered by *knowledge of how to acquire knowledge* needed for the pursuit of happiness. Education of this nature is nothing else but liberal education.

§ 3. Education is a Task of Government

There are some who think education is a private good, not a public good, and that therefore all institutions of education should be private sector enterprises. In their view, no institutions of education should be paid for out of the common fund of taxes and instead schools should be made to compete with one another in the environment of uncivic free market enterprise. The top leaders of the Idaho Republican Party are men who hold this view, although their political acuity usually leads them to avoid saying so publicly since on the infrequent occasions when one of them does say so he usually is punished for it at the polls during the next election (*if* he suffers the misfortune to have a Democratic opponent facing him). This extremist view is the natural consequence of ignorant adherence to the ideology of the Friedman myth and, ironically, is a thoroughly anti-Republic outlaw ideology.

A great many more people acknowledge public education to be the public good that it is, but balk at having control of public education placed in any but local hands. This, indeed, is the politics behind the tradition in the United States of the local school district. When one considers the nearly universal way in which state governments have reversed the township-centered power relationship Tocqueville so admired (which we discussed in chapter 2), it is hardly surprising that citizens should be determined to keep the control of their children's education in their own hands, and it is *just* that they should be allowed to do so to the full extent that they have the power to provide for it.

However, this power is very irregular in its distribution. The citizens of wealthy Los Altos Hills in northern California are financially much more able to provide a strong educational infrastructure for their children than are the citizens of the tiny village of Deary in the Idaho panhandle. Inhomogeneous distributions of wealth within the Republic produce inhomogeneity in the local power of its citizens to provide for public education. In addition, the loss of liberal education in America – with education's consequent failure to provide the *civic* education of which Jefferson wrote and which is the *common* interest underlying and justifying public education in the first place – has had the effect of eradicating all common understanding of what is essential for the common public good in education. Without this common civic factor – which only a liberal education provides – accompanying the vocational training practical necessitation likewise requires, there really is no just basis for making the taxpayers of Boise foot part of the bill for the education of the children of Deary. In this the Idaho Republican Party leaders are right; if public education really is nothing more than vocational training, there is utterly no reason *I* should pay for any portion of *your* son's or daughter's schooling. I am free to take the attitude that: if Wal-Mart or Macy's or Wells Fargo Bank thinks it is in their corporate interest for people to be able to read, write, and do simple arithmetic then Wal-Mart or Macy's or Wells Fargo Bank can either pay for this training themselves or make a contract with individual parents to co-share the costs of the training with the understanding that the pupil will later work for them as an indentured servant.

This would be of course nothing else than a return to a practice that was common in eighteenth century Britain and colonial America. That this idea is so clearly and obviously preposterous and un-American testifies to the fundamentally uncivic nature of applying the ideology of the Friedman myth in all of its implications. That it also inevitably produces a civically amoral society is perhaps less apparent, but nonetheless this amoral society is part of the price tag of the ideology. There is no civic morality in the state of nature.

But life in the political community is not life in the state of nature. Where, then, does public education fit within the context of the lives of citizens in the political community? Jefferson's words quoted above spell this out for us, but everything he wrote in 1818 stems from one fundamental principle. This principle is and can be nothing else than the principle of the Social Contract. All policy in regard to public education must take the Social Contract as its starting point and as the standard for judgment in all policy matters. Not a single one of the six objectives of government – to form a more perfect union, to establish justice, to insure domestic tranquility, to provide for the common defense, to promote the general welfare, and to secure the blessings of liberty – can be achieved or sustained without the provision for a well educated citizenry. *I willingly pay part of the cost of educating your child because it is my duty to preserve and perfect the Republic of which I am a citizen and to which I have pledged my personal allegiance. But what I pay for is not a future carpenter or plumber; what I pay for is a future good citizen, associate, and ally in the cause of liberty with justice for all of us. And at present I am not getting what I am paying for. Neither are you.*

Tocqueville wrote of then fifty-year-old America,

It cannot be doubted that in the United States the instruction of the people powerfully contributes to the support of the democratic republic; and such must always be the case, I believe, where the instruction which enlightens the understanding is not separated from the moral education which amends the heart. But I would not exaggerate this advantage, and I am still further from thinking, as so many people do think in Europe, that men can be instantaneously made citizens by teaching them to read and write. True information is mainly derived from experience; and if the Americans had not been gradually accustomed to govern themselves, their book-learning would not help them much at the present day.

I have lived much with the people of the United States, and I cannot express how much I admire their experience and their good sense. An American should never be led to speak of Europe, for he will then probably display much presumption and very foolish pride. He will take up those crude and vague notions which are so useful to the ignorant all over the world. But if you question him respecting his own country, the cloud that dimmed his intelligence will immediately disperse; his language will become as clear and precise as his thoughts. He will inform you what his rights are and by what means he exercises them; he will be able to point out the customs which obtain in the political world. You will find that he is well acquainted with the rules of the administration, and that he is familiar with the mechanisms of the laws. The citizen of the United States does not acquire his practical science and his positive notions from books; the instruction he has acquired may have prepared him for receiving these ideas, but it did not furnish them. The American learns to know the laws by participating in the act of legislation; and he takes a lesson in the forms of government from governing. The great work of society is ever going on before his eyes and, as it were, under his hands.

In the United States politics are the end and aim of education; in Europe its principal object is to fit men for private life. The interference of the citizens in public affairs is too rare an occurrence to be provided for beforehand. Upon casting a glance over society in the two hemispheres, these differences are indicated even by their external aspect.

In Europe we frequently introduce the ideas and habits of private life into public affairs; and as we pass at once from the domestic circle to government of the state, we may frequently be heard to discuss the great interests of society in the same manner in which we converse with our friends. The Americans, on the other hand, transport the habits of public life into their manners in private; in their country the jury is introduced into the games of schoolboys, and parliamentary forms are observed in the order of a feast.

This could not truthfully be said of America today. In our passage through the twentieth century we became nineteenth century Europe, and our modern-day uncivic system of education bears a large measure of responsibility for this backward passage. The public schools no longer produce citizens. Children that come into them as outlaws leave them as outlaws.

Neither do the colleges or universities produce citizens. Bloom wrote,

What image does a first-rank college or university present today to a teenager leaving home for the first time, off to the adventure of a liberal education? He has four years of freedom to discover himself – a space between the intellectual wasteland he has left behind and the inevitable dreary professional training that awaits him after the baccalaureate. In this short time he must learn that there is a great world beyond the little one he knows, experience the exhilaration of it and digest enough of it to sustain himself in the intellectual deserts he is destined to traverse. He must do this, that is, if he is to have any hope of a higher life. These are the charmed years when he can, if he so chooses, become anything he wishes and when he has the opportunity to survey his alternatives, not merely those current in his time or provided by careers, but those available to him as a human being. The importance of these years for an American cannot be overestimated. They are civilization's only chance to get to him.

In looking at him we are forced to reflect on what he should learn if he is to be called educated; we must speculate on what the human potential to be fulfilled is. In the specialties we can avoid such speculation, and the avoidance of them is one of specialization's charms. But here it is a simple duty. What are we to teach this person? The answer may not be evident, but to attempt to answer the question is already to philosophize and to begin to educate. Such a concern in itself poses the question of the unity of man and the unity of the sciences. It is childishness to say, as some do, that everyone must be allowed to develop freely, that it is authoritarian to impose a point of view on the student. In that case, why have a university? If the response is "to provide an atmosphere for learning," we come back to our original questions at the second remove. Which atmosphere? Choices and the reflection on the reasons for those choices are unavoidable. The university has to stand for something. The practical effects of unwillingness to think positively about the contents of a liberal education are, on the one hand, to ensure that all the vulgarities of the world outside the university will flourish within it, and, on the other, to impose a much harsher and more illiberal necessity on the student – the one given by the imperial and imperious demands of the specialized disciplines unfiltered by unifying thought.

The university now offers no distinctive visage to the young person. He finds a democracy of the disciplines . . . This democracy is really an anarchy, because there are no recognized rules for citizenship and no legitimate titles to rule. In short there is no vision, nor is there a set of competing visions, of what an educated human being is. . . There is no organization of the sciences, no tree of knowledge. Out of chaos there emerges dispiritedness, because it is impossible to make a reasonable choice. Better to give up on liberal education and get on with a specialty in which there is at least a prescribed curriculum and a prospective career. . . The student gets no intimation that great mysteries might be revealed to him, that new and higher

motives of action might be discovered within him, that a different and more human way of life can be harmoniously constructed by what he is going to learn.

Bloom was right about the absence of vision, but he was wrong about the difficulty of judging what the proper vision must be for a public institution of education in a Republic bound together by social contract. John Donne wrote,

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were[.] – *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, 17*

The strength of every citizen of the Republic is multiplied by the strength of the associates with whom he has joined in their common cause. Likewise, the strength of every citizen of the Republic is diminished by whatever diminishes the strength of another. Education can be the aliment of strength or it can poison and sap this strength. Which the Republic must require of it is obvious. Jefferson wrote,

I think by far the most important bill in our whole code is that for the diffusion of knowledge among the people. No other sure foundation can be devised for the preservation of freedom and happiness. . . Preach, my dear Sir, a crusade against ignorance; establish and improve the law for educating the common people. Let our countrymen know that the people alone can protect us against these evils, and that the tax which will be paid for this purpose is not more than the thousandth part of what will be paid to kings, priests, and nobles who will rise up among us if we leave the people in ignorance. – *Letter to George Wythe, Aug. 13, 1786.*

It is fitting and appropriate to repeat here a part of *Representative Government* quoted earlier in this treatise. Mill wrote,

We have now, therefore, obtained a foundation for a twofold division of the merit which any set of political institutions can possess. It consists partly of the degree in which they promote the general mental advancement of the community, including under that phrase advancement in intellect, in virtue, and in practical activity and efficiency; and partly of the degree of perfection with which they organize the moral, intellectual, and active worth already existing, so as to operate with the greatest effect on public affairs. A government is to be judged by its action upon men, and by its action upon things; by what it makes of its citizens, and what it does with them; its tendency to improve or deteriorate the people themselves, and the goodness or badness of the work it performs for them, and by means of them. Government is at once a great influence acting on the human mind, and a set of organized arrangements for public business: in the first capacity its beneficial action is chiefly indirect, but not therefore less vital[.]

Children do not inherit their parents' knowledge of experience. Every generation must learn afresh the hard-won knowledge of the foundations of liberty with justice for all and the Idea of the American Republic. Government is instituted by the political community for its preservation, defense, and for its improvement. This means that insofar as education touches upon the Social Contract, government in a free society is charged with the duty of seeing to it that knowledge necessary for the common cause for which the Social Contract exists is provided to all the people of the Republic. Hutchins wrote,

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, scientific experimentation, and specialization, too. . .

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 re-learning. A political order is tyrannical if it is not rational.

§ 4. The Objectives of Reformation in Public Education

§ 4.1 The Purpose and Prime Objective of the Reformation

Education always involves three distinguishable but not disjoint benefits: (1) the benefit education provides for the shaping of the individual's personality; (2) the benefit education provides for the free management of his situation; and (3) the benefit education provides for his capacity to be a citizen in a political community. The first speaks to the personal duties a person owes himself for the sake of his own humanity, the second to duties a person owes himself in the commerce of living, and the third to duties the individual owes the political community in his capacity as a citizen. In this triad of relations there are involved just interests in the administration and the financing of public education from private, local, state, regional, and national sources. A *just* system of public education requires, therefore, a firm understanding of how each is related in the Social Contract. Let us understand very clearly: an *unjust* system of public education destroys the very foundation for the existence of public education. Like all great public issues, public education issues have many stakeholders and the success of the system marches hand in hand with the mandate of justice for all that attends its mechanisms.

The grounding justification for public education is set upon the third relation enumerated above. But this relation is in a deep sense the synthesis of benefits from the first two. One who is incapable of competently servicing his own situation cannot be competent to serve the public situation. One whose personality is unconformed to civic morality will not be a fit steward of the public trust or a responsible guardian of civil liberty with justice for all. Thus we cannot divide and apportion the task of education by independencies of three separate objectives. Rather, there must be a unity in the system of education where the interdependencies of all three are recognized and taken into account.

The goal of *public* education, like that of government itself, is to secure the peaceful Union of the

political community. The foundation of this Union, before every other argument or consideration – including well-intended but dangerously misplaced over-enthusiasm for pure democracy – is the Idea of Republic. The first and most important task for public education is the teaching of this Idea in *all* its aspects to *every* citizen. Your author can find in himself no words to explain the crucial and vital reasons for the central necessity of this that would be better than the words of Washington in his Farewell Address to the American people. Washington wrote,

The Unity of Government, which constitutes you one people, is also now dear to you. – It is justly so; for it is a main Pillar in the Edifice of your real independence; the support of your tranquility at home; your peace abroad; of your safety; of your prosperity in every shape; of that very Liberty, which you so highly prize. – But as it is easy to foresee that, from different causes, and from different quarters, much pains will be taken, many artifices employed, to weaken in your minds the conviction of this truth; – as this is the point in your political fortress against which the batteries of internal and external enemies will be most constantly and actively (though often covertly and insidiously) directed, it is of infinite moment that you should properly estimate the immense value of your national Union to your collective and individual happiness; – that you should cherish a cordial, habitual, and immovable attachment to it; accustoming yourself to think and speak of it as of the Palladium of your political safety and prosperity; watching for its preservation with jealous anxiety; discountenancing whatever may suggest even a suspicion that it can in any event be abandoned, and indignantly frowning upon the first dawning of every attempt to alienate any portion of our Country from the rest, or to enfeeble the sacred ties which now link together the various parts.

For this you have every inducement of sympathy and interest. – Citizens by birth or choice of a common country, that country has a right to concentrate your affections. – The name of AMERICAN, which belongs to you in your national capacity, must always exalt the just pride of Patriotism, more than any appellation derived from local discriminations. . .

While then every part of our Country thus feels an immediate and particular interest in Union, all the parts combined in the united mass of means and efforts cannot fail to find greater strength, greater resource, proportionably greater security from external danger, a less frequent interruption of the Peace by foreign Nations; and, what is of inestimable value! they must derive from Union an exemption from those broils and wars between themselves, which so frequently afflict neighboring countries not tied together by the same governments . . . In this sense it is, that your Union ought to be considered as a main prop to your liberty, and that the love of the one ought to endear to you the preservation of the other.

These considerations speak a persuasive language to every reflecting and virtuous mind, and exhibit the continuance of the UNION as a primary object of Patriotic desire. Is there a doubt, whether a common government can embrace so large a sphere? – Let experience solve it. To listen to mere speculation in such a case were criminal. – We are authorized to hope that a proper organization of the whole, with the auxiliary agency of governments for the respective subdivisions, will afford a happy issue to the experiment. It is well worth a fair and full experiment. With such powerful and obvious motives to Union, affecting all parts of the country, while experience shall not have demonstrated its impracticability, there will always be reason to distrust the patriotism of those who in any quarter may endeavor to weaken its bands. . .

To the efficacy and permanency of your Union, a Government for the whole is indispensable. . . Sensible of this momentous truth, you have improved upon your first essay, by the adoption of a Constitution of Government better calculated than your former for an intimate Union, and for the efficacious management of your common concerns. – This government, the offspring of our own choice uninfluenced and unawed, adopted upon full investigation and mature deliberation, completely free in its principles, in the distribution of its power, uniting security with energy, and containing within itself a provision for its own amendment, has a just claim to your

confidence and your support. – Respect for its authority, compliance with its Laws, acquiescence in its measures, are duties enjoined by the fundamental maxims of true Liberty. . . The very idea of the power and the right of the People to establish Government presupposes the duty of every individual to obey the established Government.

All obstructions to the execution of the Laws, all combinations and associations, under whatever plausible character, with the real design to direct, control, counteract, or awe the regular deliberation and action of the constituted authorities, are destructive of this fundamental principle, and of fatal tendency. – They serve to organize faction, to give it an artificial and extraordinary force – to put in the place of the delegated will of the nation, the will of a party; – often a small but artful and enterprising minority of the community; – and, according to the alternate triumphs of different parties, to make the public administration the mirror of the ill-concerted and incongruous projects of faction, rather than the organ of consistent and wholesome plans digested by common councils, and modified by mutual interests. – However combinations or associations of the above descriptions may now and then answer popular ends, they are likely, in the course of time and things, to become potent engines, by which cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the Power of the People, and to usurp for themselves the reins of Government; destroying afterwards the very engines which have lifted them to unjust dominion. . .

It is important, likewise, that the habits of thinking in a free country should inspire caution to those entrusted with its administration, to confine themselves within their respective constitutional spheres; avoiding in the exercise of the powers of one department to encroach upon another. The spirit of encroachment tends to consolidate the powers of all the departments in one, and thus to create, whatever the form of government, a real despotism. – A just estimate of that love of power, and the proneness to abuse it, which predominates the human heart, is sufficient to satisfy us of the truth of this position. . .

'Tis substantially true, that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government. – The rule indeed extends with more or less force to every species of Free Government. – Who that is a sincere friend to it can look with indifference upon attempts to shake the foundation of the fabric? –

Promote, then, as an object of primary importance, institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge. In proportion as the structure of government gives force to public opinion, it is essential that public opinion should be enlightened.

Washington's prescience, cast in writing over two centuries ago, strikes with uncanny accuracy the fruits from neglect of these principles that prevail in the American political community today. The tyranny and jealousy of the political parties, the encouragement of neglect of citizenship, the insidious promotion of a shift in attitude from citizenship as *duty* to citizenship as *entitlement* – all of these things undermine the American Republic at its very foundations. We take for granted the deadly illusion that our Union is self-preserving. It is not. In every year and in every generation, the renewal of commitment to the preservation of the Republic must be the on-going work of people determined to be free, to be secure in their civil liberty, and who expect justice to rule the world. The Idea of the American Republic is not an innate datum stamped by inheritance upon one's mind at birth. It is a complex and difficult Idea that required millennia of human intellectual effort to discover. Everyone who cherishes his *freedom* must likewise cherish preservation of Union in the American Republic, for it *is* what Lincoln said it was at Gettysburg, "the last, best hope of earth." ***The purpose of the reformation of public education is nothing else than the preservation of the Republic.***

The Patriots of 1776 thought at first that the institution of a free government was a matter of common sense and adherence to the traditions of their time and experience. They thought that, while the establishment of the State governments required much effort, the establishment of the Union of the United States required nothing more than the barest application of practical wisdom, and they called this simple wisdom the Articles of Confederation. In only a few short years, this miscalculation was made manifest by the ensuing crisis of disunity that enveloped their fledgling nation, and realized that something better was necessary. This is what gave birth to the Convention of 1787, and this is what motivated the far more piercing deliberation that body of Patriots brought to the understanding of Republican government. In our time we are seeing the consequences of failure to, as Washington put it, enlighten the public opinion. The "general diffusion of knowledge" of what is required to preserve liberty with justice for all and to preserve the very edifice of "government of the people by the people for the people" has been made inadequate. Perhaps we might excuse the nineteenth century for this failure because of the difficulty then of accomplishing the task, but this excuse – if ever it really had any validity – does not hold up in the twenty-first.

A century of disastrous experimentation in public education has wrought the very evils Washington spoke about in the Farewell Address. Most Americans today know that something has gone very wrong, and most have their personal opinions as to what it is that has gone wrong and their personal recipes for its remedy. And some have abandoned hope of remedy and returned, in the conduct of their daily lives and their public attitudes, to the outlaw state. Many Americans yearn for the emergence of a leader who can guide the nation back to the path towards its Ideal. But unless we are willing to settle for uncivic partial measures that will prove to be tyrannous and despotic for some, that leadership can come from only one source, and that source is the united effort of citizens who have learned well how to truly *be* citizens of the Republic. **The prime objective of the reformation is: *to provide the citizenship education essential to the preservation of the American Republic.***

§ 4.2 The Objectives of Implementation

The American Republic is today in crisis – a crisis so loud and raucous that it is an avalanche roar that cannot even be heard for what it is. It is not a crisis brought upon us by any external foe – though deadly foreign enemies we do have – but by the internal breakdown of principles. Meeting this crisis will not be achieved by only one remedy, and meeting it will require the mustering of effort from many – perhaps, my dear reader, you yourself because it remains as true today as in 1777 that

Those who expect to reap the blessings of freedom must, like men, undergo the fatigue of supporting it. – Thomas Paine, *The American Crisis*, 4 (September 12, 1777).

Our present crisis is not caused by the failure of the Great Experiment begun in 1789. It is because

an inadequate appreciation of its requirements has led to misunderstandings and mistaken means for carrying it out. It is not an accident that the false propositions of revisionism that began during the turmoils of the 1960s were followed by national breakdown in political civics in the last decade of that century. The nation has become polarized, ideological extremists have gained the reins of power, and the Social Contract is being torn to shreds. Civics has disappeared from politics, and civil liberty and justice have been pushed to the edge of the abyss. Are we to assume that the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 could never happen in the United States? It has already begun. The signs of it are manifest everywhere in the political community – in local, state, and general government; in the predations of uncivic enterprise; in the ever-growing hostility of the public to public enterprises; in the increasing national illiteracy and ignorance of science and politics; in the astounding public tolerance and lack of indignation to being bombarded by lies and deceits from every quadrant of political and commercial spheres of interest; in the abdication by the news media of their duty to report hard truths in favor of shilling out trivia of entertainment; in the refusal of our best citizens to undertake the duties of public service. We do not face a crisis on a battlefield against an armed foe; we face a national crisis that only we ourselves can meet, and the rallying words of an earlier crisis are as fit for today as they were at the darkest hour of the Revolution in 1776:

These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it *now* deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly; it is dearness only that gives everything its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as *Freedom* should not be highly rated. – Thomas Paine, *The American Crisis*, 1 (December 23, 1776).

The crisis is broad and has many faces. Its reversal will not be effected by the reformation of public education alone – and, indeed, the time that will be needed to effect civic reformation of public education will take too long to stop it, although public awareness of the depth of the crisis might be able to motivate more immediate steps to slow it down enough for more permanent measures to be put into place. The previous chapters in this treatise have been directed toward the many and specific reformations needed to put us back on the path to the Idea of the American Republic.

But these specific remedies will themselves some day come to naught if they are not supported in the long term by reformation of public civic education. Public education must recognize and then meet its civic objectives else, inevitably, the day will come when government by the people will perish from this land and the American Experiment will end. The issues are many and it will require the most conscientious refinement of specific ideas to bring the reformation about. But all reformations must be guided by objectives, and it is the task of this final segment of this treatise to set these out under the

prime objective of the reformation.

The first hard fact we must face is that the death of liberal education in the United States has led to the most severe shortage imaginable of teachers who have themselves been educated in the principles and reasons that set the foundations for the Social Contract and the nature of political community in the Idea of the American Republic. It is axiomatic that effective public education requires effective public educators. It calls for a corps of our best and brightest, but there are instead few at all who we can call upon to serve, and the competent few who do exist are widely scattered and hindered by many restrictions in their institutions and situations. They do not constitute a core faculty of *educators of educators* because they are not incorporated to this service. Yet some there are, and even though the nation currently lacks the faculty of civic educators it needs, the great books themselves still exist. In "A Letter to the Reader" at the end of *The Great Conversation* Hutchins wrote,

We say that these books contain a liberal education and that everybody ought to try to get one. You say either that you have had one, that you are not bright enough to get one, or that you do not need one.

You cannot have had one. If you are an American under the age of ninety, you can have acquired in the educational system only the faintest glimmerings of the beginnings of liberal education. Ask yourself what whole great books you read while you were in school, college, or university. Ask yourself whether you and your teachers saw these books as a Great Conversation among the finest minds of Western history, and whether you obtained an understanding of the tradition in which you live. . . I am willing to wager that, if you read any great books at all, you read very few, that you read one without reference to the others, in separate courses, and that for the most part you read only excerpts from them. . .

I must reiterate that you can set no store by your education in childhood and youth, no matter how good it was. Childhood and youth are no time to get an education. They are the time to get ready to get an education. . . The great issues, now issues of life and death for civilization, call for mature minds. . .

The question for you is only whether you can ever understand these books well enough to participate in the Great Conversation, not whether you can understand them well enough to end it. . .

The decay of education in the West, which is felt most profoundly in America, undoubtedly makes the task of understanding these books more difficult than it was for earlier generations. In fact my observation leads me to the horrid suspicion that these books are easier for people who have had no formal education than they are for those who have acquired that combination of misinformation, unphilosophy, and slipshod habits that is the usual result of the most elaborate and expensive institutional education in America.

For one thing, those who have had no formal education are less likely to labor under prejudices about the writers contained in this set. They have not heard, or at least not so often, that these writers are archaic, unrealistic and incomprehensible. They approach the books as they would approach any others, with a much more open mind than their more sophisticated, or more miseducated, contemporaries. They have not been frightened by their education. . .

In our colleges the curriculum is often so arranged that taking one course is made prerequisite to taking another. The pedagogical habit ingrained by such arrangements may prompt the question: What reading is prerequisite to reading great books? The answer is simply None. . .

Do you need a liberal education? We say that it is unpatriotic not to read these books. You may reply that you are patriotic enough without them. We say that you are gravely cramping your

human possibilities if you do not read these books. You may answer that you have troubles enough already.

This answer . . . assumes that we can leave all intellectual activity, and all political responsibility, to somebody else and live our lives as vegetable beneficiaries of the moral and intellectual virtue of other men. The trouble with this assumption is that . . . such indulgence now, on the part of anybody, endangers the whole community. . . The death of democracy is not likely to be an assassination from ambush. It will be a slow extinction from apathy, indifference, and undernourishment. . .

We who say, then, that we believe in democracy cannot content ourselves with virtual education any more than we can with virtual representation. . . We cannot admit that ordinary people cannot have a good education, because we cannot agree that democracy must involve a degradation of the human ideal. Anything less than the effort to help everybody get the best education necessarily implies that some cannot achieve in their own measure our human ideal. . . The aim of education is wisdom, and each must have the chance to become as wise as he can.

Providing that chance is **the first objective of implementation: *To build up the teaching capacity of the Republic to provide for the liberal civic education of every citizen.*** It should not be necessary to remark that this corps of educators must themselves have or acquire, and oblige themselves to, the highest deontological standards of civic morality and take upon themselves the most profound commitment to duty as educators, including the duty to impart these standards to those they teach.

To teach necessarily implies a matter to be taught. We are, as a people, far from common consent today over the proper content of general public education. The proof of this could not be more plainly apparent from the utter lack of civic liberal education in the educational institutions of this country and from the amateur and vulgar efforts by politicians and businessmen to dictate educational curricula and standards. General public education has a purpose it must serve and an objective it must achieve. Furthermore, there are many levels of instruction ranging from primary education all the way to the highest peak of graduate and post-graduate education. It would be a grave mistake to assume any one-size-fits-all curriculum could accomplish our national purpose. **The second objective of implementation is: *To design and craft with utmost professionalism the necessary system of curricula for civic public education.***

It is axiomatic that any large scale and complex undertaking cannot succeed without proper setup, on-going financial and other aliment, and an organization of human enterprise so designed and constituted as to achieve the greatest beneficial effect human wisdom can make possible. It must also understand and become prepared to deal with the foreseeable hindrances and issues that inevitably will attend its function. Not the least of these for the case of universal civic education is the obvious inter-relationships among the three duties of education in general enumerated earlier. Civic educational efforts cannot succeed if they stand isolated from, and lack respect for, the other duties of an education system. This system must meet the vocational and specialist needs of the Republic as much as it must meet its objective of maintaining and preserving the Social Contract of the Republic. The education

problem cannot be solved by dissecting it; that was and is the great error in our failed twentieth century experiment in specialization. **The third objective of implementation is: *To design, constitute, and establish the mechanisms for the successful and effective delivery of public education necessary for meeting the goals of this institution.***

There is perhaps no more easily observable tendency of human nature than the tendency for any body or group of people, especially dedicated ones, to become so absorbed in the manifold details of their mission that the *purpose* of this mission disappears from their sight. The American philosopher George Santayana wrote, "Fanaticism consists of redoubling your efforts after you have forgotten your aim." Complex enterprises invariably involve many different levels of effort, each successively lower level having its own objectives, the purpose of which is always to insure that the objectives at the next higher level are met. The more complex the enterprise, the more essential it is that the administration of the enterprise be so structured and intelligently committed to its success that it is capable of summoning the very best performance human achievement can provide for its success. It would be strange – even incomprehensible – if the administrative structure of an enterprise devoted to the purpose of perfecting a Republic, and which will of its very nature stamp its own impress upon civil society, should be anything else than a Republic in its own constitution. Therefore, **the fourth objective of implementation is: *To constitute and provide an administration of civic public education in the form of a Republic of educators and stakeholders.*** No other model, whether taken from the example of a government agency or a private business enterprise, has any realistic possibility of insuring that the primary purpose of the educational system is achieved.

As is the case in all the reformations called for in this treatise, there is a staggering wealth of detail that must be worked through for the success of the educational enterprise. Earlier in this treatise, in the discussion concerning the House of Interests, it was pointed out that the refinement of ideas is essential in every proposal aimed at achieving the general aims of government if true faith and allegiance to the terms of the Social Contract is to be kept. The nucleus of this contract is *the common interests* of the Sovereign. This is no less true for education reform. Public education, properly in accord with this condition, is the greatest of public goods for the health, security, maintenance, and perfection of the American Republic. The universality of its impact sets it among the most urgent tasks of government in any political community founded upon liberty with justice for all. That the education function is neither legislative, executive, nor judicial does not make it any the less a necessary institution for the security of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

§ 5. References

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