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Liberal Education
and Responsibility

When I was approached by The Fund for Adult Education with the suggestion that I prepare an essay on liberal education and responsibility, my first reaction was not one of delight. While I am in many ways dependent on the administration of education and hence on the organizations serving education, I looked at these things, if I looked at them, with that awe which arises from both gratitude and apprehension mixed with ignorance. I thought that it was my job, my responsibility, to do my best in the classroom, in conversations with students wholly regardless of whether they are registered or not, and last but not least in my study at home. I own that education is in a sense the subject matter of my teaching and my research. But I am almost solely concerned with the goal or end of education at its best or highest—of the education of the perfect prince, as it were—and very little with its conditions and its how. The most important conditions, it seems to me, are the qualities of the educator and of the human being who is to be educated; in the case of the highest form of education those conditions are very rarely fulfilled, and one cannot do anything to produce them; the only things we can do regarding them are not to interfere with

their interplay and to prevent such interference. As for the how, one knows it once one knows what education is meant to do to a human being or once one knows the end of education. Certainly, there are some rules of thumb. Almost every year I meet once with the older students of my department in order to discuss with them how to teach political theory in college. Once on such an occasion a student asked me whether I could not give him a general rule regarding teaching. I replied: "Always assume that there is one silent student in your class who is by far superior to you in head and in heart." I meant by this: do not have too high an opinion of your importance, and have the highest opinion of your duty, your responsibility.

There was another reason why I was somewhat bewildered when I first began to prepare this essay. That reason has to do with the word "responsibility." For clearly, liberal education and responsibility are not identical. They may not be separable from each other. Before one could discuss their relation, one would have to know what each of them is. As for the word "responsibility," it is now in common use, and I myself have used it from time to time, for instance a very short while ago. In the sense in which it is now frequently used, it is a neologism. It is, I believe, the fashionable substitute for such words as "duty," "conscience," or "virtue." We frequently say of a man that he is a responsible man, where people of former generations would have said that he is a just man or a conscientious man or a virtuous man. Primarily, a man is responsible if he can be held accountable for what he does—for example, for a murder; being responsible is so far from being the same as being virtuous that it is merely the condition for being either virtuous or vicious. By substituting responsibility for virtue, we prove to be much more easily satisfied than our forefathers, or, more precisely perhaps, we assume that by being responsible one is already virtuous or that no vicious man is responsible for his viciousness. There is a kinship between "responsibility" thus under-

stood and "decency" as sometimes used by the British: if a man ruins himself in order to save a complete stranger, the stranger, if British, is supposed to thank him by saying, "It was rather decent of you." We seem to loathe the grand old words and perhaps also the things which they indicate and to prefer more subdued expressions out of delicacy or because they are more businesslike. However this may be, my misgivings were caused by my awareness of my ignorance as to what the substitution of responsibility for duty and for virtue means.

I certainly felt that I was particularly ill-prepared to address professional educators on the subject "Education and Responsibility." But then I learnt to my relief that I was merely expected to explain two sentences occurring in my speech "What is Liberal Education?" The sentences run as follows: "Liberal education is the ladder by which we try to ascend from mass democracy to democracy as originally meant. Liberal education is the necessary endeavor to found an aristocracy within democratic mass society."

To begin at the beginning, the word "liberal" had at the beginning, just as it has now, a political meaning, but its original political meaning is almost the opposite of its present political meaning. Originally a liberal man was a man who behaved in a manner becoming a free man, as distinguished from a slave. "Liberality" referred then to slavery and presupposed it. A slave is a human being who lives for another human being, his master; he has in a sense no life of his own: he has no time for himself. The master, on the other hand, has all his time for himself, that is, for the pursuits becoming him: politics and philosophy. Yet there are very many free men who are almost like slaves since they have very little time for themselves, because they have to work for their livelihood and to rest so that they can work the next day. Those free men without leisure are the poor, the majority of citizens. The truly free man who can live in a manner becoming a free man is the man of leisure, the gentleman who must possess some wealth—but wealth of a

certain kind: a kind of wealth the administration of which, to say nothing of its acquisition, does not take up much of his time, but can be taken care of through his supervising of properly trained supervisors; the gentleman will be a gentleman farmer and not a merchant or entrepreneur. Yet if he spends much of his time in the country he will not be available sufficiently for the pursuits becoming him; he must therefore live in town. His way of life will be at the mercy of those of his fellow citizens who are not gentlemen, if he and his like do not rule: the way of life of the gentlemen is not secure if they are not the unquestioned rulers of their city, if the regime of their city is not aristocratic.

One becomes a gentleman by education, by liberal education. The Greek word for education is derived from the Greek word for child: education in general, and therefore liberal education in particular, is, then, to say the least, primarily not adult education. The Greek word for education is akin to the Greek word for play, and the activity of the gentlemen is emphatically earnest; in fact, the gentlemen are “the earnest ones.” They are earnest because they are concerned with the most weighty matters, with the only things which deserve to be taken seriously for their own sake, with the good order of the soul and of the city. The education of the potential gentlemen is the playful anticipation of the life of gentlemen. It consists above all in the formation of character and of taste. The fountains of that education are the poets. It is hardly necessary to say that the gentleman is in need of skills. To say nothing of reading, writing, counting, reckoning, wrestling, throwing of spears, and horsemanship, he must possess the skill of administering well and nobly the affairs of his household and the affairs of his city by deed and by speech. He acquires that skill by his familiar intercourse with older or more experienced gentlemen, preferably with elder statesmen, by receiving instruction from paid teachers in the art of speaking, by reading histories and books of travel, by med-

itating on the works of the poets, and, of course, by taking part in political life. All this requires leisure on the part of the youths as well as on the part of their elders; it is the preserve of a certain kind of wealthy people.

This fact gives rise to the question of the justice of a society which in the best case would be ruled by gentlemen ruling in their own right. Just government is government which rules in the interest of the whole society, and not merely of a part. The gentlemen are therefore under an obligation to show to themselves and to others that their rule is best for everyone in the city or for the city as a whole. But justice requires that equal men be treated equally, and there is no good reason for thinking that the gentlemen are by nature superior to the vulgar. The gentlemen are indeed superior to the vulgar by their breeding, but the large majority of men are by nature capable of the same breeding if they are caught young, in their cradles; only the accident of birth decides whether a given individual has a chance of becoming a gentleman or will necessarily become a villain; hence aristocracy is unjust. The gentlemen replied as follows: the city as a whole is much too poor to enable everyone to bring up his sons so that they can become gentlemen; if you insist that the social order should correspond with tolerable strictness to the natural order—that is, that men who are more or less equal by nature should also be equal socially or by convention—you will merely bring about a state of universal drabness. But only on the ground of a narrow conception of justice, owing its evidence to the power of the ignoble passion of envy, must one prefer a flat building which is everywhere equally drab to a structure which from a broad base of drabness rises to a narrow plateau of distinction and of grace and therefore gives some grace and some distinction to its very base. There must then be a few who are wealthy and well born and many who are poor and of obscure origin. Yet there seems to be no good reason why this family is elected to gentility and that family is condemned to in-

distinctness; that selection seems to be arbitrary, to say the least. It would indeed be foolish to deny that old wealth sometimes has its forgotten origins in crime. But it is more noble to believe, and probably also truer, that the old families are the descendants from the first settlers and from leaders in war or counsel; and it is certainly just that one be grateful.

Gentlemen may rule without being rulers in their own right; they may rule on the basis of popular election. This arrangement was regarded as unsatisfactory for the following reason. It would mean that the gentlemen are, strictly speaking, responsible to the common people—that the higher is responsible to the lower—and this would appear to be against nature. The gentlemen regard virtue as choiceworthy for its own sake, whereas the others praise virtue as a means for acquiring wealth and honor. The gentlemen and the others disagree, then, as regards the end of man or the highest good; they disagree regarding first principles. Hence they cannot have genuinely common deliberations.¹ The gentlemen cannot possibly give a sufficient or intelligible account of their way of life to the others. While being responsible to themselves for the well-being of the vulgar, they cannot be responsible to the vulgar.

But even if one rests satisfied with a less exacting notion of the rule of gentlemen, the principle indicated necessarily leads one to reject democracy. Roughly speaking, democracy is the regime in which the majority of adult free males living in a city rules, but only a minority of them are educated. The principle of democracy is therefore not virtue, but freedom as the right of every citizen to live as he likes. Democracy is rejected because it is as such the rule of the uneducated. One illustration must here suffice. The sophist Protagoras came to the democratic city of Athens in order to educate human beings, or to teach for pay the art of administering well the affairs of one's household and

of the city by deed and by speech—the political art. Since in a democracy everyone is supposed to possess the political art somehow, yet the majority, lacking equipment, cannot have acquired that art through education, Protagoras must assume that the citizens received that art through something like a divine gift, albeit a gift which becomes effective only through human punishments and rewards: the true political art, the art which enables a man not only to obey the laws but to frame laws, is acquired by education, by the highest form of education, which is necessarily the preserve of those who can pay for it.

To sum up, liberal education in the original sense not only fosters civic responsibility: it is even required for the exercise of civic responsibility. By being what they are, the gentlemen are meant to set the tone of society in the most direct, the least ambiguous, and the most unquestionable way: by ruling it in broad daylight.

It is necessary to take a further step away from our opinions in order to understand our opinions. The pursuits becoming the gentleman are said to be politics and philosophy. Philosophy can be understood loosely or strictly. If understood loosely, it is the same as what is now called intellectual interests. If understood strictly, it means quest for the truth about the most weighty matters or for the comprehensive truth or for the truth about the whole or for the science of the whole. When comparing politics to philosophy strictly understood, one realizes that philosophy is of higher rank than politics. Politics is the pursuit of certain ends; decent politics is the decent pursuit of decent ends. The responsible and clear distinction between ends which are decent and ends which are not is in a way presupposed by politics. It surely transcends politics. For everything which comes into being through human action and is therefore perishable or corruptible presupposes incorruptible and unchangeable things—for instance, the natural order of the human soul—with a view to which we can distinguish between right and wrong actions.

1. Cf. *Crito* 49d 2–5.

In the light of philosophy, liberal education takes on a new meaning: liberal education, especially education in the liberal arts, comes to sight as a preparation for philosophy. This means that philosophy transcends gentlemanship. The gentleman as gentleman accepts on trust certain most weighty things which for the philosopher are the themes of investigation and of questioning. Hence the gentleman's virtue is not entirely the same as the philosopher's virtue. A sign of this difference is the fact that whereas the gentleman must be wealthy in order to do his proper work, the philosopher may be poor. Socrates lived in tenthousand-fold poverty. Once he saw many people following a horse and looking at it, and he heard some of them conversing much about it. In his surprise he approached the groom with the question whether the horse was rich. The groom looked at him as if he were not only grossly ignorant but not even sane: "How can a horse have any property?" At that Socrates understandably recovered, for he thus learned that it is lawful for a horse which is a pauper to become good provided it possesses a naturally good soul: it may then be lawful for Socrates to become a good man in spite of his poverty. Since it is not necessary for the philosopher to be wealthy, he does not need the entirely lawful arts by which one defends one's property, for example, forensically; nor does he have to develop the habit of self-assertion in this or other respects—a habit which necessarily enters into the gentleman's virtue. Despite these differences, the gentleman's virtue is a reflection of the philosopher's virtue; one may say it is its political reflection.

This is the ultimate justification of the rule of gentlemen. The rule of the gentlemen is only a reflection of the rule of the philosophers, who are understood to be the men best by nature and best by education. Given the fact that philosophy is more evidently quest for wisdom than possession of wisdom, the education of the philosopher never ceases as long as he lives; it is the adult education par excellence. For, to say nothing of other things, the

highest kind of knowledge which a man may have acquired can never be simply at his disposal as other kinds of knowledge can; it is in constant need of being acquired again from the start. This leads to the following consequence. In the case of the gentleman, one can make a simple distinction between the playful education of the potential gentleman and the earnest work of the gentleman proper. In the case of the philosopher this simple distinction between the playful and the serious no longer holds, not in spite of the fact that his sole concern is with the weightiest matters, but because of it. For this reason alone, to say nothing of others, the rule of philosophers proves to be impossible. This leads to the difficulty that the philosophers will be ruled by the gentlemen, that is, by their inferiors.

One can solve this difficulty by assuming that the philosophers are not as such a constituent part of the city. In other words, the only teachers who are as such a constituent part of the city are the priests. The end of the city is then not the same as the end of philosophy. If the gentlemen represent the city at its best, one must say that the end of the gentleman is not the same as the end of the philosopher. What was observed regarding the gentleman in his relation to the vulgar applies even more to the philosopher in his relation to the gentlemen and a fortiori to all other nonphilosophers: the philosopher and the nonphilosophers cannot have genuinely common deliberations. There is a fundamental disproportion between philosophy and the city. In political things it is a sound rule to let sleeping dogs lie or to prefer the established to the nonestablished or to recognize the right of the first occupier. Philosophy stands or falls by its intransigent disregard of this rule and of anything which reminds of it. Philosophy can then live only side by side with the city. As Plato put it in the *Republic*, only in a city in which the philosophers rule and in which they therefore owe their training in philosophy to the city is it just that the philosopher be compelled to engage in political activity; in all other cities—

that is, in all actual cities—the philosopher does not owe his highest gift of human origin to the city and therefore is not under an obligation to do the work of the city. In entire agreement with this, Plato suggests in his *Crito*, where he avoids the very term “philosophy,” that the philosopher owes indeed very much to the city and therefore he is obliged to obey at least passively even the unjust laws of the city and to die at the behest of the city. Yet he is not obliged to engage in political activity. The philosopher as philosopher is responsible to the city only to the extent that by doing his own work, by his own well-being, he contributes to the well-being of the city: philosophy has necessarily a humanizing or civilizing effect. The city needs philosophy, but only mediately or indirectly, not to say in a diluted form. Plato has presented this state of things by comparing the city to a cave from which only a rough and steep ascent leads to the light of the sun: the city as city is more closed to philosophy than open to it.

The classics had no delusions regarding the probability of a genuine aristocracy’s ever becoming actual. For all practical purposes they were satisfied with a regime in which the gentlemen share power with the people in such a way that the people elect the magistrates and the council from among the gentlemen and demand an account of them at the end of their term of office. A variation of this thought is the notion of the mixed regime, in which the gentlemen form the senate and the senate occupies the key position between the popular assembly and an elected or hereditary monarch as head of the armed forces of society. There is a direct connection between the notion of the mixed regime and modern republicanism. Lest this be misunderstood, one must immediately stress the important differences between the modern doctrine and its classic original. The modern doctrine starts from the natural equality of all men, and it leads therefore to the assertion that sovereignty belongs to the people; yet it understands that sovereignty in such a way as to guarantee the natural

rights of each; it achieves this result by distinguishing between the sovereign and the government and by demanding that the fundamental governmental powers be separated from one another. The spring of this regime was held to be the desire of each to improve his material conditions. Accordingly the commercial and industrial elite, rather than the landed gentry, predominated.

The fully developed doctrine required that one man have one vote, that the voting be secret, and that the right to vote be not abridged on account of poverty, religion, or race. Governmental actions, on the other hand, are to be open to public inspection to the highest degree possible, for government is only the representative of the people and responsible to the people. The responsibility of the people, of the electors, does not permit of legal definition and is therefore the most obvious crux of modern republicanism. In the earlier stages the solution was sought in the religious education of the people, in the education, based on the Bible, of everyone to regard himself as responsible for his actions and for his thoughts to a God who would judge him, for, in the words of Locke, rational ethics proper is as much beyond the capacities of “day laborers and tradesmen, and spinsters and dairy maids” as is mathematics. On the other hand, the same authority advises the gentlemen of England to set their sons upon Puffendorf’s *Natural Right* “wherein (they) will be instructed in the natural rights of men, and the origin and foundation of society, and the duties resulting from thence.” Locke’s *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* is addressed to the gentlemen, rather than to “those of the meaner sort,” for if the gentlemen “are by their education once set right, they will quickly bring all the rest into order.” For, we may suppose, the gentlemen are those called upon to act as representatives of the people, and they are to be prepared for this calling by a liberal education which is, above all, an education in “good breeding.” Locke takes his models from the ancient Romans and Greeks, and the liberal education

which he recommends consists to some extent in acquiring an easy familiarity with classical literature: "Latin I look upon as absolutely necessary to a gentleman."²

Not a few points which Locke meant are brought out clearly in the *Federalist Papers*. These writings reveal their connection with the classics simply enough by presenting themselves as the work of one Publius. This eminently sober work considers chiefly that diversity and inequality in the faculties of men which shows itself in the acquisition of property, but it is very far from being blind to the difference between business and government. According to Alexander Hamilton, the mechanics and manufacturers "know that the merchant is their natural patron and friend," their natural representative, for the merchant possesses "those acquired endowments without which, in a deliberative assembly, the greatest natural abilities are for the most part useless." Similarly, the wealthier landlords are the natural representatives of the landed interest. The natural arbiter between the landed and the moneyed interests will be "the man of the learned professions," for "the learned professions . . . truly form no distinct interest in society" and therefore are more likely than others to think of "the general interests of the society." It is true that in order to become a representative of the people, it sometimes suffices that one practice "with success the vicious arts by which elections are too often carried," but these deplorable cases are the exception, the rule being that the representatives will be respectable landlords, merchants, and members of the learned professions. If the electorate is not depraved, there is a fair chance that it will elect as its representatives for deliberation as well as for execution those among the three groups of men "who possess most wisdom to discern, and most virtue to pursue, the common

2. Ep. Ded., pp. 93–94, 164, 186.

good of the society," or those who are most outstanding by "merits and talents," by "ability and virtue."³

Under the most favorable conditions, the men who will hold the balance of power will then be the men of the learned professions. In the best case, Hamilton's republic will be ruled by the men of the learned professions. This reminds one of the rule of the philosophers, but only reminds one of it. Will the men of the learned professions at least be men of liberal education? It is probable that the men of the learned professions will chiefly be lawyers. No one ever had a greater respect for law and hence for lawyers than Edmund Burke: "God forbid I should insinuate anything derogatory to that profession, which is another priesthood, administering the rites of sacred justice." Yet he felt compelled to describe the preponderance of lawyers in the national counsels as "mischievous." "Law . . . is, in my opinion, one of the first and noblest of human sciences; a science which does more to quicken and invigorate the understanding, than all the other kinds of learning put together; but it is not apt, except in persons very happily born, to open and to liberalize the mind exactly in the same proportion." For to speak "legally and constitutionally" is not the same as to speak "prudently." "Legislators ought to do what lawyers cannot; for they have no other rules to bind them, but the great principles of reason and equity, and the general sense of mankind."⁴ The liberalization of the mind obviously requires understanding of "the great principles of reason and equity," which for Burke are the same thing as the natural law.

But it is not necessary to dwell on this particular shortcoming from which representative government might suffer. Two generations after Burke, John Stuart Mill took up the question concerning the relation of representative government and liberal education. One does not exagger-

3. Nos. 10, 35, 36, 55, 57, 62, 68.

4. *The Works of Edmund Burke* (Bohn Standard Library), I 407, II 7, 317–318, V 295.

ate too much by saying that he took up these two subjects in entire separation from each other. His *Inaugural Address at St. Andrews* deals with liberal education as “the education of all who are not obliged by their circumstances to discontinue their scholastic studies at a very early age,” not to say the education of “the favorites of nature and fortune.” That speech contains a number of observations which will require our consideration and reconsideration. Mill traces the “superiority” of classical literature “for purposes of education” to the fact that that literature transmits to us “the wisdom of life”: “In cultivating . . . the ancient languages as our best literary education, we are all the while laying an admirable foundation for ethical and philosophical culture.” Even more admirable than “the substance” is “the form” of treatment: “It must be remembered that they had more time and that they wrote chiefly for a select class possessed of leisure,” whereas we “write in a hurry for people who read in a hurry.” The classics used “the right words in the right places” or, which means the same thing, they were not “prolix.”⁵ But liberal education has very little effect on the “miscellaneous assembly” which is the legal sovereign and which is frequently ruled by men who have no qualification for legislation except “a fluent tongue, and a faculty of getting elected by a constituency.” To secure “the intellectual qualifications desirable in representatives,” Mill thought, there is no other mode than proportional representation as devised by Hare and Fawcett, a scheme which in his opinion is of “perfect feasibility” and possesses “transcendent advantages.”

The natural tendency of representative government, as of modern civilization, is toward collective mediocrity: and this tendency is increased by all reductions and extensions of the franchise, their effect being to place the principal power in

5. James and John Stuart Mill, *On Education*, ed. by F.A. Cavenagh (Cambridge: University Press, 1931), pp. 151–157.

the hands of classes more and more below the highest level of instruction in the community. . . . It is an admitted fact that in the American democracy, which is constructed on this faulty model, the highly-cultivated members of the community, except such of them as are willing to sacrifice their own opinions and modes of judgment, and become the servile mouthpieces of their inferiors in knowledge, do not ever offer themselves for Congress or State legislatures, so certain is it that they would have no chance of being returned. Had a plan like Mr. Hare’s by good fortune suggested itself to the enlightened and patriotic founders of the American Republic, the Federal and State Assemblies would have contained many of those distinguished men, and democracy would have been spared its greatest reproach and one of its most formidable evils.

Only proportional representation which guarantees or at least does not exclude the proper representation of the best part of society in the government will transform “the falsely called democracies which now prevail, and from which the current idea of democracy is exclusively derived” into “the only true type of democracy,” into democracy as originally meant.

For reasons which are not all bad, Mill’s remedy has come to be regarded as insufficient, not to say worthless. Perhaps it was a certain awareness of this which induced him to look for relief in another part of the body politic. From the fact that the representative assemblies are not necessarily “a selection of the greatest political minds of the country,” he drew the conclusion that for “the skilled legislation and administration” one must secure “under strict responsibility to the nation, the acquired knowledge and practiced intelligence of a specially trained and experienced Few.”⁶ Mill appears to suggest that with the growth and maturity of democracy, the institutional seat of public-spirited intelligence could and should be sought in the high and middle echelons of the appointed officials. This

6. *Considerations on Representative Government* (London: Routledge, s.d.), pp. 93, 95, 101–102, 133–140, 155.

hope presupposes that the bureaucracy can be transformed into a civil service properly so called, the specific difference between the bureaucrat and the civil servant being that the civil servant is a liberally educated man whose liberal education affects him decisively in the performance of his duties.

Permit me to summarize the preceding argument. In the light of the original conception of modern republicanism, our present predicament appears to be caused by the decay of religious education of the people and by the decay of liberal education of the representatives of the people. By the decay of religious education I mean more than the fact that a very large part of the people no longer receive any religious education, although it is not necessary on the present occasion to think beyond that fact. The question as to whether religious education can be restored to its pristine power by the means at our disposal is beyond the scope of this year's Arden House Institute. Still, I cannot help stating to you these questions: Is our present concern with liberal education of adults, our present expectation from such liberal education, not due to the void created by the decay of religious education? Is such liberal education meant to perform the function formerly performed by religious education? Can liberal education perform that function? It is certainly easier to discuss the other side of our predicament—the predicament caused by the decay of liberal education of the governors. Following Mill's suggestion, we would have to consider whether and to what extent the education of the future civil servants can and should be improved, or in other words whether the present form of their education is liberal education in a tolerably strict sense. If it is not, one would have to raise the broader question whether the present colleges and universities supply such a liberal education and whether they can be reformed. It is more modest, more pertinent, and more practical to give thought to some necessary reforms of the teaching in the Departments of Political Science and per-

haps also in the Law Schools. The changes I have in mind are less in the subjects taught than in the emphasis and in the approach: whatever broadens and deepens the understanding should be more encouraged than what in the best case cannot as such produce more than narrow and unprincipled efficiency.

No one, I trust, will misunderstand the preceding remarks so as to impute to me the ridiculous assertion that education has ceased to be a public or political power. One must say, however, that a new type of education or a new orientation of education has come to predominate. Just as liberal education in its original sense was supported by classical philosophy, so the new education derives its support, if not its being, from modern philosophy. According to classical philosophy the end of the philosophers is radically different from the end or ends actually pursued by the nonphilosophers. Modern philosophy comes into being when the end of philosophy is identified with the end which is capable of being actually pursued by all men. More precisely, philosophy is now asserted to be essentially subservient to the end which is capable of being actually pursued by all men. We have suggested that the ultimate justification for the distinction between gentlemen and nongentlemen is the distinction between philosophers and nonphilosophers. If this is true, it follows that by causing the purpose of the philosophers, or more generally the purpose which essentially transcends society, to collapse into the purpose of the nonphilosophers, one causes the purpose of the gentlemen to collapse into the purpose of the nongentlemen. In this respect, the modern conception of philosophy is fundamentally democratic. The end of philosophy is now no longer what one may call disinterested contemplation of the eternal, but the relief of man's estate. Philosophy thus understood could be presented with some plausibility as inspired by biblical charity, and accordingly philosophy in the classic sense could be disparaged as pagan and as sustained by sinful pride. One may

doubt whether the claim to biblical inspiration was justified and even whether it was always raised in entire sincerity. However this may be, it is conducive to greater clarity, and at the same time in agreement with the spirit of the modern conception, to say that the moderns opposed a “realistic,” earthly, not to say pedestrian conception to the “idealistic,” heavenly, not to say visionary conception of the classics. Philosophy or science was no longer an end in itself, but in the service of human power, of a power to be used for making human life longer, healthier, and more abundant. The economy of scarcity, which is the tacit presupposition of all earlier social thought, was to be replaced by an economy of plenty. The radical distinction between science and manual labor was to be replaced by the smooth co-operation of the scientist and the engineer. According to the original conception, the men in control of this stupendous enterprise were the philosopher-scientists. Everything was to be done by them for the people, but, as it were, nothing by the people. For the people were, to begin with, rather distrustful of the new gifts from the new sort of sorcerers, for they remembered the commandment, “Thou shalt not suffer a sorcerer to live.” In order to become the willing recipients of the new gifts, the people had to be enlightened. This enlightenment is the core of the new education. It is the same as the diffusion or popularization of the new science. The addresses of the popularized science were in the first stage countesses and duchesses, rather than spinsters and dairymaids, and popularized science often surpassed science proper in elegance and charm of diction. But the first step entailed all the further steps which were taken in due order. The enlightenment was destined to become universal enlightenment. It appeared that the difference of natural gifts did not have the importance which the tradition had ascribed to it; method proved to be the great equalizer of naturally unequal minds. While invention or discovery continued to remain the preserve of the few, the results could be transmitted to all. The leaders

in this great enterprise did not rely entirely on the effects of formal education for weaning men away from concern with the bliss of the next world to work for happiness in this. What study did not do, and perhaps could not do, trade did: immensely facilitated and encouraged by the new inventions and discoveries, trade which unites all peoples, took precedence over religion, which divides the peoples.

But what was to be done to moral education? The identification of the end of the gentlemen with the end of the nongentlemen meant that the understanding of virtue as choiceworthy for its own sake gave way to an instrumental understanding of virtue: honesty is nothing but the best policy, the policy most conducive to commodious living or comfortable self-preservation. Virtue took on a narrow meaning, with the final result that the word “virtue” fell into desuetude. There was no longer a need for a genuine conversion from the premoral if not immoral concern with worldly goods to the concern with the goodness of the soul, but only for the calculating transition from unenlightened to enlightened self-interest. Yet even this was not entirely necessary. It was thought that at least the majority of men will act sensibly and well if the alternative will be made unprofitable by the right kind of institution, political and economic. The devising of the right kind of institutions and their implementation came to be regarded as more important than the formation of character by liberal education.

Yet let us not for one moment forget the other side of the picture. It is a demand of justice that there should be a reasonable correspondence between the social hierarchy and the natural hierarchy. The lack of such a correspondence in the old scheme was defended by the fundamental fact of scarcity. With the increasing abundance it became increasingly possible to see and to admit the element of hypocrisy which had entered into the traditional notion of aristocracy; the existing aristocracies proved to be oligarchies, rather than aristocracies. In other words it became

increasingly easy to argue from the premise that natural inequality has very little to do with social inequality, that practically or politically speaking one may safely assume that all men are by nature equal, that all men have the same natural rights, provided one uses this rule of thumb as the major premise for reaching the conclusion that everyone should be given the same opportunity as everyone else: natural inequality has its rightful place in the use, nonuse, or abuse of opportunity in the race as distinguished from at the start. Thus it became possible to abolish many injustices or at least many things which had become injustices. Thus was ushered in the age of tolerance. Humanity, which was formerly rather the virtue appropriate in one's dealings with one's inferiors—with the underdog—became the crowning virtue. Goodness became identical with compassion.

Originally the philosopher-scientist was thought to be in control of the progressive enterprise. Since he had no power, he had to work through the princes. The control was then in fact in the hands of the princes, if of enlightened princes. But with the progress of enlightenment, the tutelage of the princes was no longer needed. Power could be entrusted to the people. It is true that the people did not always listen to the philosopher-scientists. But apart from the fact that the same was true of princes, society came to take on such a character that it was more and more compelled to listen to the philosopher-scientists if it desired to survive. Still there remained a lag between the enlightenment coming from above and the way in which the people exercised its freedom. One may even speak of a race: will the people come into full possession of its freedom before it has become enlightened, and if so, what will it do with its freedom and even with the imperfect enlightenment which it will already have received? An apparent solution was found through an apparent revolt against the enlightenment and through a genuine revolt against enlightened despotism. It was said that every man has the

right to political freedom, to being a member of the sovereign, by virtue of the dignity which every man has as man—the dignity of a moral being. The only thing which can be held to be unqualifiedly good is not the contemplation of the eternal, not the cultivation of the mind, to say nothing of good breeding, but a good intention, and of good intentions everyone is as capable as everyone else, wholly independently of education. Accordingly, the uneducated could even appear to have an advantage over the educated: the voice of nature or of the moral law speaks in them perhaps more clearly and more decidedly than in the sophisticated who may have sophisticated away their conscience. This belief is not the only starting point and perhaps not the best starting point, but it is for us now the most convenient starting point for understanding the assertion which was made at that moment: the assertion that virtue is the principle of democracy and only of democracy. One conclusion from this assertion was Jacobin terror which punished not only actions and speeches but intentions as well. Another conclusion was that one must respect every man merely because he is a man, regardless of how he uses his will or his freedom, and this respect must be implemented by full political rights for everyone who is not technically criminal or insane, regardless of whether he is mature for the exercise of those rights or not. That reasoning reminds one of a reasoning which was immortalized by Locke's criticism and which led to the conclusion that one may indeed behead a tyrannical king, but only with reverence for that king. It remains then at the race between the political freedom below and the enlightenment coming from above.

Hitherto I have spoken of the philosopher-scientist. That is to say, I have pretended that the original conception, the seventeenth-century conception, has retained its force. But in the meantime philosophy and science have become divorced: a philosopher need not be a scientist, and a scientist need not be a philosopher. Only the title

Ph.D. is left as a reminder of the past. Of the two henceforth divorced faculties of the mind, science has acquired supremacy; science is the only authority in our age of which one can say that it enjoys universal recognition. This science has no longer any essential connection with wisdom. It is a mere accident if a scientist, even a great scientist, happens to be a wise man politically or privately. Instead of the fruitful and ennobling tension between religious education and liberal education, we now see the tension between the ethos of democracy and the ethos of technocracy. During the last seventy years, it has become increasingly the accepted opinion that there is no possibility of scientific, and hence rational knowledge of “values,” that is, the science or reason is incompetent to distinguish between good and evil ends. It would be unfair to deny that, thanks to the survival of utilitarian habits, scientists in general and social scientists in particular still take it for granted in many cases that health, a reasonably long life, and prosperity are good things and that science must find means for securing or procuring them. But these ends can no longer claim the evidence which they once possessed; they appear now to be posited by certain desires which are not “objectively” superior to the opposite desires. Since science is then unable to justify the ends for which it seeks the means, it is in practice compelled to satisfy the ends which are sought by its customers, by the society to which the individual scientist happens to belong and hence in many cases by the mass. We must disregard here the older traditions which fortunately still retain some of their former power; we must disregard them because their power is more and more corroded as time goes on. If we look then only at what is peculiar to our age or characteristic of our age, we see hardly more than the interplay of mass taste with high-grade but strictly speaking unprincipled efficiency. The technicians are, if not responsible, at any rate responsive to the demands of the mass; but a mass as mass cannot be responsible to anyone or to anything for any-

thing. It is in this situation that we here, and others in the country, raise the question concerning liberal education and responsibility.

In this situation the insufficiently educated are bound to have an unreasonably strong influence on education—on the determination of both the ends and the means of education. Furthermore, the very progress of science leads to an ever increasing specialization, with the result that a man’s respectability becomes dependent on his being a specialist. Scientific education is in danger of losing its value for the broadening and the deepening of the human being. The only universal science which is possible on this basis—logic or methodology—becomes itself an affair of and for technicians. The remedy for specialization is therefore sought in a new kind of universalism—a universalism which has been rendered almost inevitable by the extension of our spatial and temporal horizons. We are trying to expel the narrowness of specialization by the superficiality of such things as general civilization courses or by what has aptly been compared to the unending cinema, as distinguished from a picture gallery, of the history of all nations in all respects: economic, scientific, artistic, religious, and political. The gigantic spectacle thus provided is in the best case exciting and entertaining; it is not instructive and educating. A hundred pages—no, ten pages—of Herodotus introduce us immeasurably better into the mysterious unity of oneness and variety in human things than many volumes written in the spirit predominant in our age. Besides, human excellence or virtue can no longer be regarded as the perfection of human nature toward which man is by nature inclined or which is the goal of his eros. Since “values” are regarded as in fact conventional, the place of moral education is taken by conditioning, or more precisely by conditioning through symbols verbal and other, or by adjustment to the society in question.

What then are the prospects for liberal education within mass democracy? What are the prospects for the liberally

educated to become again a power in democracy? We are not permitted to be flatterers of democracy precisely because we are friends and allies of democracy. While we are not permitted to remain silent on the dangers to which democracy exposes itself as well as human excellence, we cannot forget the obvious fact that by giving freedom to all, democracy also gives freedom to those who care for human excellence. No one prevents us from cultivating our garden or from setting up outposts which may come to be regarded by many citizens as salutary to the republic and as deserving of giving to it its tone. Needless to say, the utmost exertion is the necessary, although by no means the sufficient, condition for success. For “men can always hope and never need to give up, in whatever fortune and in whatever travail they find themselves.” We are indeed compelled to be specialists, but we can try to specialize in the most weighty matters or, to speak more simply and more nobly, in the one thing needful. As matters stand, we can expect more immediate help from the humanities rightly understood than from the sciences, from the spirit of perceptivity and delicacy than from the spirit of geometry. If I am not mistaken, this is the reason why liberal education is now becoming almost synonymous with the reading in common of the Great Books. No better beginning could have been made.

We must not expect that liberal education can ever become universal education. It will always remain the obligation and the privilege of a minority. Nor can we expect that the liberally educated will become a political power in their own right. For we cannot expect that liberal education will lead all who benefit from it to understand their civic responsibility in the same way or to agree politically. Karl Marx, the father of communism, and Friedrich Nietzsche, the stepgrandfather of fascism, were liberally educated on a level to which we cannot even hope to aspire. But perhaps one can say that their grandiose failures make it easier for us who have experienced those failures

to understand again the old saying that wisdom cannot be separated from moderation and hence to understand that wisdom requires unhesitating loyalty to a decent constitution and even to the cause of constitutionalism. Moderation will protect us against the twin dangers of visionary expectations from politics and unmanly contempt for politics. Thus it may again become true that all liberally educated men will be politically moderate men. It is in this way that the liberally educated may again receive a hearing even in the market place.

No deliberation about remedies for our ills can be of any value if it is not preceded by an honest diagnosis—by a diagnosis falsified neither by unfounded hopes nor by fear of the powers that be. We must realize that we must hope almost against hope. I say this, abstracting entirely from the dangers threatening us at the hands of a barbaric and cruel, narrow-minded and cunning foreign enemy who is kept in check, if he is kept in check, only by the justified fear that whatever would bury us would bury him too. In thinking of remedies we may be compelled to rest satisfied with palliatives. But we must not mistake palliatives for cures. We must remember that liberal education for adults is not merely an act of justice to those who were in their youth deprived through their poverty of an education for which they are fitted by nature. Liberal education of adults must now also compensate for the defects of an education which is liberal only in name or by courtesy. Last but not least, liberal education is concerned with the souls of men and therefore has little or no use for machines. If it becomes a machine or an industry, it becomes undistinguishable from the entertainment industry unless in respect to income and publicity, to tinsel and glamour. But liberal education consists in learning to listen to still and small voices and therefore in becoming deaf to loud-speakers. Liberal education seeks light and therefore shuns the lime-light.