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What Can Liberal Education Provide for Citizens of Liberal Democracy?

When one looks at the history of higher education in Canada and the United States it is striking to note that at one time every university regarded liberal education as its central purpose.[1] Moreover, that purpose was connected to, though not entirely limited to, citizenship broadly conceived. At the time of Canada’s founding, Thomas D’Arcy McGee argued that education is “an essential condition of our political independence.”[2] His understanding of education, the kind of education required for Canadian national identity, came from the “classical sources.”[3] With some notable exceptions, most of our contemporary publicly-funded universities have drifted from these original goals. I would argue that unless this purpose is recovered by our institutions of higher education, our society and the individuals who make it up will be culturally, politically, and spiritually malnourished, citizenship will be compromised, and debate about difficult issues will continue to become intellectually thinner and simultaneously shriller.

In addition, I will argue that two key aspects of contemporary Canadian political culture prevent the recovery of this education and tend to reinforce the present malaise and discontent Canadians feel about their political culture. Both of these will be difficult to overcome and indeed we would not necessarily want to overcome them entirely, but we need to be aware of the limited justness of their claims, and we are made more aware of those limitations the more we are liberally educated in the great books of past. And that is the problem. If we lose liberal education, then we will lose this perspective, making it even more likely that we will become prisoners in our own cave: The first problem is the tendency of democracies to regard the principle of equality as the whole of justice and to reject with anger and indignation claims of superiority, whether merited or not; the second is the epistemology that under girds multiculturalism as a goal of the academy. Thus the argument in favour of liberal education is bound to suffer and perhaps even fail because it challenges two tenets that Canadians have come to believe are central if not sacred to their political identity. But if this argument fails, it may fail in the same way that Socrates might be said to have failed. In Plato’s Apology of Socrates, which depicts Socrates’ defence speech to the Athenian democracy, Socrates portrays himself as gadfly whose bite wakes a drowsy horse. Socrates believes it is better to live in wakefulness than to sleepwalk through life, but he understands that in trying to impart this good counsel, he is bound to be slapped by an angry and strong city.
Liberal education traces its roots back to the ancient Greeks. In the Middle Ages it meant an education in the *trivium* and the *quadrivium*, together comprising the seven liberal arts: grammar, rhetoric, logic; geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, music. Liberal education includes aspects of subjects now found separated into the arts and humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. It is an education that methodically and systematically addresses the question of the meaning of life and does so through critical reflection on great works from a variety of “disciplines”: philosophy, politics, science, art, religion. While interdisciplinary, it is an education that nonetheless has a specific, identifiable content.

Liberal education constituted the heart and soul of what every university in Canada believed its purpose to be, at least until the early 20th century. The tradition of liberal education was brought over to Canada from Europe in the late nineteenth century when the first universities began to open here. The specific curricula at the various Canadian universities in the late 19th century differed, but they appear to have shared a set of core principles about the purpose of higher education. At the “core of liberal education was the duty of the teacher to impart and cultivate those talents and excellences which would prepare a student to bear the obligations of citizenship and to begin the exploration of the intellectual and spiritual life.” While it is possible to obtain a decent liberal education in Canada apart from these “structured,” great-books programs, nevertheless the “multiversity” and its cafeteria-style programming is now the norm, and this represents a significant shift from Canadian higher education a century ago. Liberal education is now but one option available to students. In most Canadian universities the student is left to decide the content of their education, choosing from a bewildering array of courses, some serious and some less so. They must gravely and prudently choose their courses in the absence of the very education intended to cultivate their prudence and gravitas.

In the early twentieth century, the American civil rights pioneer, W.E. B. Dubois, was thinking about what emancipated slaves would need in terms of education if they were to take their place as citizens of a republic. He declared that they needed a college that could give them the best that liberal education had to offer. Now that their bodies were emancipated they would need to free their minds, and they could best do this through the study of the great authors of the past, including Aurelius, Aristotle, and Shakespeare—the same sorts of authors taught in Canadian universities. Dubois opposed Booker T. Washington’s idea that freed blacks needed vocational training first and foremost if they were to become independent. Surely in the final analysis some combination of these two perspectives is required, but what Dubois insists on is that true freedom requires a freedom of the mind from prevailing currents of thought and habits. In particular, Dubois was concerned that the emancipated blacks would be subsumed into a political economy that would give shape to their minds below the standard of what they should strive for. “What if the Negro people be wooed from a strife for righteousness, from a love of knowing, to regard dollars as the be-all and end-all of life? What if to the Mammonism of America be added the rising Mammonism of the re-born South, and the Mammonism of this South be reinforced by the budding Mammonism of its half-wakened black millions?” The ubiquitous concern for money and for utility in America may crowd out the higher concerns. Dubois shares Aristotle’s view that citizens “must be able to do necessary and useful things,
but still more they must be able to do the noble things. Accordingly, it is with these aims in view that they should be educated. Vocational training and liberal education are both needed, but of these two, liberal education is higher.

Dubois’ concern that the freed blacks might drift into the prevailing habits that drive the mind to be preoccupied with money and utility echoes Alexis de Tocqueville’s analysis of democracy and the sort of character that it tends to form in individuals. Democratic peoples become unusually preoccupied by the pursuit of property. That is, according to de Tocqueville, what Dubois should fear is not capitalism per se or the market but democracy. Democracy is at the root of the excessive concern for prosperity:

When distinctions of rank are blurred and privileges abolished, when patrimonies are divided up and education and freedom spread, the poor conceive an eager desire to acquire comfort, and the rich think of losing it. A lot of middling fortunes are established. Their owners have enough physical enjoyments to get a taste for them, but not enough to content them. They never win them without effort or indulge in them without anxiety. They are therefore continually engaged in pursuing or striving to retain these precious, incomplete, and fugitive delights.

Richard Myers summarizes the point: “The democratic regime thus produces what a sociologist might call the ‘culture of utility’ in which people are preoccupied with the pursuit of material prosperity and thus tend to measure everything in terms of profitability.” If de Tocqueville is correct, then those who complain that universities are becoming too market driven and who also want universities to help shift the current regime further in the direction of pure democracy may only be fanning the flames rather than putting them out. Instead of this approach, one might have to encourage some members in the democracy to return to Aristotle’s aristocratic perspective. The corrective for democracy’s ills is not more democracy; the corrective is aristocracy. It is on this basis that we can understand the remark by Leo Strauss that “Liberal education is the necessary endeavour to found an aristocracy within democratic mass society. Liberal education reminds those members of a mass democracy who have ears to hear, of human greatness.” Liberal education is not intended to supply us with experience in things useful; it supplies us with “experience in things beautiful.”

Remarkably, Dubois does not regard the tradition of great texts as one of the causes of black oppression. Rather he regards these books as a potential source of human liberation. In fact, the black slaves in the United States would be denied genuine freedom—freedom of the mind—by being denied access to these avenues of human liberation. For DuBois, these texts do not enforce distinctions of race or color; they transcend these contingent aspects of the human person:

I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not. Across the color line I move arm in arm with Balzac and Dumas, where smiling men and welcoming women glide in gilded halls. From out the caves of evening that swing between the strong-limbed earth and the tracery of the stars, I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what soul I will, and they come all graciously with no scorn nor condescension. So, wed with Truth, I dwell above the Veil. Is this the life you grudge us, O
knightly America? Is this the life you long to change into the dull red hideousness of Georgia?
Are you so afraid lest peering from this high Pisgah, between Philistine and Amalekite, we sight
the Promised Land?[15]

So Dubois goes on to assert that “the true college will ever have one goal,—not to earn meat,
but to know the end and aim of that life which meat nourishes.”[16]

The aims and purposes of universities have undergone considerable change in the last
century. The rise of the research university and the need for specialization meant general,
liberal education was pushed to the margins. The partially justifiable insistence that publicly
funded universities prove their worth to a sceptical democratic public preoccupied by utility has
meant that more pressure was felt by administrators to demonstrate the usefulness of the
university: to what extent does the university answer society’s need for trained workers, for
technological answers to pressing problems, or for directing positive social change? (The
definition of “positive change” is often, and problematically, being determined at the outset.) Yet
the essence of “the true college” is jeopardized when it directs itself by standards of utility and
relevance. Liberal education loses out when relevance and utility become the central measures
of university success because liberal education is neither about job training nor about fixing
this or that emergent social or environmental problem. The public is not well positioned to
understand this point and, unfortunately, the drift of contemporary universities in Canada only
serves to reinforce the public view that the university ought to be about utility and fixing social
problems—the “service station” model of the university, as R. M. Hutchins disparagingly
named it. And as fewer Canadians each year are acquainted with this kind of learning, they no
longer recognize it or understand its purpose. The dynamic establishes a negative feedback
loop.

We should recognize that the modern university is here to stay. It will train some people for
jobs, conduct research, and do useful and practical things. But other institutions in society do
these things too, and they can do them well. What the university needs to articulate and defend
is its other purpose, what used to be its primary purpose. It is a purpose that is not fulfilled
nearly so well by any other institution in society. It is unlikely anyone else will defend this
purpose on the university’s behalf, although many would lament its loss from society. Eva T. H.
Brann, an instructor at St. John’s College in Annapolis for 40 years, asserts that “parents and
the world owe the young some (let it be four) clear years for becoming not a this or a that, but
for learning to be a human being, whose powers of thought are well exercised, whose
imagination is well stocked, whose will has conceived some large human purpose, and whose
passions have found some fine object of love about which to crystallize.”[17] And (ironically,
given what I argued above) it turns out that this might just provide the indispensable
preparation for being practical in the right way and for solving life’s problems in a thoughtful
and responsible manner, whatever those problems will be (because they may be one thing
today—like the environment—but they will be something else tomorrow). The environment is
an especially important problem today, but it was not a problem 1500 years ago. Universities
do not need to re-write their mission statement in order, for example, to place climate change
at the centre of their academic purpose. However, so long as there are human beings there is
always a need for liberal education—it is as important now as it was 1500 years ago or 2500 years ago when Plato first sketched out its curriculum in the Republic. The need for that kind of education never disappears. The university ought to recognize and concentrate on this high calling, this timeless service. And to do so might more assuredly arrive at the short-term practical and social goals: “The best preparation, we think, for doing good [in the world] is not the somewhat spurious experience of social ills and personal badness that students are provided with in academic settings but the genuine absorption in excellence that liberal education naturally induces. In short, long liberal reflection on the way things ought to be is a better prelude to real life than a premature immersion in the worst facts of life.”[18]

It may be that this form of education is more necessary now than at any other time, especially given the tremendous power that the natural sciences have put at our disposal, and also given the fact that we live in a liberal democracy where citizens are expected to deliberate about the good of the political partnership, about justice and injustice, and the advantageous and the disadvantageous.[19] If the university does anything, it should provide a place for the thorough exploration of these questions and the development of citizens—even global citizens—who can pursue these questions moderately, thoughtfully and competently. As Martha Nussbaum notes, “Democracy needs citizens who can think for themselves rather than simply deferring to authority, who can reason together about their choices rather than just trading claims and counter claims.”[20]Anthony Kronman, former Dean of the Yale Law School, writes that “a college or university is not just a place for the transmission of knowledge but a forum for the exploration of life’s mystery and meaning through the careful but critical reading of the great works of literary and philosophical imagination that we have inherited from the past.”[21]

There is also recent empirical evidence to suggest that liberal education contributes to increased civic engagement by citizens. Studies in the United States and Canada point to a correlation between certain types of learning and civic engagement levels. The US National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) reported that literary reading has declined in the United States as have a variety of civic activities, such as volunteering, and voting.[22] In some respects the study confirms finding made by Robert Putnam: reserves of social capital have been declining since the 1960’s.[23] The NEA study is intriguing, however, because it links reading of certain kinds of texts with higher levels civic and social participation. These studies may only be confirming what has been widely known by teachers of liberal education: it is an essential creator and transmitter of the “social capital”—the virtues and skills—required to maintain a healthy, prosperous, vibrant, and free society. “These are not qualities that a free, innovative, or productive society can afford to lose.”[24] Few goals for a civically responsible post-secondary institution in Canada would seem to be of greater importance that the maintenance and strengthening of this kind of education.

Meanwhile, recent Canadian studies indicate that levels of civic knowledge are reliable predictors of levels of key political activity, such as voting: the higher a person’s level of civic knowledge, the more likely it is they will engage in political activity. Henry Milner even suggests civic knowledge is more important than social capital in terms of predicting civic engagement levels.[25] Yet Milner’s definition of civic knowledge, it might be argued, is rather thin,
consisting primarily of knowledge of contemporary political news and political actors. Milner’s studies do not ask what results may obtain among Canadians who read some of the key works in our tradition that discuss the deepest principles of politics and justice or who, for example, are systematically taught the history and formation of Canada’s constitution and political structure (perhaps an avenue for further empirical research).

If this is a call to return to a former understanding of a university’s goals it should not be interpreted either as a narrowing of the goal or as a Eurocentric goal. Liberal education builds the bridge between peoples, in part by moderating (but not extinguishing) the love of our own and by disengaging us from the narrowness of our cultural perspective: “By linking one’s own people to the merits and virtues universally distributed among all peoples and individuals, liberal education, far from being Eurocentric and prejudiced, on the contrary tempers a love of one’s own country with an awareness of what others have achieved.”[26] This is a genuine form of multiculturalism that has been authentically a part of the intellectual tradition for millennia.[27] It acknowledged that we lead our lives on the basis of opinions about what is good and just, and that these opinions are almost never freely chosen. “Our religion, our ‘society,’ our ‘culture,’ our political regime—all of these create a world view whose authority over us is virtually absolute.”[28] But if we were entirely closed off by our distinct world-views, there would be no point to multiculturalism; we would have no shared basis, no shared ruler or benchmark, by which to appreciate the genuine accomplishments of others. We would be unable to cross the color line because there would be no shared place to stand in the middle. There would only be an abyss waiting there.

There is a strong view of diversity and multiculturalism which undermines the emancipatory capacity of liberal education. It is an idea that begins with noble intentions, intentions that correspond with and are derived from the goals regnant in liberal education right from the start. I would even say that in more limited forms it has helped achieve some of these goals. However, it can become counterproductive when it presumes to validate a certain metaphysical stance regarding human beings, a stance that is at home in post-modern discourse about the human person. This form begins from the idea that we are “constructed selves,” that the whole human world is an artefact constructed by human beings. There is nothing that exists by nature, and nothing has an independent “essence.” If there is no nature, then human beings do not have a nature either. “Constructivism further insists that this activity of meaning-making receives its motive and direction from a desire to assert power and control over someone or something (oneself, others, or the world).” And the purpose of education is reduced to the effort “to expose these motives.” Moreover, “it also asserts that there can be no criteria for ranking the relative worth of the meanings that human beings make or the desires that drive them to do so” because each meaning is equally an outgrowth of the same basic element: power.[29] Although this idea is often advanced by a sincere desire for equality (hence the attraction to the idea of no criteria for ranking), and out of a genuine concern for restorative justice for marginalized groups, it has the unintended consequence of making rational debate and compromise meaningless; it renders the humanities a “death zone” and it cultivates bad citizenship habits. If students are convinced that they are merely “representatives” of a marginalized group, and also that opinions are merely covert assertions
of power, then there is no incentive to temper “a love of one’s own country with an awareness of what others have achieved.” There is also no reason to be moderate. They no longer come to class as individuals thirsty for new and foreign insights into the meaning of life, they come as delegates. “The more a classroom resembles a gathering of delegates speaking on behalf of the groups they represent, the less congenial a place it becomes in which to explore questions of a personally meaningful kind including, above all, the question of what ultimately matters in life and why. In such classrooms, students encounter each other not as individuals but as spokespersons instead.”[30]

A further consequence of this position is that all previous authors, those to whom one used to turn for insight and ideas, the same ones Dubois would have insisted upon as the needed resources for liberating previously enslaved persons, are now “known” to be wrong. How is this known? Because these authors mistakenly believed and thought that they were speaking the truth and sharing their insights when we now know that every narrative is merely a construct. So we might study them in order to disclose their hidden agenda, hidden even to themselves when they were writing. Therefore we stand in a superior relation to those authors. It leads to cynicism.

It is a strange cynicism, however, because it yields a distinctly optimistic brand of nihilism. Sanctimonious finger-pointing and the discrediting of everything once found admirable belongs to the labor necessary for realizing a visionary future. To be sure, the academic industry’s demand for novelty is partly to blame. In order to be original, treatments of old subjects must be somehow transgressive, making transgressive scholarship ubiquitous, predictable and tiresome. Still, students who haven’t yet learned fundamental facts and conventional interpretations of things—let alone the complexities of the debates of their ancestors—end up getting fast-tracked to trendy criticisms which flatter their self-satisfied pride and befit their rebellious inclinations, predisposing them to suppose that any traditional account of things must be a ruse (without suspecting that the entrenchment of this attitude may itself be part of an elaborate ruse).[31]

When we adopt this superior attitude with regard to the texts of the past, we do not approach them as serious students inquiring after the truth they may contain. Rather, we become dismissive and, worse, poor readers and undisciplined and haughty thinkers, the very opposite of the intrepid modesty and zeal of inquiry that McGee hoped Canadian citizens would cultivate. The end result of all this, surprisingly, is less genuine diversity of opinion. On the edges, it may even compromise academic freedom. “For despite the claim of its defenders to have widened the horizon of student understanding by acquainting them with values and experiences that were previously unnoticed or suppressed, the conception of racial and gender diversity that is so enthusiastically embraced by so many humanities teachers today is in reality driven by an oppressive uniformity of moral purpose from whose perspective the more robust diversity of secular humanism can only seem morally dubious.”[32]

I am whole heartedly inclined to leave open the debate between the “constructivists” and the “essentialists.” That debate can and should happen within the walls of a university. I think students ought to be brought to this debate and to delve into it as deeply as they can. That is...
why I encourage and look forward to teaching Nietzsche every time I am assigned to teach “Liberal Studies 420” at my University. But I also want my students to read Plato and Aristotle. But regardless of the specific texts in question, students qua students and qua citizens of Canada are better off if they are encouraged to set out from the perspective of the essentialist rather than the constructivist. This might seem merely “biased” or one-sided, but it can be justified on this basis: the essentialist go into the debate willing to learn from the past and the present, asking only for evidence and reason, and not pre-judging an author’s argument on the basis of the gender, race, ethnicity, or time frame in which that author lived. It is more genuinely open to alternatives. Counter intuitively (to our generation) the essentialist position is more likely to lead to the worthy goals associated with weak multiculturalism, openness, fair-mindedness, and moderation, which are some of the habits and skills required by citizens in a liberal democracy. Also, as I mentioned above, this stance encourages slow and careful reading. Students of great books (and I count myself among the students) must pay deference to the intelligence of the author and they cannot be quick to dismiss simply because what is said is strange or foreign to our ears or tastes.[33]

If the constructivist or historicist (postmodern) position is adopted by the learner at the outset, however, then they really have no incentive to take the opinions of anyone else seriously because prior to the investigation one presumes to know that this or that author cannot possibly be right (and nor can you, for that matter) since you are both just trading power assertions. [No wonder contemporary politics is so uncivil these days if this is what has been taught in the universities for the last generation.] There is an incentive to neglect political history which again reinforces the worst modes of citizenship. “The neglect of political history reinforces the view that everything is available and ready to be transformed in accordance with the wisdom of the day. Neglecting the past is a surefire way to exacerbate the conviction that the present is exceptionally enlightened and morally sophisticated. Endless progress toward the perfect, in accordance with progressive sensibilities, is regarded as being delayed only by irrational and outmoded prejudices as well as plain old greed and malice—although these would evaporate if only things were set right.”[34]

The essentialist view is the more generous and open of the two, and it inspires students to do some hard, disciplined thinking about an author’s claims before rejecting or accepting their viewpoint. “That is because such learning is radically open and appreciative of all serious ways, whether friendly or inimical to its very nature. Consequently when people learn in a liberal spirit they give appreciative weight to both method and ideology, though the converse can’t be claimed. That is why liberal education is better than ideological critique, which has no place as a classroom mode, though as a subject of inquiry it certainly does.”[35] The constructivist view, on the other hand, encourages students to be superficial and to judge a book by its cover—literally. When the university adopts the strong version of multiculturalism and diversity as a principle of its academic mission, it implicitly adopts the constructivist premise. It therefore actively undermines the genuine tradition of diversity and unfettered rational inquiry it claims to uphold.
I am not advocating a return to the “good old days” of late 19th century Canadian higher education. Nor am I entirely hostile to the research ideal. Least of all am I opposed to the legitimate and just aspirations of any identifiable group. But what I would argue is that contemporary programs that seek to build up a minority’s self-identity by immersing its members in the task of reconstructing and reabsorbing its traditional knowledge, and do so while “deconstructing” the colonial counter-narrative, may be doing more harm than good for the individuals in the communities they want to serve. The deconstructive task it encourages departs from a premise that denies the value of the constructive side of the endeavour. On the one hand the colonial narrative must be deconstructed to show that its high sounding rhetoric about justice and freedom are merely insubstantial hot air masking the assertion of naked power. “Cynicism reigns, as everything high must be brought low, every idea deconstructed, every decision and action reduced to base interests and private agendas. Every heroic figure must be exposed as a hypocrite or reduced to a subject of tawdry gossip, it being far more fashionable to delegitimate their ideas and explain away their deeds with reference to biographical foibles and psychological speculations than to weigh their merits.”[36] On the other hand, against the dominant Western culture, a more authentic cultural narrative is sought. But if each and every narrative is merely a construct, there is no reason to prefer one narrative to any other.[37] If there is any compelling motive for reasserting a tradition it is because it is “one’s own” and it is not “the others” tradition. But to accentuate the love of one’s own is a dangerous tendency in politics that tends to drive groups and individuals apart. It causes one to abandon Socrates’ insight that one’s own and the good are not identical, and that one ought to prefer the good to one’s own. It is on that basis that an individual can look beyond the confines of their own dominant belief system and search for what is good in others. Thomas D’Arcy McGee points to this as the hoped for goal of Canadian education in his speech to the Montreal Literary Club in 1867:

Regarding the New Dominion as an incipient new nation, it seems to me that our mental self-reliance is an essential condition of our political independence; I do not mean a state of mind puffed up on small things; an exaggerated opinion of ourselves and a barbarian depreciation of foreigners; a controversial state of mind; or a merely imitative apish civilization. I mean a mental condition, thoughtful and true; national in its preferences, but catholic in its sympathies; gravitating inward, not outward; ready to learn from every other people on one sole condition, that the lesson when learned has been worth acquiring. In short, I would desire to see, Gentlemen, our new national character distinguished by a manly modesty as much as by mental independence; by the conscientious exercise of the critical faculties, as well as by the zeal of the inquirer.[38]

I tend to side with Dubois in believing that the injustices done to people in the past is compounded when they are denied full access to the liberating education available in the great books. The rhetoric of strong multiculturalism denies this access, not literally by denying physical access to these works, but by de-legitimizing them before individuals can have an opportunity to decide for themselves.
The contemporary university may want to explain how its research benefits the region it serves, but it doesn’t need to defend the purpose of research. The democratic ear is already attuned to arguments regarding utility and efficiency. But the same is not true regarding liberal education. Its goals are less likely to resonate easily and immediately with the wider public. Because the case has not been made in a generation, the terms sound foreign to the ears of the public: all the more reason to take up the task of advocating on its behalf. If McGee is right, our political independence may depend upon it.

Notes


[6] Falconer, “The Tradition of Liberal Education in Canada,” 99: “The [King’s College] curriculum of 1814 is ambitious, and consists almost entirely of such subjects and books as had for several centuries been accepted as affording a liberal education.” Dalhousie was founded in 1819 “on the model of Edinburgh” (100); and “the earliest curriculum of Acadia University of which there is record, was a typical classical course” (101).


[9] Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America (I ii 10)


Possibilities (Calgary, AB: Detselig Enterprises Ltd, 2001): “This collection is based [on the conception of democracy] which builds on Dewey’s characterization of democracy as a way of life rather than as a form of government” (18). Following Dewey (1951) and Greene (1985), we believe in the ongoing reconstructive nature of democracy. Living the democratic spirit is not easy or straightforward; we need to continue the struggle of reconstructing democracy” (16). For the idea of “pure democracy” see Publius Federalist Papers (no.10): pure democracies “have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths. Theoretic politicians, who have patronized this species of government, have erroneously supposed that by reducing mankind to a perfect equality in their political rights, they would, at the same time, be perfectly equalized and assimilated in their possessions, their opinions, and their passions.”


[14] What is implied here is the distinction Tocqueville draws between freedom and equality: “Although men cannot become absolutely equal unless they be entirely free, and consequently equality, pushed to its furthest extent, may be confounded with freedom, yet there is good reason for distinguishing the one from the other. The taste which men have for liberty, and that which they feel for equality, are, in fact, two different things; and I am not afraid to add that, amongst democratic nations, they are two unequal things.” In this chapter Tocqueville argues that the desire for equality is stronger than the desire for freedom. They will strive for equality even if it is at the expense of freedom. Democracy in America, Vol 2, part ii, chp. 1.


[19] Aristotle, The Politics, 1252a1. Also, whereas university research, especially in the natural sciences, has undoubtedly increased the power over nature that human beings have at their disposal, anxiety concerning the beneficial uses of that technological power have also emerged. Yet the question as to what this power ought to be used for is not one that can be raised from within the natural sciences even though these sciences may place limits on what might be legitimate answers to these questions (see Werner Heisenberg, Physics and Philosophy, chp. 9). Physics may unveil how to create the atom bomb, but the study of physics
will not tell human beings whether they should ever use the bomb. These questions indirectly raise and point the way back to more fundamental questions concerning what it means to be a good human being, and what obligations we might have to one another, and what the purpose of life is: i.e. the subject of liberal education.


[21] Kronman, p#?


[27] And so, for instance, Socrates maintains in Plato’s *Republic* that the best city is likely not to be found among the Greeks. There’s nothing about being Greek, being from *that* particular ethnic stock, which Socrates believes inherently makes one superior to others or that would causes a Greek to see or to know the world in an entirely unique way. There is a *human* way of knowing, not a Greek way of knowing, and to discern this fact can be a step toward liberating one from the spurious claims and demands made on one by their own culture. Also consider Leo Strauss, “it has always been known that different notions of justice obtain at different times and in different nations. It is absurd to claim that the discovery of a still greater number of such notions by modern students has in any way affected the fundamental issue.” Also, “it is obviously untrue to say, for instance, that Aristotle could not have conceived of the injustice of slavery, for he did conceive of it.” *Natural Right and History*, 10, 23.

[28] Myers, 60.


[34] Smith, “Citizenship and Education.”

[35] Brann, “Eight Theses”


[37] Richard Rorty advocates that we become liberal ironists who have an “ungroundable” desire to see suffering diminished. For liberal ironists, there is no answer to the question ‘Why not be cruel?’—no noncircular theoretical backup for the belief that cruelty is horrible.” Contingency, irony, and solidarity (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989, xv. Compare with Leo Strauss: “Once we realize that the principles of our actions have no other support than our blind choice, we really do not believe in them anymore. We cannot wholeheartedly act upon them anymore. We cannot live as responsible beings….the inescapable practical consequence of nihilism is fanatical obscurantism.” Natural Right and History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 6.