

Mortimer J. Adler

REFORMING EDUCATION

THE OPENING OF THE
AMERICAN MIND

Edited by Geraldine Van Doren

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Great Books, Democracy, and Truth

1

Because of its title, *The Closing of the American Mind*, by Allan Bloom, sold widely, probably much more widely than it was read. Its misleading but attention-grabbing subtitle, *How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*, lamented the failure of our colleges to serve our democratic society, but paid little attention to the dismal deficiencies of basic schooling in the United States, which are much more important as far as serving democracy is concerned.

With regard to the academic malaise that Mr. Bloom describes, but mistakenly regards as recent, his analysis of its causes is both inaccurate and inadequate. Worse, his slight effort to propose a cure falls far short of what must be done to make our schools responsive to democracy's needs and to enable our colleges to open the minds of their students to the truth.

These are serious indictments. But for me the book's most glaring defect is with regard to the undergraduate use of the great books over the last sixty years, and the more recent introduction of them into basic schooling by the Paideia program. Allan Bloom either has no knowledge of these facts or is gravely at fault for neglecting to report them. There is but one reference in *The Closing of the American Mind* to the "good old great books approach." Nevertheless, he proposes that approach as a remedy for the reform of our colleges.

Before Allan Bloom was born, I was a student in the first great books seminar that John Erskine taught at Columbia University in 1921. From 1923 to 1929, with Mark Van Doren, I taught great books seminars at Columbia University. At the invitation of Robert M. Hutchins, President of the University of Chicago, I brought the great books educational program to Chicago in 1930, and Hutchins and I taught the great books there long before Allan Bloom arrived on the scene. We continued teaching them while he was a young student at the University of Chicago.

Allan Bloom either is ignorant of the work that had been done at Columbia and at the University of Chicago; or worse, he intentionally ignored it in order to foster the impression that his recommendation—that the great books be read by college students—was his own educational innovation. However, this interpretation of his failure to tip his hat to his many predecessors, especially those at his own university, is partly negated by the fact that he refers to "the good *old* great books approach" (italics added). Hence, one might conclude that his recommendation of the "great books approach" is qualified by the condition that they be read and taught in the style that he, Allan Bloom, and his teacher, Leo Strauss, have read and taught them.

That is most certainly not the way that John Erskine, Mark Van Doren, Robert Hutchins, Stringfellow Barr, Scott Buchanan, Jacques Barzun, Lionel Trilling, Otto Bird (the last three of whom were students of mine), and many others taught them long before Allan Bloom arrived at the University of Chicago. When I come to the consideration of the great books in relation to philosophical truth, I will try to explain why the dialectical rather than the doctrinal style of reading and teaching the great books is much to be preferred in the education of the young.

2

Erskine's great innovation was the undergraduate seminar in which students and teacher sat around a table and engaged in critical conversation about the ideas in an assigned text. Erskine developed the first list of some sixty great books to be read by college juniors and seniors. Nothing like it ever existed before in undergraduate instruction. Seminars, in the German style, had been conducted, but they were only for Ph.D. candidates and for the consideration of their doctoral researches.

Erskine's original reading list has been considerably revised and expanded since the early 1920s—at Columbia itself, at the University of Chicago, at St. John's College, and at other institutions (Notre Dame, St. Mary's College) that adopted the great books seminars—but all subsequent lists of great books have retained about 85 percent of Erskine's original list.

In 1928 a grant from the Carnegie Corporation enabled Scott Buchanan (who later became Dean of St. John's College in Annapolis) and me to organize fifteen great books seminars for adults in New York City. This, so far as I know, was the first attempt to employ the reading and discussion of great books as a major form of continued learning for adults, later to become a national program under the auspices of the Great Books Foundation. There were two leaders for each of these seminars.

Before Hutchins went to Chicago, he and I discussed the Erskine list of great books that I had been teaching at Columbia. Hutchins confessed that in his undergraduate years at Yale, he had not read more than three or four of those books. Hutchins knew that his duties as president of the University of Chicago would get in the way of his own education unless he himself taught a course in which he had to read the books he had not read in college. He asked me to come to Chicago mainly for the purpose of teaching a great books seminar for entering freshmen that he and I would conduct as Mark Van Doren and I had done at Columbia. We did so from 1930 until 1948. From that, many other achievements followed.

In 1936, Hutchins established a Committee on the Liberal Arts. He invited Stringfellow Barr and Scott Buchanan of the University of Virginia to join us in planning an ideal, completely required curriculum for a liberal arts college. The reading and seminar discussion of great books for four years were central to that curriculum. This resulted in a greatly expanded list of great books, including works in mathematics and the natural sciences that had been for the most part absent from the original Erskine list. It also resulted, in 1937, in the establishment of the completely required New Program at St. John's College, the fiftieth anniversary of which has recently been celebrated. The renown of St. John's College, which was generally known as "the great books college," led other institutions around the middle of the century, such as Notre Dame and St. Mary's, to adopt modified versions of the program.

There were other, even more far-reaching results of what had been started at Columbia and Chicago.

In 1940, I published *How to Read a Book*, which should have been entitled *How to Read a Great Book*. That volume contained in its appendix a list of the great books, which enlarged Erskine's original list and the one in use at the University of Chicago and at St. John's College. It was a best-seller in 1940 and has been in print ever since. It has been used by many high schools and colleges in English courses as an instrument for cultivating skills in reading, and was revised in 1974 by Charles Van Doren and me.

In the 1940s, Hutchins and I also established the Great Books Foundation for the purpose of promoting great books seminars for adults all across the country. In that connection, I developed the first manual of instruction for the guidance of ordinary lay persons in the conduct of great books seminars. I also trained the first generation of seminar leaders in Chicago.

During that same period, Hutchins and I conducted a great books seminar for Chicago's civic leaders, many of whom were trustees of the University of Chicago. Begun in 1943, it continues to this day, although its membership has changed considerably.

There were still other significant developments of the great books movement. The University of Chicago operated extension courses for adults in University College, which was then called "the downtown

college." With the enthusiastic endorsement of Cyril Houle, dean of that college, I outlined another modification of the St. John's program. It was called "The Basic Program of Liberal Education for Adults" and began its long and successful career in the late 1940s. Allan Bloom and other students of Leo Strauss at the University of Chicago were among the young men who were enlisted to teach the great books in that program. It was his first teaching job.

In the great books seminars that Hutchins and I conducted for Chicago's civic leaders at the University Club were Walter and Elizabeth Paepcke. Their growing interest in the great books as an educational instrument for adults led in 1950 to the establishment of the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies. Starting out with just great books seminars, the Aspen seminars, especially the Executive Seminars, developed in other directions, but a handful of great books has always been at the core of the reading lists.

Another by-product of the great books seminars that Hutchins and I conducted at the University Club was the publication in 1952 by Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., of *Great Books of the Western World*.

William Benton, then a vice president of the University of Chicago, was a participant in that University Club seminar. When in 1943, he became owner and publisher of Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., he asked Hutchins and me to edit a set of great books for it to publish. We worked hard on that project for eight years, during which time I invented and produced the *Syntopicon* of the great ideas to accompany the set.

Then, on a grant from the Ford Foundation, the Institute for Philosophical Research was established to undertake a dialectical examination of the great ideas. Since then, it has published a series of books, beginning with a two-volume work, entitled *The Idea of Freedom*. Finally, in 1982, after three years' work with a group of eminent associates, I wrote and published *The Paideia Proposal*, an educational manifesto that called for a radical reform of basic schooling (kindergarten through twelfth grade) in the United States, and outlined a completely required curriculum that involved great books seminars in elementary and secondary schools.

I mention all this as background because *The Closing of the American Mind* and the reviews of it—both adverse and favorable—have made me realize that it is necessary to retell the story of the great books movement for the present academic generation, whose memories do not go further back than the 1960s, or at most, the end of the Second World War. It is also necessary to restate as clearly as possible the fundamental notions that underlie the selection of the great books, the proper way to discuss them in seminars, their use in a truly democratic system of education, and their relation to the pursuit of truth.

I would like, first, to discuss the ideal of a truly democratic system of education, which does not yet exist in this country and which Bloom's book nowhere considers. Second, I think it necessary to examine truth and error in the great books, and their bearing on the proper way to conduct discussions of them, which is the dialectical method, not the doctrinal style employed by Allan Bloom and his teacher, Leo Strauss. Third, I must deal with a problem that deeply concerns Allan Bloom—the prevalent skepticism about moral philosophy and the prevalence of subjectivism and relativism about values among students and professors—the causes of which Mr. Bloom inaccurately diagnoses. Finally, here and in the epilogue, I will set forth the fundamental notions and principles of the great books movement.

3

Many readers today think of democracy in twentieth-century terms as constitutional government with universal suffrage and the securing of natural, human rights. The other two quite different senses of democracy are the senses in which Plato and Aristotle in antiquity and Rousseau in the eighteenth century used the word: either for mob rule or for a constitutional government with citizenship restricted to men of property. In our terms, they used the word "democracy" to signify an oligarchy that conferred citizenship on men of small property instead of restricting it to those having large estates.*

* In Athens, at its most "democratic" extreme under Pericles, there were only 30,000 citizens in a population of 120,000. Excluded were women, slaves, and artisans.

Neither for them nor for Allan Bloom, who admires the political philosophy of these oligarchs, does the word "democracy" stand for the political ideal—the only perfectly just form of government. That use of the word makes its first appearance in 1861 in John Stuart Mill's *Representative Government*. Mill was the first great political philosopher who spoke for universal suffrage, extending it to women and to the laboring classes. He thought that justice required securing political liberty and equality for all, with few exceptions. But in 1861 Mill was a reluctant democrat who feared the unenlightened self-interest of the working-class majority, and so advocated plural votes for the upper classes to help them defeat majority rule.

All of Mill's predecessors in Western political theory thought that democracy, in *their* sense of the term, was either the worst form of bad government or the least desirable of the good forms of government, and none had even the slightest conception or even conjecture of democracy, in the twentieth-century sense of the term, as a political ideal to be realized in the future.

Bloom's readers have to guess in which of these radically different senses of democracy he uses the word. On the one hand, he could not be complaining about the failure of our educational institutions to serve democracy if he did not think of it as a desirable form of government. On the other hand, can any reader of *The Closing of the American Mind* fail to detect the strong strain of elitism in Bloom's own thinking, as evidenced by his devotion to Plato, Rousseau, and Nietzsche, and by his advocacy of reading the great books by relatively few in the student population, certainly not by all?

The recency of constitutional democracy in this country explains and may even justify our not yet having a truly democratic system of public schooling or institutions of higher learning that are concerned with making good citizens of those who attend our colleges.

In 1817, Thomas Jefferson, as much an oligarch as John Adams, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and all the rest of our founding fathers, called upon the Virginia legislature to give three years of common schooling to all the children of the state. After three years, he advocated dividing the children into those destined for labor and those destined for leisure and learning (and citizenship and public office), and sending only the latter to college.

In our twentieth-century understanding of the term "democracy," Jefferson's educational program was thoroughly antidemocratic, but it still exists in the United States today. Though virtually all the children in our schools are now destined to become citizens, we still divide them into the college-bound and those not going from high school to college. The quality of schooling given the noncollege-bound does not prepare them for citizenship or for a life enriched by continued learning; nor, I should add, does the quality of education given the college-bound when they get to college. It is still a fundamentally antidemocratic system of schooling with a sharp differentiation between two tracks, one for those of inferior ability and one for their betters.

The first real departure from Jefferson's antidemocratic policy (dominating American education from 1817 to the present day) occurred in this century with startling pronouncements by John Dewey and Robert Hutchins. *The Paideia Proposal* in 1982 was dedicated to them because of their commitment to a democratic system of education.

In 1900, John Dewey said that the kind of schooling that the best and wisest parents would want for their own children is precisely the kind of schooling that the community should want for all its children. Any other policy if acted upon, he said, would defeat democracy.

In his epoch-making book, *Democracy and Education* (1916), Dewey enunciated a position the opposite of Jefferson's. He said all the children in our nation, now that it was on its way to becoming democratic, had the same destiny—to lead lives in which they would earn a living, act as intelligent citizens of the republic, and make an effort to lead a decent and enriched human life.

Bloom's book does not manifest the slightest commitment to a program for giving all the children the same quality of schooling to enable them to fulfill their common destiny. Nor does it give its readers any

indication that the most grievous failure of our schools and colleges to serve democracy, now that democracy has at last come into existence, lies in the early differentiation of students, with different tracks for different students.

In the early 1930s President Hutchins was asked whether great books seminars, then open only to a picked handful of students, should be accessible to all the students in our colleges. His brief reply was crisp and clear. He said that the best education for the best was the best education for all. Great books seminars in our public schools and in our colleges should be available to all the students there, not only to the few who elect to take them or who are specially selected. That is not the answer to be found in Allan Bloom's book.

4

Some basic truths are to be found in the great books, but many more errors will also be found there, because a plurality of errors is always to be found for every single truth. One way of discovering this is to detect the contradictions that can be found in the books of every great author. Being human works, they are seldom free from contradictions. Skill in reading and thinking is required to find them. But, given that skill, finding contradictions in a book puts one on the highroad in the pursuit of truth. The truth must lie on one or the other side of every contradiction. It is there for us to detect when we are able to resolve the contradiction in favor of one side or the other.

More important is the fact that the great books contradict one another on many points in the various fields of discourse in which they engage. Once again, it must be said that the relation between truth and error is a one-many relationship: if the truth on a given point is thought to be in one or several of the great books, contradictions on that same point are likely to be found in many more great books.

In any case, it is clear that, if the great books contradict one another on many points, it must follow that many errors as well as some truths are to be found there. That is why the great books are such useful instruments in the pursuit of truth. For every truth, understanding all the errors it refutes is indispensable.

What I have just said holds particularly for the philosophical and theological works that belong in any comprehensive list of great books—the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, Hobbes, Descartes, Locke, Hume, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Mill, William James. Since Bloom and his teacher, Leo Strauss, are specialists in the field of moral and political philosophy, I will draw my examples from that field of discourse.

If Aristotle's political philosophy is thought to contain a number of fundamental truths, then errors must be found in Plato, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel. If J. S. Mill's political philosophy is thought to contain some truths not found elsewhere, then on these points errors must be found in Aristotle. If Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is thought to contain a number of basic truths in moral philosophy, then on these points serious errors must be found in Plato, Epictetus, Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche.

Though the same can be said for works in other branches of philosophy—metaphysics, the philosophy of mind, and the theory of knowledge—the examples I have given from the field of moral and political philosophy will suffice to enable me to distinguish between the right and wrong way to teach the great books, if the aim in using them is to teach students how to think and how to pursue the truth. Since the kind of teaching done by Leo Strauss and by his students, among them Allan Bloom, represents in my judgment the wrong way to teach the great books in our public schools and in our undergraduate colleges, let me describe the difference between what I consider to be the right and wrong way to read the great books.

The difference between Strauss's method of reading and teaching the great books and the method that Hutchins and I had adopted (the method also used by Erskine and Van Doren at Columbia, and by Barr and Buchanan at St. John's College) lies in the distinction between a doctrinal and a dialectical approach.

The doctrinal method is an attempt to read as much truth as possible (and no errors) into the work of a particular author, usually devising a special interpretation, or by discovering the special secret of an author's intentions. This method may have some merit in the graduate school where students aim to acquire narrowly specialized scholarship about a particular author. But it is the opposite of the right method to be used in conducting great books seminars in schools and colleges where the aim is learning to think and the pursuit of truth.

When in the late 1940s Leo Strauss came to the University of Chicago and we were both on the faculty teaching great books, President Hutchins suggested that I get to know him. We met several times and discussed our reading of Plato and Aristotle. I soon learned that Strauss read these great authors as if they were devoid of any serious errors, in spite of the fact that on many points they appeared to contradict one another. I also learned that for Strauss the radical changes in our social and political institutions that have occurred since antiquity had no bearing on the likelihood that Aristotle made grave errors about natural slavery and about the natural inferiority of women. In his view, these were not errors. After a few conversations, I told Hutchins that I found talking to Strauss about philosophical books and problems thoroughly unprofitable from the point of view of leading great books seminars in the college.

The word "disciple" stresses the difference between the doctrinal and the dialectical teaching of the great books. Leo Strauss was preeminently the kind of doctrinal teacher who made disciples out of his students, disciples who followed in his footsteps and repeated again and again what they learned from him. The doctrinal teaching of disciples enables them to learn what the master thinks. The dialectical teaching of students enables them to think for themselves. I would go further and say that the doctrinal method *indoctrinates*, and only the dialectical method *teaches*.

Those of us who teach the great books dialectically exert an influence on our students, but only so far as a good use of their minds is concerned. We never make disciples of them. Strauss's use of the doctrinal method resulted in students learning what the master thought about the work under consideration. I would even go so far as to say that the doctrinal method is most appropriate in reading a sacred book. It is like the orthodox Hassidic approach to reading the Talmud. But it is totally inappropriate in liberal education at the college level or in our public schools.

5

I come now to the skepticism about moral values that prevails among college students and their teachers. I will treat this matter briefly because I have written many essays that bear on the subject. One in particular was written for *Harper's Magazine* under the title "This Prewar Generation" (1940). As the title indicates, the college students of that time generally held the view that judgments about moral values were matters of subjective opinion, different for different persons, and relative to the circumstances of time and place.

Before I go on, let me say what is meant by the distinction between subjective and objective and between relative and absolute. The subjective is that which differs for you, for me, and for other individuals. The objective is that which is the same for all of us. The relative is that which varies with the circumstances of time and place. The absolute is that which is invariant always and everywhere.

In "This Prewar Generation," I pointed out that subjectivism and relativism about value judgments on the part of students emanated from the same stance on the part of their teachers, especially their professors in philosophy and in the social sciences. At that time, the reign of philosophical positivism among Anglo-American professors gave rise to the doctrine of noncognitive ethics. This meant that moral philosophy was not knowledge, not a body of valid truths. Some went so far as to say that judgments that contained the words "ought" and "ought not" were neither true nor false. There were no prescriptive truths.

At the same time, what was known to sociologists and cultural anthropologists—that the tribal or ethnic mores differed from tribe to tribe, from culture to culture, and from time to time—led them to the

dogmatic denial that there are any objectively valid moral judgments. As the positivists among the philosophers dismissed ethics as noncognitive, so the social scientists denied ethics objectivity and universality by putting the members of one tribe, culture, or ethnic group into what they called "the ethnocentric predicament." This meant that they were unable to make objective judgments about the values espoused in other tribes and cultures.

Is there any wonder that subjectivism and relativism should have been prevalent among college students exposed to such indoctrination by their professors in the 1930s and 1940s? That indoctrination has continued right down to the present. The moral skepticism among the students is the same as it was then and its cause is the same, though the vocabulary in which it is expressed may have changed in detail.

More recently I have returned to the defense of objective and absolute truth in moral philosophy by reviewing books by two eminent professors of philosophy—Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* and a book by Bernard Williams entitled *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. Both books concede the dismal failure of philosophy since the seventeenth century to develop an ethics that can claim to have objective truth. Both books, the first more explicitly than the second, give Nietzsche credit for exposing the failures of modern thinkers to develop a sound moral philosophy. Both books concede that Aristotle's *Ethics* was sound in Greek antiquity. MacIntyre, however, called for its revision to make it acceptable to us today, and Williams rejected it as no longer tenable. The critiques I wrote of these two books argued that Aristotle's *Ethics*, without the revision proposed by MacIntyre, is just as sound in the twentieth century as it was in the fourth century B.C.

Against the background of what I have just said, I have only two points to make about the mistakes of Allan Bloom in dealing with the impoverishment of student souls in the late 1960s and continuing until the present day. If by "impoverishment" he is referring to their lack of firm dedication to objective and absolute moral truths, then that impoverishment existed as well in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. He is simply wrong as a matter of historical fact.

The other mistake made by Bloom concerns the causes that generated the result he deplores and wishes he knew how to remedy. Ascribing contemporary skepticism about moral values to the influence of Nietzsche's nihilism is wide of the mark. The two causes were those already mentioned—philosophical positivism and the relativism of sociology and cultural anthropology. Nietzsche was not at all in the picture when these began to influence American thought; and if that has changed recently and his influence has become evident, it is still a minor cause as compared with the others that I mentioned.

6

The great books, read and discussed with an eye out for the basic truths and the equally basic errors or mistakes to be found in them, should be a part of everyone's general, liberal, and humanistic education. This program should begin with what might be called "junior great books" in the early grades, continued throughout basic schooling with more and more difficult books, and be pursued on an even higher level in college. It would still be everyone's obligation to read many of these books again in the course of adult learning, for the greatest among them cannot ever be plumbed to their full depths. They are inexhaustibly rereadable for pleasure and profit.

A genuine great books program does not aim at historical knowledge of cultural antiquities or at achieving a thin veneer of cultural literacy. On the contrary, it aims only at the general enlightenment of its participants, an essential ingredient in their initial liberal education and something to be continued throughout a lifetime of learning. Its objective is to develop basic intellectual skills—the skills of critical reading, attentive listening, precise speech, and, above all, reflective thought. Through the use of these skills, the reading and seminar discussion of the great books seeks to help students pass from less to greater understanding of the basic ideas in the Western intellectual tradition and of the controversial issues with which those great ideas abound.

Let me repeat: the controlling purpose behind this recommendation is twofold. First, only through reading and discussing books that are over one's head can the skills of critical reading and reflective thought be developed. Second, of the three educational objectives—acquisition of knowledge, development of intellectual skills, and increase of understanding of basic ideas and issues—the third is by far the most important, and cannot be achieved without seminar discussions of truly great or almost-great books.

Finally, the earlier the reading and discussions begin and the more persistently they are continued in college and in the learning of adults, involving as it must the oft-repeated reading and discussion of the same books, the better anyone will be enabled to reach his or her ultimate goal in the later years of life—that of becoming a generally educated human.

No one ever becomes a generally educated person in school, college, or university, for youth itself is an insuperable obstacle to becoming generally educated. That is why the very best thing that our educational institutions can do, so far as general education is concerned (not the training of specialists), is to afford preparation for continued learning by their students after they leave these institutions behind them. That cannot be done unless the skills of learning are cultivated in school and unless, in schools and colleges, the students are initiated into the understanding of great ideas and issues and are motivated to continue to seek an ever-increasing understanding of them.

It is necessary here to distinguish, sharply and clearly, the reading and seminar discussion of great books as a lifelong educational program from the current misuse of the phrase "great books" in connection with courses in Western civilization that college students are required to take as part of a core curriculum.

Until the end of the eighteenth century, there were no great books of Western civilization that were not of European origin. Until the nineteenth century, all were written by white males. Hence if one were to read all or almost all of the great books of Western civilization, most of them would, perforce, be written by white, male Europeans.

It is certainly arguable that under the radically changed circumstances of the twentieth century, college students should be required to study global civilization, both Eastern and Western, not just Western or European. It is also arguable that many books written in this or the last century, books which are clearly not great, should be studied for their relevance to the most pressing problems of our age. But all such arguments have nothing whatsoever to do with the educational program associated with a list of great Western books, most of which were written by white European males.

The educational purpose of the great books program is not to study Western civilization. Its aim is not to acquire knowledge of historical facts. It is rather to understand the great ideas. Its objective is not to become acquainted with the variety of conflicting cultures and groups that engender the problems that confront us in the contemporary world. Its controlling purposes, as I have already pointed out, are solely to learn how to read critically and to think reflectively about basic ideas and issues, not just in school and college but throughout one's life.

For that purpose, the minimum list of great books to be read would include at least the works of 60 authors. A more intensive program would extend that number to 125. At the college level, the minimal program should include seminars once a week for two years; at the maximum, it should include two seminars a week for four years. At the level of basic schooling, it would involve seminars once a week for at least nine years—from grade three to grade twelve.

I mention these numbers lest it be thought that a required single semester or a one-year college course in the history of civilization, Western or global, with twelve or fifteen traditionally recognized Western classics in the list of required readings, is even, in small part, a great books program. Such survey courses are mainly history courses, conducted primarily by lectures. They may be supplemented by small group discussions that only faintly resemble great books seminars.

To recapitulate: A true great books program is not a course in the history of Western civilization, nor is it devoted to the scholarly study of the books read. It is concerned primarily with the discussion of the great ideas and issues to be found in those books. It may, therefore, be asked why the works read should consist entirely of works written by Westerners, both European and American, and not by authors who belong to one of the four or five major cultural traditions of the Far East.

The answer is simply that the basic ideas and issues of our *one* Western intellectual tradition are *not* the basic ideas and issues in the *four* or *five* intellectual traditions of the Far East. In the distant future there may be a single, worldwide cultural community with one set of common basic ideas and issues; but until that comes into existence, becoming a generally educated human being in the West involves understanding the basic ideas and issues that abound in the intellectual tradition to which one is heir either by the place of one's birth or by immigration to the West.

Teaching, Learning, and Their Counterfeits (1976; 1987)

In "Teaching, Learning, and Their Counterfeits" we learn that genuine teaching, as opposed to indoctrination, is a cooperative art, an activity that helps but cannot by itself bring about genuine learning. Part of this essay "Teaching and Learning" was written for From Parnassus, a collection of essays in honor of Jacques Barzun, edited by William R. Keylor and Dora B. Weiner (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); part of it was unpublished. The conception of teaching and learning it presents is the basis of the Paideia program.

G.V.D.

Everyone knows, or certainly should know, that indoctrination is not genuine teaching and that the results of indoctrination are the very opposite of genuine learning. Yet, as a matter of fact, much that goes on in the classrooms of our schools is nothing but indoctrination. The results that are measured by our standardized tests are not products of genuine learning.

All learning is either by instruction or by discovery—that is, with or without the aid of teachers. The teachers who serve as instructors may be alive and in direct contact with those whom they instruct, as is always the case in classrooms or tutorials, or they may be present to the learner only in the form of books. The teacher who instructs by his writings cannot engage in discussion with those who are reading his works in order to learn; he can ask them initial questions, but he cannot ask any second questions—questions about answers they give to his initial questions. He is, therefore, seriously limited in his performance of the art of teaching, though he may have done what he could to apply the rules of that art in his effort to communicate what he knows.

That the effort to communicate what a man knows is not, *in itself*, effective teaching follows from the fact that such efforts are seldom if ever successful and, at best, they succeed only in part. Successful teaching occurs only when the mind of the learner passes from a state of ignorance or error to a state of knowledge. The knowledge acquired may be either something already known by the teacher, or something about which he himself is inquiring. In either case, the transformation effected in the mind of the learner is learning by instruction only if another human being has taken certain deliberate steps to bring about that transformation. What the teacher does must be deliberately calculated to change the mind of the learner. Merely motivating someone to learn is not enough; stimulation is not teaching.

Since whatever can be learned by instruction must necessarily have been learned first by discovery without the aid of teachers, it follows that teachers are, absolutely speaking, dispensable. Nevertheless, they are useful because most human beings need instruction to learn what they could have learned by discovering it for themselves. If we recognize, as we should, that genuine learning cannot occur without activity on the part of the learner (passive absorption or rote memorization does not deserve to be called learning), then we must also recognize that all learning is a process of discovery on the part of the learner.

This alters our understanding of the distinction between learning by discovery and learning by instruction. If the latter is not to be identified with passive absorption or rote memorization, then the distinction divides all active learning into two kinds—unaided discovery, discovery without the aid of teachers, on the one hand; and aided discovery, or discovery deliberately assisted by teachers, on the other. In both cases, the principal cause of learning is activity on the part of the learner engaged in the

process of discovery; when instruction occurs, the teacher is at best only an instrumental cause operating to guide or facilitate the process of discovery on the part of the learner. To suppose that the teacher is ever more than an instrumental cause is to suppose that the activity of a teacher can by itself suffice to cause learning to occur in another person even though the latter remains entirely passive. This would view the learner as a patient being acted upon rather than as an agent whose activity is both primary and indispensable. In contrast, the instrumental activity of the teacher is always secondary and dispensable.

These basic insights are epitomized by Socrates when, in the *Theaetetus*, he describes his role as a teacher by analogy with the service performed by a midwife who does nothing more than assist the pregnant mother to give birth with less pain and more assurance. So, according to Socrates, the teacher assists the inquiring mind of the learner to give birth to knowledge, facilitating the process of discovery on the learner's part.

Teaching, like farming and healing, is a cooperative art. Understanding this, Comenius in *The Great Didactic* again and again compares the cultivation of the mind with the cultivation of the field; so, too, Plato compares the teacher's art with the physician's.

In arts such as shoemaking and shipbuilding, painting and sculpture (arts which I call "operative" to distinguish them from the three cooperative arts), the artist is the principal cause of the product produced. Nature may supply the materials to be fashioned or transformed, and may even supply models to imitate, but without the intervention of the artist's skill and causal efficacy, nature would not produce shoes, ships, paintings, or statues.

Unlike the operative artist, who aims either at beauty or utility, the cooperative artist merely helps nature to produce results that it is able to produce by its own powers, without the assistance of the artist—without the intervention of the artist's accessory causality. Fruits and grains grow naturally; the farmer intervenes merely to assure that these natural products grow with regularity and, perhaps, to increase their quantity. The body has the power to heal itself—to maintain health and regain health; the physician who adopts the Hippocratic conception of the healing art attempts to support and reinforce the natural processes of the body. The mind, like the body, has the power to achieve what is good for itself—knowledge and understanding. Learning would go on if there were no teachers, just as healing and growing would go on if there were no physicians and farmers.

Like the farmer and the physician, the teacher must be sensitive to the natural process that his art should help bring to its fullest fruition—the natural process of learning. It is the nature of human learning that determines the strategy and tactics of teaching. Since learning which results in expanded knowledge and improved understanding (rather than memorized facts) is essentially a process of discovery, the teacher's art consists largely in devices whereby one individual can help another to lift himself up from a state of knowing and understanding less to knowing and understanding more. Left to his own devices, the learner would not get very far unless he asked himself questions, perceived problems to be solved, suffered puzzlement over dilemmas, put himself under the necessity of following out the implications of this hypothesis or that, made observations and weighed the evidence for alternative hypotheses, and so on. The teacher, aware of these indispensable steps in the process by which he himself has moved his own mind up the ladder of learning, devises ways to help another individual engage in a similar process; and he applies them with sensitivity to the state of that other person's mind and with awareness of whatever special difficulties the other must overcome in order to make headway.

Discipline in the traditional liberal arts imparts the skills by which an individual becomes adept at learning. They are the arts of reading and writing, of speaking and listening, of observing, measuring, and calculating—the arts of grammar, rhetoric, and logic, the mathematical arts, and the arts of investigation. Without some proficiency in these arts, no one can learn very much, whether assisted or not by the use of books and the tutelage of teachers. Unless the teacher is himself a skilled learner, a master of the liberal arts which are the arts of learning, he cannot help those he attempts to teach acquire the skills of learning; nor can his superior skill in learning provide the learner with the help he needs in the process of discovery. The teacher must put himself sympathetically in the position of a learner who is less advanced

than himself, less advanced both in skill and in knowledge or understanding. From that vantage point, he must somehow reenact—or simulate—for the learner the activities he himself engaged in to achieve his present state of mind.

The Hippocratic understanding of healing as a cooperative art provides us with analogical insights into the cooperative art of teaching. Hippocrates, whom we in the West regard as the father of medicine, wrote treatises setting forth the rules of healing as a cooperative art. They were rules for controlling the regimen of the patient—the food he ate, the air he breathed, his hours of waking and sleeping, the water he drank, the exercise he engaged in, and so forth. By controlling the patient's regimen—his diet, his hours, his activities, his environment—the physician helps the body to heal itself by its natural processes.

Administering drugs, introducing foreign substances into the body, Hippocrates regarded as the least cooperative of all medical treatments. Surgery he regarded as a drastic measure to be resorted to only when all cooperative methods failed; it was, strictly speaking, an *operative* rather than a *cooperative* procedure.

In the sphere of teaching, the analogue of surgery is indoctrination, the result of which is rote memorization, or some passive absorption of information without any understanding of it. Indoctrination does violence to the mind, as surgery does violence to the body, the only difference being that there is never any excuse for indoctrination, while there can be justification for surgery.

Teachers who regard themselves as the principal, even the sole, cause of the learning that occurs in their students simply do not understand teaching as a cooperative art. They think of themselves as producing knowledge or understanding in the minds of their students in the same way that shoemakers produce shoes out of pliable or plastic materials.

Only when teachers realize that the principal cause of the learning that occurs in a student is the activity of the student's own mind do they assume the role of cooperative artists. While the activity of the learner's mind is the principal cause of all learning, it is not the sole cause. Here the teacher steps in as a secondary and cooperative cause.

Just as, in the view of Hippocrates, surgery is a departure from healing as a cooperative art, so, in the view of Socrates, didactic teaching, or teaching by lecturing or telling rather than teaching by questioning and discussion, is a departure from teaching as a cooperative art.

Lecturing is that form of teaching which is analogous to the use of drugs and medication in the practice of medicine. No violence may be done to the mind if the lecturer eschews any attempt at indoctrination; but the lecture, even when it is attended to with maximum effort on the part of the auditor, is something that the mind must first absorb before it can begin to digest and assimilate what is thus taken in. If passively attended to and passively absorbed by the memory, the lecture has the same effect as indoctrination, even if the lecturer scrupulously intended to avoid that result. At its best, the lecture cannot be more than an occasion for learning, as challenge to the mind of the auditor, an invitation to inquiry. The lecture, in short, is no better than the book as a teacher—an oral rather than a written communication of knowledge.

If, however, the lecture is always accompanied by some discussion of whatever matters are didactically presented, if there is an active interchange between teacher and students through questioning, didactic teaching can, to some slight degree, become genuine teaching of knowledge understood instead of being an indoctrination of opinions to be committed to memory, retained, regurgitated on examinations, and then largely forgotten when the tests have been passed.

Analogous to the fully cooperative therapeutic technique of controlling the patient's regimen is the fully cooperative pedagogical technique of engaging the learner in discussion—teaching by asking instead of teaching by telling, asking questions not merely to elicit answers for the sake of grading them (as in a quiz session, which is not teaching at all), but asking questions that open up new avenues of inquiry.

When instruction is not accompanied by discovery, when instruction makes impressions on the memory with no act of understanding by the mind, then it is not genuine teaching, but mere indoctrination.

Genuine teaching, in sharp distinction from indoctrination, always consists in activities on the part of teachers that cooperate with activities performed by the minds of students engaged in discovery.

The Greek word for mind, *nous*, identifies it with understanding. What we do not understand at all we retain solely through memory. Memory is a by-product of sense-perception; understanding, an act of the intellect. Statements that are verbally remembered and recalled should never be confused with facts understood.

Correlated with this distinction between mind and memory is the distinction between knowledge and opinion. To know something as opposed to holding a mere opinion about it is to understand it in the light of relevant reasons and supporting evidence.

Students acquire knowledge by the activity of their own minds, with or without the aid of teachers. How do they come by the opinions they hold, especially those acquired in the course of schooling?

They have adopted them on the naked authority of teachers who acted as if they were productive, not cooperative, artists—teachers who indoctrinated them by didactic instruction that was not accompanied by any acts of thinking or discovery on their part.

I have used the phrase "naked authority" to signify the authority teachers arrogate to themselves when they expect students to accept what they tell them simply because they are teachers. The only authority to which genuine teachers, as opposed to indoctrinators, should appeal is the authority of the relevant reasons or the evidence supporting whatever is to be learned. In the absence of such authority, teachers cannot help students acquire knowledge that is understood. They can only indoctrinate them with opinions they may or may not retain for long in their memories. Opinions adopted on the naked authority of teachers have little durability. Opinions remembered, with that memory reinforced temporarily by "boning up for tests," are opinions for the most part soon forgotten.

Much more durable are the habits of skill that are formed by the kind of teaching that is coaching, which is more cooperative than didactic teaching even when what is thus taught is illuminated by understanding through discussion. Habits are not memories. They can only be formed by coaching, never by lectures and the reading of textbooks.

Most students passing, at the end of one academic year, the standardized tests currently used, which are largely tests of memory, would probably not be able to pass them if they were given the same tests without warning at the beginning of the next academic year. But if the habitually possessed skills of students in reading and writing were measured by the level of their performance at the end of one academic year and then measured in the same way at a later time, little would be lost.

The understanding of ideas and knowledge understood, once acquired, has maximum durability. What is understood cannot be forgotten because it is a habit of the intellect, not something remembered. Anyone who comes to understand that a truth is self-evident only if it is undeniable because its opposite is unthinkable will understand it forever. To test or measure the understanding of students, the only effective instrument is an oral examination, a probing of the mind by persistent questioning that penetrates its depths as far as possible.

The misunderstanding of teaching and learning that prevails today has resulted in the deplorable fact, amply attested by Professor John Goodlad in *A Place Called School*, that 85 percent of all classroom time is consumed by unrelieved didactic teaching that is not genuine teaching at all, but sheer indoctrination. It results in the short-lived, mainly verbal, memory of mere opinions adopted on the naked authority assumed by indoctrinating teachers.

The conception of the teacher as one who has knowledge or information that he or she transmits to students as passive recipients violates the nature of teaching as a cooperative art. It assumes that genuine learning can occur simply by instruction, without acts of thinking and understanding that involve discovery by the minds of students.

The way in which we test or examine students and the way in which we grade them determines what teachers teach and how they teach, and what students learn and how they learn. Our present methods call for indoctrination rather than genuine teaching, and for memorizing rather than genuine learning.

Unless we radically change our present methods of testing and grading students, we cannot expect our teachers to become cooperative artists instead of mere indoctrinators, and we cannot expect our students to become genuine learners instead of mere memorizers.

All our written tests should be open-book examinations so that students prepare for them not by boning up on what they have not adequately remembered, but by trying to deepen their understanding of what they were taught, or sharpening their thinking about it. If habitual skills are to be evaluated, they should be tested by performances judged adequate or inadequate. And to measure levels of understanding, the only effective instrument is an oral examination.

Four things are needed in the training of teachers to make them cooperative artists:

1. They themselves should possess whatever knowledge students are expected to acquire through their didactic efforts, but this by itself is never enough. They must also have an understanding of everything they know in order for them to be able to supplement their didactic performance by questioning, by answering questions, by leading discussions that will help their students acquire genuine knowledge, knowledge accompanied by understanding.
2. Teachers should have the intellectual skills they are expected to coach and they should know how to form the habits of those skills in the students they coach.
3. They should have an understanding of the ideas and issues that they wish to help students to comprehend through discussions in Socratically conducted seminars. For this purpose they should be trained in the art of conducting seminars by observing others conducting them, by participating themselves as students in seminars conducted by others, and by conducting seminars under the critical scrutiny of masters of this art.
4. Most important of all, they should be so prepared for the profession of teaching that they understand their own primary role as that of learners. A school should be a place where teachers learn, not just a place where students learn. A learner-teacher is one whose teaching involves genuine intellectual activity on the teacher's part as well as on the student's part, not just recitation by the teacher and memorization by the students.

The Order of Learning (1941)

This complex and profound discussion is essentially a practical guide to the art of teaching. It deals with the means of education—in this case, the activity of the teacher. Adler's question is: Given ideally perfect ends of education, how shall the basic means be ordered? The answer here is that the order of teaching must follow the order of learning and not the order of knowledge. In other words, instruction follows or imitates discovery. What follows from this thesis is the understanding that the liberal arts, as skills, are the arts of teaching and learning and as such must precede the mastery of the fundamental subject matters.

Taken from an address given for the western division of the American Catholic Philosophical Association in April 1941, the article was published in The Moraga Quarterly (Autumn 1941). It is included here with only a few changes. The occasion explains the context of the discussion with reference to Catholic education, but the question concerns all. G.V.D

I am deeply appreciative of the honor conferred upon me by your invitation to address you this evening. It is a great privilege to be able to attend two meetings of the Catholic Philosophical Association in the same year. I have been attending the Christmas meetings of the eastern division for the last seven years, and I think you will realize with what background and what sincerity I can pay you this compliment: I have never before seen so perfectly constructed a program—so unified, so comprehensive, so balanced. The officers and members of this division are to be congratulated. I wish they would come East some time and arrange our meetings for us.

I have a private reason for pleasure in the perfection of the program you have just completed. When I first read the announcement of the papers to be given during these two days, I was embarrassed by the fact that there seemed to be nothing left to talk about on the subject of education. It looked as if the only appropriate thing to do at this dinner was to get up and say Amen. But then I found another angle from which to view the proceedings and my place in them. Just because the program was so beautifully rounded and balanced, I could feel relaxed about my own final part in it. The program was so balanced, no harm would be done if I was unbalanced. All the major points having been made, all the important themes being covered, I could feel free to do a minor and unimportant job. I could indulge myself in a little tirade, expressing one of my pet prejudices about contemporary education.

1. The Means of Intellectual Virtue

The theme I have chosen to discuss is the order of learning. *I am going to deal with the means of education, not with the ends.* Nor am I going to consider the means in every way—but only with respect to their ordination to one another. I am concerned with the order of studies, on the one hand, and with the order of a teacher's activities relative to those of his students, on the other. The question I propose to answer is: Given ideally perfect ends, how shall the basic means be ordered? But even this question is too large for treatment after dinner, so I must restrict the matters to be considered somewhat further.

I shall limit myself to purely natural education—that is, education defined in terms of natural and temporal happiness, as its ultimate end, and the natural virtues, as its proximate ends. I shall neglect

religious education entirely, not because it is negligible—far from it, it is the least negligible part of education—but for two reasons which I wish to state: first, because it is beyond my competence to treat of such matters; and second, because it is beyond the province of strictly philosophical discussion to consider such matters, regardless of the personal competence of an individual who may combine in his person the gifts of both the philosopher and the theologian. One may combine the gifts, but the gifts are never the same, and should never be confused.

There is one further restriction on my discussion this evening which I should like to announce. I shall neglect moral education entirely—a much more difficult, and also a more important, topic than intellectual education, to which I shall confine myself. I note that one of your papers was on whether virtue (moral, I assume, must have been meant) can be taught. I hope the answer was clearly negative. As I understand the essence of teaching, it simply cannot be the adequate or effective instrument for forming moral virtue. Plato and Aristotle were clear about this, and clearly in agreement. The intellectual virtues are preeminently teachable, as the moral virtues are not. With respect to them, we should be able to solve the problem of means, as no one yet has with respect to the development of moral virtues, if ever a solution will be reached. And so I address myself to the problem—interesting because narrow and solvable—of the means to intellectual virtue: the order of studies which aim to cause the perfection of the mind.

The intellectual virtues are the proximate ends of all truly *liberal* or *intellectual* education. (I shall use these two words interchangeably.) Even here there is one last restriction. Prudence belongs with the moral virtues. It is formed as they are, not by teaching or by schoolwork, but somehow mysteriously by practice, under guidance, in many ways. Hence, I am left with four virtues, divided into the arts, on the one hand, and the three speculative virtues (understanding, science, and wisdom) on the other. And here certainly wisdom is the highest end and the controlling principle in any consideration of the means.

I think this problem is something Catholic educators should consider. I say "Catholic educators" because they alone today rightly understand the ends of liberal or intellectual education to be the four intellectual virtues: understanding, science, art, and wisdom. They alone know this, and know what the virtues are. In this, they stand in sharp contrast to their secular colleagues who in the last hundred years have so misconceived the aims and ends of liberal education that it has almost vanished from the scene. But though our secular colleagues are wrong about the ends of liberal education, they are often quite sound about the means—especially about the order of teaching as an art of using the means—and this is most true, you will be surprised to hear me say, in the case of the extreme progressive educators who have unwittingly returned to some ancient truths about educational method. They do not use the means for good educational results, because they misdirect them through ignorance or misconception of the ends. But Catholic educators can, I think, be charged with an opposite fault: knowing the right ends, they frequently fail to achieve them because they misuse the means, because they violate the nature of the learning process itself.

I warned you this might become a tirade, expressing a pet peeve of mine. You may remember an article I published in *The Commonwealth* several years ago, asking "Can Catholic Education be Criticized?" My answer was Yes—not about the ends, but about the means. Let me repeat here the conclusion I then formulated:

I can understand why a Catholic educator might be impervious to any critic who attacked the ends of Catholic education, because somehow these ends are implicated in the central truths of the Christian religion, and thus there is a dogmatic confirmation for the conviction of reason about them. *But certainly this is not the case with the means!* The truth of Catholicism in religion and philosophy, for example, is no warrant for the efficacy or intrinsic excellence of the way religion and philosophy are taught in Catholic schools. Only the liberal arts can provide the standard for judging excellence in teaching, for measuring the efficiency of

educational means, or for inventing others; and the liberal arts are neither pagan nor Christian, but human.

I am deeply concerned about this point, deeply disturbed by seeing the miscarriage of education in Catholic institutions, precisely because I know their ends are right. Furthermore, is not their fault a worse one than the fault of the secular educators? Is there not more excuse for the secular educators being mistaken about the ends, than for Catholic educators being mistaken about the means? Let me explain why I think so.

I said before that secular educators, especially the radical progressive group, were singularly right and eminently sound on many points concerning the means. I had in mind the fundamental soundness of the project method (though I abhor the name), the method which stresses activity on the part of the learner as indispensable, which emphasizes the great importance of understanding the problem before knowing the answers, which places the acquirement of skills before the mastery of subject matters in the domain of basic general education.

Now I say that all of these right procedures appear to be radical innovations only because they were forgotten or corrupted by the decadent classical education of the last century, against which progressive education arose in justifiable rebellion. Truly, all these procedures are founded on ancient insights about the order of teaching and learning, insights which every Catholic educator must possess if he understands the nature of man and of human teaching, according to the principles of the philosophy he generally affirms. Let me briefly enumerate some of these points. *The Catholic educator knows:*

1. *The difference between intellectual habit and sensitive memory.* Hence he knows that verbal proficiency, which is a work of sensitive memory, must not be confused with the habit of understanding.
2. *That habits of understanding can be formed only by intellectual acts—acts on the part of the student, not simply acts by the teacher.* Hence he knows that the teacher is always a secondary cause of learning, never a primary cause, for the primary cause must always be an act on the part of the learner's own intellect.
3. *That the intellect depends on sense and imagination, and also that it can be swayed and colored by the motion of the passions.* Hence he knows that the discipline of the liberal arts must precede the process of acquiring the speculative virtues, for it is the liberal arts which rectify the intellect in its pursuit of truth—the arts of grammar and logic which protect the intellect against the deceptions of verbal and other symbolizations, and all the wayward imagery of sense; the arts of logic and rhetoric, which guard against the incursions of passion, and the coloring of thought by irrelevant emotion.
4. *That the intellectual virtues are always a mean state between vicious extremes of saying too much or saying too little—dogmatic affirmations in excess, or skeptical denials in defect.* Hence he knows that truth is always an eminent synthesis of false extremes, a sober resolution of false issues made by extreme positions; he knows that the truth can be genuinely possessed only by a mind which sees the truth always as a correction of manifold and divers errors, and never by the mind which tries to be alone with the truth in an artificially antiseptic environment.

The Catholic educator knows all these things, because they are fundamental truths in his philosophy of man. But, unlike his secular colleague, who may not acknowledge these truths at all, or certainly not know them so deeply, but who nevertheless seems to practice according to their meaning, *the Catholic educator, who knows them, often violates them in practice by educational methods which (1) put a premium on verbal memory instead of intellectual habit; (2) proceed as if the teacher were the only active cause of learning, and as if the learner could be entirely passive; (3) neglect or wrongly subordinate the liberal arts to a supposed mastery of subject matter; (4) try to do the impossible—namely, to give the students genuine possession of the truth without ever really perplexing them first by the problems or issues*

which the truth resolves—and this requires a vital experience of error, for genuine perplexity is usually killed along with the dummy opponents who have been made into straw men for quick demolition.

Before I proceed now to a brief statement of the order of learning, based upon these truths, let me anticipate one objection I have received from Catholic educators *as to means*. I am told that Catholic education must give its college graduates a fundamental body of truths for the guidance of their lives. I am told that this necessitates the covering of much ground. You can guess my response. I simply ask what *is* the point of covering ground, if the students' feet never touch it, if they never learn through independent exercise to walk by themselves, with head erect and unafraid of all intellectual opposition and difficulty. What is the point of memorizing truths, if they can really guide us only when they are genuinely possessed, if they can protect us from falsehood only to the extent that we understand them as fully refuting errors—real, live errors, not dummy ones concocted for the purposes of an easy victory. I would feel happier about the graduates of Catholic colleges if they were really to understand a few truths well—understand them as solving problems which vigorously challenge the mind and perplex it—rather than be able to recite, from merely verbal memory, a whole catechism of philosophical answers to problems they did not really understand or take seriously. I would be happier if they were merely disciplined in the pursuit of truth and in the rejection of error, rather than be, as they now are in so many cases, unable to give an account of what they know because it is known by memory rather than possessed by intellectual habit.

I shall proceed now to a brief discussion of the order of learning in the field of the intellectual virtues. I shall, first, consider the ordination of the liberal arts to the speculative subject matters. I shall, then, consider the methods of teaching the speculative subject matters. And, finally, I shall draw some conclusions and summarize my insights in terms of the state of philosophy in contemporary culture—for the present condition of philosophy is not unrelated to the way it is taught and learned.

2. Art and Subject Matter

My thesis here is simply that mastery of the liberal arts must precede the mastery of the fundamental subject matters, which constitute the matter of the speculative virtues. Though wisdom comes first in the natural order of the virtues—graded according to their intrinsic excellence—the arts, least of the intellectual virtues, come first in the temporal order, the order of human development.

You may tell me that this order is now generally observed: that logic is a basic course in all Catholic colleges, and that it is a discipline preparatory for the study of the basic subject matters. May I disagree, not with the facts, but with such interpretation of them? Logic can be taken, or given, in one of two ways: *either* as a speculative science itself, albeit a science in the second intention, in contrast to metaphysics and physics as sciences of the real (and hence in the first intention); *or* as one of the liberal arts, an organon, a body of rules for the regulation and rectification of the mind, not in itself, for in itself the human intellect is absolutely infallible, and needs no art at all, but rather in its dependence upon sense and imagination, and in its subjection to passion. (I am saying that logic, as a science, may deal with pure thought; but logic, as an art, is not an art of thinking, of pure intellectual activity, for such does not exist; it is always an art, necessarily conjoined with grammar and rhetoric, which regulates the operations of the intellectual imagination, thinking with symbols and against the impulse of passion.)

When logic is considered as an art, it cannot be divorced, you see, from the other two liberal arts of grammar and rhetoric. The three arts form a trinity, and each of the arts becomes corrupted and ineffective—an empty and meaningless routine—when separated from the others. This, by the way, is precisely what has happened to the liberal arts during the last four centuries. And scholasticism, with its arid logic, divorced from grammar and rhetoric, is as much to blame for this sad state of affairs as the most anti-intellectual movements in education.

The teaching of logic in Catholic colleges—*as a science*—is not a liberal discipline. The textbook logic which is taught, as a set of formulas without practice in the intellectual operations to which they are

relevant, does not discipline the mind in writing, speaking, and listening. What good is it to know all the kinds of propositions, if a student cannot discover how many propositions are being expressed in a complicated sentence, and how they are related? What good to know all the principles of the syllogism if the student cannot recognize the congeries of syllogisms, or reasonings, that occur in a paragraph expressing a complicated argument? The proof of my point here is very simple. Though they are given a course in the science of logic, as their secular fellows are not, the graduates of Catholic colleges cannot read or write any better than their secular fellows. If they had been liberally disciplined, if the liberal arts had been acquired by them through years of exercise in their practices, then they would be vastly superior in the performance of all these liberal operations.

Furthermore, logic as a science is completely out of order when it is put first in the course of philosophical studies. Logic the organon, which really means the three arts of the trivium in complex conjunction, does come first; but logic the science comes last—even after metaphysics, after all the sciences of the real—precisely because second intentions follow first intentions, are derived from them, and depend upon them.

Let me explain, therefore, that by a proper teaching of the liberal arts, I mean only a teaching of the fundamental practices which these arts regulate: the performance of reading, writing, speaking, listening, measuring, and observing. Arts are habits. Hence they are not possessed at all by students who can verbally recite their rules. The rules are important only as regulating the performance of acts, which acts in turn, often repeated, then form the habits, which are the arts as vital transformations of the soul's operative powers. This can be done only in a scheme of education which orders learning in the following manner: (1) *on the elementary level*, gives the predispositions for intellectual discipline, by the study of multiple languages, especially the highly inflected ancient ones; by the routines of mathematics; and by the cultivation of the senses and imagination as the intellect's most important adjuncts; and (2) *on the secondary or collegiate level*, spends all of the four years primarily on the liberal arts, and not on the mastery of subject matters.

In short, a liberal education, crowned by the bachelor of arts degree, should consist in an ability to read and write, speak and listen, observe and think. A college graduate should be a liberal artist, and nothing more—as if this were not enough to hope for, and strive for, with all one's might and main.

Let me explain this last point, for it is likely to be misunderstood. First, let me say that I make no distinction between secondary and collegiate education. The B.A. degree should be given at what is now the end of high school, or at least at what is now the end of the sophomore year of our so-called colleges. After that comes the university. The three levels of education—and there is no place for a fourth—are rightly ordered when the first, or elementary, is seen as entirely preparatory and preintellectual, predispositive toward liberal training; when the second, or general, is seen as entirely liberal, partly terminal and partly preparatory for the study of subject matter; when the third, or specialized, is seen as devoted to the mastery of special subject matters, to the acquirement of the speculative virtues. (I shall return to this point later.)

I do not mean that the liberal arts are ever ultimate ends, ends in themselves. On the contrary, they are only intermediate ends, and as such, means to further and higher ends. They are specifically the indispensable means to the speculative virtues as ends. The acquisition of the arts is for the sake of mastering subject matters. But I wish to repeat one point: *they are not only means, they are indispensable as means*. Lacking real skill in the liberal arts, no one can become a master of an intellectual subject matter.

In order to acquire the arts, the subject matters must be used. This preliminary use of subject matter must not be confused with the ultimate approach to it after the arts have been acquired. When the basic subject matters are used at the collegiate or secondary level, they must be subordinated to the acquirement of the arts: they are then merely the matter on which the mind is being exercised to learn how to think—not, *then*, to learn what to think. That comes later. This is not a misuse of subject matter, as, of course, it would be, if it were the only use.

May I conclude this section of my remarks by the summary statement *that unless and until students become reasonably competent liberal artists, they are incompetent to approach or learn—really learn—any of the fundamental truths in the basic subject matters, for the means of forming the speculative virtues are lacking*. Teachers can indoctrinate students. Teachers can stuff their memories with pat verbal formulas—in Latin or in English—but they cannot teach them as if they were rational animals, instead of parrots, simply because their rational powers have not been sufficiently disciplined in the difficult arts of learning itself. The liberal arts, in my conception of them, are nothing but the arts of teaching and being taught. They are the basic skills of learning, and must, therefore, precede the effort of the mind to learn. just as I would make mastery of the liberal arts—the old, but not meaningless, degree—the only requirement for one who wishes to teach the young in school or college (how many teachers would there be, if this standard were imposed?), so I would make bachelorhood, or a novitiate in the arts, the one test for admission to the university as the place where subject matters are studied. This would close our universities down quicker than any military draft is likely to do.

To all of this, let me add a few brief comments. First, this is not a defense or apologia for the St. John's plan. What I am proposing is the fundamental order of the best ancient and medieval educational systems. It was the order, the very wise order, proposed by Plato in *The Republic*. It was the medieval order, which really put Platonic policy into actual practice; the work of the liberal arts faculty served to prepare boys for the universities, where under the auspices of the three basic faculties (law, medicine, and theology) they studied the subject matters. Having become skilled in learning, which meant they could read and write with reasonable competence, they were now admitted to the status of competent learners. It was the original intention of the Jesuit *Ratio Studiorum*, which has not—may I be forgiven for saying—been sufficiently retained in spirit, as well as in letter, by post-Renaissance Jesuit institutions. And although it is this order which St. John's is trying to reestablish, that should certainly not stand in the way of Catholic colleges adopting it, for the idea is fundamentally a Greek and medieval idea. It was not invented by the proponents of the St. John's scheme. It is an idea that belongs to all the great traditions of Catholic education, and yet Catholic institutions today do not exemplify it in practice.

Second, this basic educational idea, about the priority of the liberal arts to the study of subject matter, also has significance for the relation of all schooling to adult education. Real learning must be the work of more mature persons than boys and girls in school and college. Children are too young, too inexperienced, too unstable, to acquire wisdom. Hence, they should be given what they, at their age, are able to receive: the formation of the artistic, not the speculative, virtues. If they graduate from college liberal artists, then, whether they go on to the university or not, they will be able to continue the pursuit of truth throughout a life of adult learning, when maturity makes the formation of speculative habits possible.

Finally, there is the question, Where, *institutionally*, should the subject matters be taught and studied? I have already indicated the answer: in the university. The answer is, of course, practical, only if the B.A. is given earlier than it is at present. If Catholic educators say this is not possible, because of the opposition of the various accrediting agencies, I can only answer that until Catholic institutions throw off the yoke of the accrediting boards, and exercise a free judgment on basic educational questions, they will never be able to realize in practice any of the principles which belong to Catholic education.

We are now prepared to consider my second and last major point: the order of learning in the field of the speculative virtues, the order of studies at the university level. And here, to limit my discussion, I shall consider the teaching of philosophy as a case in point.

3. The Order of Teaching and Learning Philosophy— the Order of the Means to the Virtue of Wisdom

Here I have two fundamental points to make, which I shall try to make briefly. The first concerns the *objective order* of the subject matters themselves; the second concerns the *methods of teaching* the subject matters, with reference to the distinction between the order of knowledge and the order of learning.

By the objective order of the subject matters I mean, of course, the order of the objects of knowledge *secundum se*—the order of things known according to their intrinsic knowability, rather than their relative knowability, that is, their knowability to us.

In the first place, it is necessary briefly to condemn all the Wolffian errors—all the false divisions of subject matter, the wrong ordering of the parts of philosophy, invented by Christian Wolff, most unfortunately adopted by later scholasticism, and now dominating the philosophy curriculum of so many Catholic institutions. The correction of the Wolffian errors—the wrong divisions, the wrong orderings—can be made simply by anyone who understands the Thomistic theory of abstraction, which Wolff violates at every point. (I shall not concern myself further with Wolff but rather go at once to the right objective ordering of subject matters.)

Theology is certainly first if the objective ordering be in terms of the object which is most knowable in itself, though not to us. This indicates at once that the objective ordering of subject matters cannot be the same as the subjective ordering, for the latter must be in terms of what is most knowable to us as coming first, and, in these terms, theology would come last.

If we apply these principles to all the fundamental theoretic subject matters, we will find that, just as in the objective order, theology precedes metaphysics, and metaphysics, the philosophy of nature, and the philosophy of man, which is one of its parts, and the whole of philosophy, as dealing with essences, the whole of science, as dealing with phenomenal accidents; so in the subjective order, the members of this series are perfectly reversed: science should be studied before philosophy, and the philosophy of man before the philosophy of nature, and these before metaphysics and theology.

There are two other points of order, which I must mention in passing: (1) the priority of the theoretic to the practical (which, curiously enough, is both an objective and a subjective priority, for the theoretic is both more knowable in itself and to us); and (2) the priority of objectively constituted subject matters such as metaphysics and the philosophy of nature, to such problematically constituted subject matters as the philosophy of law, or of art, or of education, or of knowledge itself.

Now within each sphere of subject matter, there is supposed to be an order of principles and conclusions. There is some truth in this, of course, but I think it has been excessively oversimplified by the scholastic acceptance of Aristotelian logic, as giving a true and adequate account of the intrinsic structure of bodies of knowledge. In this connection, let me make the following observations:

- a. Aristotelian logic is primarily the logic of philosophy, and not at all the logic of science; and in so far as Aristotle did not clearly distinguish philosophy and science, his logic is both confused and inadequate.
- b. Even as the logic of philosophical knowledge, it is restricted to the (philosophy of nature, to what Aristotle calls physics. The *Organon* is totally inadequate as an account of metaphysical knowledge: it: concepts, judgments, or purely analytical reasonings. The supposition that Aristotelian logic is applicable to metaphysics results in the false notion that metaphysics is exclusively, or even primarily a deductive science, demonstrating conclusions from first principles
- c. In general, the influence of the *Posterior Analytics*, as giving the picture of the structure of *scientia*—any *scientia*—is disastrous; for in fact, the only science there pictured is mathematics, and primarily: geometry. As Gilson has pointed out, Aristotle's logic, and especially! the

Posterior Analytics, cannot be applied to any of Aristotle's own philosophical works. His own Physics and Metaphysics violate the account of scientia given in the Posterior Analytics.

- d. The major errors which have arisen in the scholastic tradition, as a result of following Aristotle's Organon as if it were a good, a true, and an adequate logic, are these: an attempt to expound both physics and metaphysics in a too-simple deductive order, whereas in truth, these basic philosophical subject matters are circular rather than linear in the connection of their propositions; a misconception of first principles, especially the law of contradiction, as if they were sources of deductive demonstration, as if other truths could be drawn from them deductively, whereas they are merely regulative principles of other inferences; the failure to see that most of the basic truths of philosophy, being existential judgments, are the result of a posteriori inferences from fact, not deductive inferences from prior analytical principles.

All of these points, though they are primarily concerned with the intrinsic and objective order of knowledge itself, have some significance for the order of learning, and of teaching in relation to learning. But, certainly, one thing is already clear: the objective order of subject matters—of objects as knowable in themselves and apart from us—does not and cannot determine the right subjective order of teaching and learning. We must find other principles, peculiarly relevant to the subjective order, in order to make these determinations. Let us proceed to them at once.

There are two basic principles which, it seems to me, help us determine the order of learning, and to adjust that subjective order to the objective order of subject matters.

The first of these is the very nature of teaching itself. Teaching, like agriculture and like medicine, is a *cooperative art*, not a simply productive art, transforming the obediential potentialities of inert matter. Teaching, as a cooperative art, must work with the determinate potentialities of living matter—and the rules of teaching must be adapted to the very nature of learning.

The second principle is the basic distinction between discovery and instruction as types of learning. Discovery is learning without a teacher; instruction is learning with a teacher's aid. But both are, *as learning*, essentially the same, and the order of learning must be essentially the same, therefore, whether the learner proceeds by discovery or by instruction. Furthermore, what is most important of all, since the teacher is always only a cooperative cause, and never a primary or sole cause, of learning, the intellectual activities which occur without aid in the case of discovery must be going on also in the case of instruction. From these two principles, we can conclude that the order of teaching must follow the order of learning, and that this order is primarily the order of discovery, for, as we have seen, even in learning by instruction, the primary causes of learning are the same sort of acts which cause discovery, when the learning goes on without a teacher's aid. The significance of this point—which I think is of the greatest importance—may not be grasped unless it is put into contrast with the now prevalent error. Today, in most cases, teaching proceeds as if the order of teaching should follow the order of knowledge, the objective order of knowledge itself, even though we know that this objective order cannot be followed in the process of discovery. In fact, it is completely reversed. Instruction which departs from the order of discovery also departs from the order of learning, for the way of discovery is the primary way of the mind to truth, and instruction merely imitates nature in imitating discovery. The objective structure of knowledge in no way indicates the processes of the mind in growth.

Now the order of discovery is primarily inductive and dialectical, not deductive and scientific. Let me explain. The usual distinction between induction and deduction—going from particulars to universal or universals to particulars—has always seemed to be somewhat superficial, if, in fact, it is correct at all. Rather, it seems to me, the deductive order is going from what is more knowable in itself to what *is* less knowable in itself; and thus there is an objective foundation for less intelligible truths in more intelligible ones—the intelligibility being intrinsic to the object known, being *secundum se*, not *quoad nos*. In contrast, the inductive order is going from what is more knowable to us to what is less knowable to us. Thus, the deductive order is the demonstration of conclusions from prior principles, or, where demonstration does not take place, the analytical expansion of prior truths in

terms of their consequences; whereas the inductive order is the discovery of self-evident principles, on the one hand, and, on the other, it is the inferential procedure whereby every basic existential proposition is known—for *no existential proposition (concerning God, or substance, or the diversity of essences) can be demonstrated deductively*. All *a posteriori* inferences are inductive, not deductive, and these are among the most fundamental inferences of the mind in the discovery of truth about things. The other fundamental step is the intuitive induction of first principles.

Therefore, the methods of teaching any subject matter should be primarily inductive and dialectical, rather than deductive and simply expository, for the former method is a conformity of teaching to the order of learning, as that is naturally exhibited in the order of discovery, which teaching must imitate as a cooperative art; whereas the latter method is a conformity of teaching to the order of knowledge itself, and this is an order which should not determine teaching, for it does not determine learning. The practical implications of this conclusion can be quickly drawn:

First, for any subject matter, and for philosophy preeminently (precisely because it is wisdom and the most difficult sort of knowledge to possess by way of speculative habit), teaching must be by the Socratic method.

Second, the Socratic, or dialectical, method is the only way to avoid the substitution of verbal memory for intellectual habit. It always puts questions before answers. It does not rest when a student gives a verbally right answer, but always tries to undermine the right answer to test it, for if it is just parrotlike speech, the answer will not stand the dialectical attack. It places the highest value on questions, rather than upon answers; for a question in search of answers is an educational dynamo, whereas an answer in search of the question it answers is an educational dud.

Third, it follows, of course, that lectures and textbooks are taboo, for the most part, because lectures usually are deductive or analytical expositions following the order of knowledge, rather than dialectical inquiries adapted to the order of discovery; and textbooks are even worse than lectures as manuals for the memory, rather than challenges to the mind.

Fourth, right teaching must be done either without any books, *if the teacher is a Socrates*, or, if the teacher is not a Socrates the only books he can use to good effect are the very greatest books, on a given subject that have ever been written, for only such books will be above both himself and his students; only such books will stimulate him to inquire and thus to lead his students in inquiry; only such books will pose both teacher and students problems, rather than give them simply codified, and readily memorizable, answers.

Fifth, the simplest test for right teaching—teaching well-ordered as an aid to learning—is this: that the teacher should find himself actively engaged in discovery of the truth, at the same time that he is helping his students (though they be moving at a lower level) to make discoveries also, proportionate to their age and condition. When the teacher proceeds by the wrong method—by lecture-expositions and quizzes on textbooks or manuals—it seldom, if ever, happens that the teacher himself learns anything new. His state of mind is not an inquiring one. That shows he is not really doing the work of a teacher, for the work of a teacher must conform to the work of learning, and this can only take place if the teacher is really learning at the same time that he teaches.

Finally, it is only by such dialectical and inductive procedure that the truth is learned, not in complete abstraction from the problems it solves or the errors it corrects, but in the context of complicated alternatives. This again is the trouble with textbooks. They seldom make the problems live, or state the errors vigorously enough to make them real dangers and real obstacles to the mind.

Two Essays on Docility (1940)

"Two Essays on Docility" considers the relation between students and their teachers. Adler tells us that docility is necessary for learning, but that it is not easy to achieve. Avoiding subservience on the one hand and indocility on the other, docility entails having an open mind, suspending judgment, and being disposed to seek the help of teachers and books in gaining knowledge. These essays first appeared in The Commonweal (April 1940).

G.V.D

1. Docility and Authority

In his *Treatise on Temperance*, Saint Thomas discusses the virtue of studiousness and the vice of curiosity. The virtuous pursuit of learning must not only be moderate, but rightly motivated. *Studiositas* inclines a man to be serious and steadfast in the application of his mind to things worth learning. In contrast, the zest with which many men devote themselves to scholarship and research seems to express curiosity rather than a virtuous exercise of the desire to know.

Now there is another virtue—not explicitly discussed by Saint Thomas—which disciplines us in the life of learning. Docility is the virtue which regulates a man's will with respect to learning from a teacher. Studiousness concerns a right attitude toward subject matters. If men learned only by discovery—each seeking out the truth entirely by himself—studiousness would be sufficient. But men also learn by instruction; in fact, that is the way most men learn for the most part. Therefore, they must adopt a right attitude toward their teachers, to the instruments as well as to the matter of instruction. It is through docility that we recognize the teacher as a doctor, and respect his authority as we respect that of a physician working for our health.

I place docility in the group of virtues annexed to justice, for it consists in rendering to teachers what is their due. As we owe piety to God as the source of our being, and to our parents as the source of our becoming, so docility is a kind of piety toward teachers as among the sources of our learning. There is also an element of gratitude in docility, responsive to the charity of teaching; and an element of humility, because through docility we are rightly ordered to our superiors. We cannot be instructed by our peers, or at least not in the respects in which there is peerage or equality in knowledge. Unless the teacher has an authority which comes from greater knowledge or skill, he cannot justly be our master, nor need we be docile as his students.

In order to define the vices of excess and defect—which I shall call *subservience* and *indocility*—it is necessary to discuss the nature of the doctoral authority. When Saint Thomas says that "the argument from authority based on human reason is the weakest" (*Summa Theologia*, I, 8, Reply to Objection 2), he is obviously not recommending indocility, for that would belie the practice of his whole life as a respectful and grateful student of Aristotle and Saint Augustine. What he is saying is simply that the weakest ground for affirming a conclusion is the fact that it has been affirmed by another, even if that other be the master of those who know or a father of doctrine. If we affirm a principle that is supposed to be self-evident, without its being evident to us, or a conclusion that is supposed to be demonstrated, without being able to demonstrate it, merely because another man has said it, we are being subservient, not docile. We have acquired an opinion, not knowledge; and if we persist in it through a sort of verbal

memory, rather than a truly intellectual penetration of the truth, we have been indoctrinated, not instructed.

But, then, wherein lies the authority of teachers? We must distinguish between the intrinsic possession of such authority and its extrinsic signs. With respect to all teachable matters, a man has as much authority intrinsically as he is able to speak the truth. Strictly, it is the truth alone which has the authority over our minds in the realm of knowledge as opposed to the realm of opinion. Whereas opinion is an affirmation by the intellect as moved by the will or the passions, knowledge is a motion independent of the will. To know is to judge entirely in the light of reason. The truth as we see it in such light compels our judgment. If the authority of a teacher consisted in nothing but the truth he spoke, then we could justly recognize his authority only to the extent that, by the natural light of our own reason, we could independently discriminate between truth and falsity on the point of doctrine. There would be no need for docility toward him as a man.

The need for docility arises from the supposition that a student lacks knowledge or the skill to get it and that a teacher, having what the student lacks, can help him. Although the student must never accept what the teacher says *simply because he says it*, neither can he reject it on that ground. In the field of natural knowledge, the student must ultimately make up his own mind in the light of natural reason, but until he is able to do that finally he should try to get all the help he can from those who offer to teach him. Docility is needed, therefore, to dispose him to seek and to use such help wisely and well. If a teacher claims to demonstrate something which the student cannot see at once to be the case, docility requires that the student suspend judgment—neither accept nor reject—and apply his mind studiously to the teacher's words and intentions. He must, with patience and perseverance, continue to submit his mind to instruction, which means nothing more than that he suffer the teacher to continue cooperating with his own active intellect.

Unless there were extrinsic signs of authority, which marked the proper objects of docility, the student would be unable to direct himself properly with respect to available instruction. Such signs are not wanting. Assuming that an educational system is wisely administered, those who hold the office of teacher are signified as having sufficient authority for the grade of student allotted to them. Unlike the political office, which has a certain authority in itself even when held by a bad man, the doctoral office is truly emptied whenever students who have exercised docility discover its occupant to be unworthy. If the *de facto* rule of a usurping despot is tyranny, the *de facto* pressure of an inadequate teacher can only be effective as indoctrination, and that, as we have seen, is a kind of violence. Docility requires the student, nevertheless, to respect the office of the teacher until his incompetence is unmistakably revealed.

There are other extrinsic signs. Quite apart from his office, a teacher may command respect because of his past performances. A teacher who has succeeded in bringing us to the light many times in the past despite our intransigence, is one who deserves our patience in the present instance where we are still in the dark. This is the mark which honors the great teachers of all times. In the tradition of European learning, some men have been the teachers of many generations, of many epochs. The fact that these men are so generally honored by the tradition as great teachers—men who both know and can communicate—is the most compelling extrinsic sign of an authority to which we must respond with docility.

I have elsewhere developed the distinction between dead and living teachers. The living teachers—the local embodiments of learning—are seldom the great teachers. The great teachers are usually dead, though, in another sense, they are eminently alive for us as teachers through their books. Books are instruments of instruction, and obviously call for docility in those who would learn from them, as much as living teachers do. The virtue is essentially the same, whether exercised toward the book of an absent teacher or toward the ministrations of one who is present. When I speak of a "great teacher" or a "great book" I mean one who merits the extrinsic marks of teaching authority because possessing that authority intrinsically, by virtue of a great store of knowledge and great power to disseminate it.

It would be a mistake for those of us who are teachers to suppose that the problem of achieving docility is a problem only for our students. To the extent that we, too, are students, the moral problem exists for us as well. It exists for anyone and everyone who is actively engaged in the life of learning. Those who understand the obligations of that life do not give up learning when they begin to teach. On the contrary, a good teacher is usually one who is himself an active student of the subject matter in which he gives instruction. Authority and docility will be combined in him, for he is both a teacher of those who know less than himself and a student of the masters of his subject matter. One might even guess that there will be a certain proportion between his attainment of authority and his exercise of docility.

I want to consider the problem of docility as it exists for all of us, whether we be merely students in the early stages of our education, or teachers who have realized the need to continue study. The problem, it seems to me, has significant implications for education under modern cultural conditions, precisely because modern culture is so ambivalent about tradition. In its horror of subservience, the modern mind tends to the opposite vice of brash indocility. On the other hand, those who deplore modernism and try to combat it too often return to the first extreme, mistaking subservience for docility.

The opposition of these extremes is the prevailing tension between the mood of secular and Catholic education. These two systems of education have contrary vices, each a reaction to the other—too little or too much respect for traditional authorities. I might add that the attitude which is characteristic of secular or Catholic faculties toward the great teachers of the past is reflected in the attitude of secular or Catholic students toward their living teachers. The one is usually indocile, the other subservient. (The subservience may be merely outward. I speak only of appearances.)

The temper of a culture with respect to its intellectual tradition underlies its educational efforts. If docility is indispensable to sound educational policy and practice, we must rectify the culture itself in terms of this virtue. How shall this be done? We are frequently told that historical scholarship is the way. We are told that the proper study of philosophy, and even science, is impossible without thorough historical orientation. Both modernism and its equally bad opposite, "modern scholasticism," spring from corrupt history, or the lack of historical insight. In their enthusiasm, the exponents of history as the magic open sesame tend to identify the historical attitude with docility. They soon become infected with historicism, which is simply the error of making historical scholarship, truly enough a necessary condition of rectitude in learning from the past, into a sufficient condition.

I propose, therefore, to examine the service of history in the life of learning, by considering its relation to the achievement of docility. But before I can discuss these larger implications of the problem, it is necessary first to consider docility from the point of view of the individual person who is trying to be virtuous in his attitude toward teachers and books.

For most of the moral virtues, the mean between the extremes of excess and defect is a subjective mean. The mean in the case of courage, lying somewhere between foolhardiness and cowardice, is not objectively ascertainable, and as such the same for all men. It is rather a mean that is relative to the individual temperament of each man who tries to be courageous, a mean which a man's own prudence must appoint after due consideration of the conditions of his life, the complexion of all his natural tendencies, and the circumstances of particular acts.

The mean of docility is subjective in this sense. The definition of docility as the right amount of respect for the authority of teachers (or books) is by itself insufficient to determine action. It is a truth too remote from the exigencies of practice to direct us in the particular decisions we have to make. In this particular case—with this teacher or book, in view of my temperamental weaknesses, my tendencies to be indolent or impatient, and in connection with this point of doctrine about which I have strong feelings—what is the *right amount* of respect due those who are trying to instruct me? There is the practical question. And I cannot cultivate the habit of docility unless I can decide such questions prudently time after time as they arise.

Aristotle gives us two practical rules to guide us in the casuistry of applying moral principles to particular cases of action.

As it is difficult to hit the mean exactly, we must take the second best course, and choose the lesser of two evils, and this we shall do best in the way we have described, i.e., by steering clear of the evil which is further from the mean. We must also observe the things to which we are ourselves particularly prone, as different natures have different inclinations, and we may ascertain what these are by a consideration of our feelings of pleasure and pain. And then we must drag ourselves in the direction opposite to them; for it is by removing ourselves as far as possible from what is wrong that we shall arrive at the mean, as we do when we pull a crooked stick straight (*Nicomachean Ethics*, II, 9).

Let us consider the second suggestion first. If by temperament we tend to be impatient of authority, we should pull ourselves in the direction of subservience, for by so doing we shall be going toward the mean. If our temperament is of the opposite sort, we should struggle against our reluctance to exercise an independent judgment. Such counteraction of our natural weaknesses assists us to make a prudent determination of the mean relative to ourselves.

But if the mean of docility is hard to hit exactly, which is the better error to make, the worse vice to avoid, subservience or indocility? I, for one, cannot answer this question *absolutely*, that is, without any reference to circumstances. But it can be answered *relatively* by considering the generality of cases of different type. Thus, I would say that for modern culture generally the aim should be to avoid indocility; for Catholic students, in contrast to those in our secular colleges, the motion should be away from subservience; and, in general, it is worse for those who are in the early stages of study to be indocile than subservient, whereas, on the contrary, for those who are mature and who should assume a responsibility of independent judgment proportionate to their competence, it is worse to be subservient.

The casuistical questions which a man faces in trying to be docile are more difficult than those which arise in the field of other moral virtues; but these are always the most difficult questions, not only for each of us to decide for ourselves, but for anyone to prescribe ways of answering for others. Perhaps, therefore, the best thing I can do is to put down some of the considerations which weigh heavily with me when I am trying to read a book with docility.

In the first place, I try never to forget that the only ultimate factor which can decide my judgment—whether I shall agree or disagree with the author who is my teacher—is the natural light of my own reason. Remembering this, I will not assent to anything I do not see, be it principle or conclusion or the reasoning from the one to the other. I know, of course, how often I have failed to abide by this precept, how often I have adopted, for example, statements by Aristotle or Saint Thomas, because of emotional predispositions rather than intellectual light. I respect them so much as teachers that I have often permitted them to indoctrinate me—the fault being mine, not theirs, the respect being excessive, rather than right. For many years, I affirmed, and repeated to my students as if I knew it to be true, the Aristotelian error about natural slavery. If it is the error I now see it to be, it could not have been a truth I saw. As I review my own life on this point, I realize that I never did *see* the point. I merely accepted it because Aristotle had spoken.

In matters of natural knowledge, no human authority should prevail against the light of your own reason. But we know that our thinking is fallible. We know how often we suffer the illusion that we see the truth, only to discover later that we have judged too soon. Hence the second maxim I try to follow is this: one should suspend judgment long enough to be sure that one really understands what the teacher is trying to say before agreeing or disagreeing with him. Life being short, and the responsibility for making up one's mind on important questions being urgent, how long is long enough? This is a matter which everyone must determine for himself in conscience. If to disagree rashly leads to indocility, to agree without reservation, without making the effort to be sure one really knows what is being agreed to, is subservience. Docility demands sufficient *suspension* of judgment so that when I judge I shall be

acting in the light of reason, and not in terms of passionate devotion or equally passionate opposition to the author I am reading.

There are a number of factors I consider in estimating the delay of judgment proper in a given case, the amount of effort to understand which should precede making up my mind. One is the degree of extrinsic authority that tradition has accorded the teacher. I should be less impetuous in judging Aristotle and Saint Thomas than in the case of some nineteenth, or even sixteenth, century scholastic textbook. If there is a probable correlation between the extrinsic signs of authority and its intrinsic possession, then certainly it is sound to say that the more authority a teacher *seems* to have, the more pause he should give you. This maxim should operate in the case in which you are, for whatever reason, inclined to disagree, as well as when you are favorably predisposed. Here, too, my biography is full of faults. So much of what David Hume says was repugnant to my reason fairly early in my study of philosophy, that I tended to reject him in entirety without due consideration of the extrinsic authority he certainly has in a large area of the modern tradition. I now know that I went astray here, failing through indocility to see the contribution of Hume's positivism for the understanding of empirical science, as through subservience I have parroted errors from Aristotle and Saint Thomas.

The rule of practice must, therefore, be sharpened on both its edges, for it must cut two ways. Wherever I am emotionally, or even intellectually, inclined to agree, I should suspend judgment before concurring, lest I merely indoctrinate myself. Wherever my disposition is of the contrary sort, I should hesitate to disagree, lest I reject without understanding what greater patience would have made intelligible and acceptable to my mind. And, in both cases, my conscience must determine the degree of patience due the author by reference to the marks of extrinsic authority he bears. I must add here that, in addition to the reputation which tradition has conferred, the degree to which I have come to feel his authority because of his previous successes as a teacher in my own life ought also to be considered.

This first factor is qualified by two others. On the one hand, I must take into account my own position in the scale of learning. Thus, in a given subject matter I may have achieved competence to a greater or less degree. In proportion as I have competence—which means, in proportion as I approach peerage with the great teachers in that field—I am entitled to make up my mind more quickly. What would be indecent impetuosity in the beginner may be protracted deliberateness in the learned. On the other hand, I must know myself as a creature of passions and prejudices in order to make due allowance for every sort of waywardness that could interfere with a prudent determination of the mean of docility in this case, as conditioned not only by the author's authority in relation to my knowledge, but also by my idiosyncrasies in relation to the author.

In this process of casuistry, it makes a difference whether I am a student being instructed by living teachers, or at once a teacher of students as well as a student of the dead masters. If I am in that middle position—which should be the position of every good teacher, modest enough to recognize his limitations—the duty of docility is more heavily incumbent upon me, for I have the obligation to exhibit it in my teaching, as well as practice it in my studying. I shall return to this point in a later discussion of the bearing of docility on the role of the teacher.

One other thing makes a difference. When I am dealing with the great teachers of the past, I must bridge the gap of time. The continuity of tradition is not perfect. I must be deeply conscious of my own place in cultural time, in order to realize that the author I am reading lived and thought in a different climate of opinion. If my cultural location confers certain advantages on me, I am not indocile if I take advantage of the superiority which modern birth gives me over the greatest teachers of the ancient and medieval past. If I exaggerate that advantage, I am, of course, lacking in true docility; but a vicious subservience results equally from minimizing it.

This last point raises the whole question about the dependence of docility, in an individual teacher, in an educational system, or in a whole culture, upon the cultivation of a historical sense—a sense of the present as moving into the future, as well as a sense of the present growing out of the past. This point, too, I shall discuss in a subsequent essay.

2. Docility and History

The attainment of docility is, as we have seen, a personal problem which each of us must solve in his private life of learning. But there is also an institutional problem of docility, involving the curriculum and administration of studies in an educational system. I am thinking of the two points which in my prior article were left for further consideration. The first has to do with the relation between living teachers and dead ones (books) as instruments of instruction. The second concerns the precise place of scholarship, and historical orientation generally, in learning from the past.

The curriculum of St. John's College, Annapolis, has generated controversy bearing on both these points. Some critics have questioned the advisability of placing the great books in the hands of the young, without definite instruction by living teachers that explicitly discriminates between true doctrines and false. When such critics follow out the implication of the amendment to the St. John's plan, they usually end up by suggesting lecture courses, textbooks, and manuals, devised for putting blinders on the students and leading them along the straight and narrow path to the truth. This is not an amendment of the St. John's plan, but an abolition of it. It substitutes the way of indoctrination for the discipline of docility.

Other critics have wondered whether the paraphernalia of historical scholarship can be so cavalierly dispensed with. The program of getting the tradition to reveal its secrets by going directly to the books seems to underestimate the importance of the philological approach to past cultures. Even though the books are read in chronological order, little effort seems to be made to place each book precisely in its cultural setting, to read the mind of each author as a product of complex historical determinations. Paradoxically, an educational program which exudes so profound a respect for the past seems to have little or no respect for the historical methods by which men try to relive the intellectual life of prior epochs.

I would like to consider these two points, not only as they bear on the St. John's curriculum, but in their educational implications generally.

The critics who fear a shallow eclecticism, or, what is worse, sophistry and skepticism, as the inevitable result of making the great books the students' *only* teachers, cannot be lightly dismissed. Their error lies not in their insistence that sound educational policy requires living leadership, but rather in their misconception of the role the living teacher should play. The tradition of great books contains both truth and error, mixed in varying proportions in different cases. This holds for ancient and medieval authors, as well as moderns. The student who reads both Plato and Aristotle and does not recognize the obligation to decide between them on crucial points is not learning *from* the past, but merely *about* it. The same can be said for issues which put Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas on opposite sides. The objective is to know the truth about God, man, and nature, and the ends of human life, not what anyone, however great his authority, thought about these matters. The deviation from a right aim is even greater if it be supposed that students should become acquainted with the sheer diversity of opinions on major questions in order to become, through the conflict of authorities, emancipated from authority itself.

There are two extremes here. One position, which may be taken by some of the exponents of the St. John's plan, is to make the living teacher *merely* a liberal artist, *merely* a dialectician, whose only office is to sharpen the student's wits as a reader of the books. While I would certainly insist that it is the teacher's business to cultivate in every way the student's skill in reading—analytically, interpretively, critically—I would also insist that that is not enough. For, as Plato teaches us, dialectic cannot be distinguished from sophistry *as an intellectual method*. It differs only on a moral count—in virtue of its use as means toward the truth. If the reading of the great books is merely for the sake of making liberal artists of the students, they will end by being sophisticated, but not learned or wise.

At the opposite extreme is the position, embodied in much of Catholic education, that the shortest way to the truth is the best. Why take the long and devious path that leads through the great books, with all

their difficulties and conflicts, if a living teacher can present the right doctrine in lectures supported by textbooks written by himself or his colleagues; or if he can assign a textbook and get the students to repeat what it says instead of doing that himself in lectures? If the great books should be read, let the teacher do that in the course of his own education or in the privacy of his study. Let him cull the truth from the errors, and feed the young the unblemished fruits.

Here the opposite error is made. Students who are not trained in the liberal arts—and apart from the discipline of reading great books they cannot be—are incapable of the *activity* of being taught. They are entirely given to the *passivity* of being indoctrinated. They are not trained to be docile, for docility is required only in the active exercise of one's intellectual powers. Only when independence of judgment is encouraged (more, demanded), must docility be cultivated. Textbooks and lectures elicit memorization and, with it, instill subservience. Furthermore, the supposition that the living teachers are the refinery through which the riches of the past are purified before they reach the student in the form of lectures and textbooks is open to question. Teachers are usually the product of the educational system in which they serve in their turn. If the system is one in which they do not read great books with *their* students, it is unlikely that *their* teachers read great books with them. Hence it is likely to be the case that their lectures or textbooks are condensations or repetitions of other textbooks and lectures, rather than magnificent renditions of the tradition.

The solution, as always, is a union of the half-truths drawn from the extremes. The living teacher must not only be a disciplinarian of the liberal arts; he must also argue for the truths and against the errors that he himself has found, or finds, in the books he reads with his students. He must be both *doctor* and *docile*. The assumption is that the person who conducts a reading seminar is more mature than his students—more skilled in reading, and hence able to initiate them into its intricacies, as well as more learned in doctrine, and hence competent to discover the truth to those who seek it in the books. The living teacher is truly a mediator between the novices in learning and the masters of knowledge, through being himself in a mean state between them. On the one hand, he participates in the role of *teacher* through possessing more of the knowledge the great books contain, than do his students. To this extent, he has some authority in his own right, is entitled to instruct and deserves docility from them. On the other hand, he participates in the role of *student* through being still engaged in the search for knowledge at its fountainheads. To this extent, he must exhibit docility to his students, for only by manifesting it in his own practice of the liberal arts, can he genuinely persuade his students to follow in his footsteps.

The solution thus avoids two errors: the fallacy of supposing that a curriculum which makes the great books the major teachers must completely exclude doctrinal judgments on the part of the minor teacher; and the mistake of making the minor teacher the chief source of doctrine, permitting him to masquerade as a major teacher, usurping an authority not rightly his. The latter error is made by any educational program which substitutes manuals and lecture courses for the great books. It forces a teaching personnel, that might be able to function well as mediators, to exceed their powers, to offer themselves as repositories of learning. It cannot breed docility, failing so signally to exhibit it, for the pretense by which the minor teacher becomes an oracle instead of a medium is a counterfeit made possible only by subservience or indocility.

What I have said of this second error applies equally, though perhaps differently, to Catholic and secular institutions. *If* the first error is made at St. John's, then the program is subject to one of the charges brought against it. I wish to argue only that that error is entirely accidental to the program. That being so, there is no excuse for Catholic educators in not separating essence from accidents, and not adopting what is fundamentally sound in the St. John's plan.

With respect to the role of historical scholarship, there are also two false extremes. For the sake of sharpening the point within the brief scope of this article, let me consider the relation of history to the study of philosophy. For one thing, the problem of docility is much more acute in seeking philosophical wisdom than in acquiring scientific knowledge; and this is related to the fact that textbooks

are much less pernicious in science than philosophy. For another thing, the history of philosophy—in fact, the history of culture, and of science also—appears to have a certain philosophical significance which the student of philosophy cannot well ignore. The student of science suffers less from ignorance of general cultural history. Hence, education in philosophy is a good field for the examination of the relation between docility and history.

At one extreme are those who claim that history is irrelevant to the study of philosophy. Curiously enough, these are usually the same people who try to teach philosophy *systematically*, out of textbooks or manuals. Philosophical knowledge consists of a set of doctrines which are timelessly true and which, therefore, can be expounded without any regard for the historical accidents of cultural time and place. If I understand them correctly, the students of M. Gilson have attacked the simplemindedness of this position as a root cause of error and superficiality in modern scholasticism. But, it seems to me, they go to the opposite extreme, and in doing so go further than their leader himself. They commit the error of historicism. Though all they affirm is that history is an indispensable instrument in the discovery of philosophical truth, they become so enamored of the instrument that in practice, if not in theory, they subvert the end to the means. The philological study of texts, the delineation of affinities between minds separated by centuries, the tracing of streams of influence and divergence—all these things become more important than bare philosophical argument.

I am extremely sensitive to the difference between scholarly competence and expertness in philosophy, to the difference between seeking to penetrate the truth by thinking, and seeking to get inside the minds of other men, to think their thoughts by acts of historical imagination. Partly this may be due to my own acknowledged incompetence in historical scholarship. Life being short, I have made what seemed to me an inevitable choice between scholarship and philosophy. I doubt if anyone's energies are ample enough to permit an adequate devotion to both. To take eminent examples, Gilson and Maritain, it seems to me, have made opposite choices, though each, of course, enjoys some competence in the other's field.

But my sensitiveness here is due even more to the fact that I have seen so many young men start out to become philosophers and end up as historians or philologists. I would say that they gave up the harder task for an easier one. Truly it is easier to "speculate" about what Aristotle thought, even if such speculation must be supported by the most careful adduction of evidences, than it is to speculate, as Aristotle did, about the nature of things. (Perhaps this is why many philosophy departments in both secular and Catholic universities direct their doctoral candidates into fields of historical research rather than encourage "young men" to undertake genuine philosophical work.) Not only is it easier, but one's fundamental intellectual integrity is less affected. To have one's scholarship corrected does not get into one's soul as much as to have one's philosophical judgments refuted. Those who substitute scholarship for philosophy avoid sticking their necks out in a way that invites serious intellectual challenge. The scholar may have his own philosophical opinions, but he usually manages to bury them in his interpretation of other men's thought. He has effaced himself behind what other men stood for and thus avoids standing too openly for anything himself.

Observe that I marked the word "speculate" when I spoke about historical research. For this, it seems to me, is speculation in the sense of conjecture, not speculation in the sense in which philosophy is speculative knowledge. In fact, history at its best stands to philosophy, as opinion does to knowledge. No matter how perfectly all the historical techniques are employed, it is impossible to *know with certitude* what Aristotle or Plotinus thought about anything. In contrast, the philosophical thought of Aristotle and Plotinus is either certainly true or false. It is either knowledge or not knowledge, but never probable opinion. The reason why cultural history is opinion should be obvious. It is an effort to reach a decision about the singular mind of a particular man in terms of such contingent and inadequate data as written documents. To indulge in scholarly disputes about what a dead philosopher meant by his words seems to me a poor substitute for philosophical controversy about a truth in issue. For if agreement is reached in the one case, the disputants rest only in opinion; whereas in the other they share a common knowledge.

But scholarship and history need not be substituted for philosophy. Therein lies the reconciliation of the two false extremes. So long as the means are properly subordinated to their end, no disorder results from the use of historical scholarship as an aid in the reading of great philosophical books. Just as we correct an error which may occur accidentally in the execution of the St. John's program, by insisting that the reading of books be ordained to the end of acquiring doctrine as well as skill, so we correct the excess of historicism by placing scholarship in the service of an intelligent reading of books. When this ordering of means to ends is clear, historicism is as effectively avoided as eclecticism.

It may be said, however, that it is not historicism, but its opposite, which a program like St. John's must avoid. The problem here concerns the relation between the liberal arts and historical techniques as components in the complex skill of reading books. May I suggest a solution briefly? There are two major steps in reading: interpretation and criticism. One must do one's best to understand an author before agreeing or disagreeing with him. Historical scholarship bears exclusively on interpretive reading; when it is properly subordinated as a means, its end is exegesis; all of its techniques are of service to the grammatical art. But exegesis is not *the* end; nor is grammar the highest art. Exegesis is for the sake of a fair critical judgment, grammar for the sake of logic and rhetoric. A liberal education must, in short, include historical scholarship as a supplement to grammatical art in reading, and just as surely must it subordinate these techniques to the ultimate purpose for which logical and rhetorical skill is exercised—the independent judgment of *a* mind about the living truth. When history and grammar dominate the process, docility is confused with the effort to achieve a "sympathetic understanding" of dead men's minds.

There is another aspect of the relation between history and docility. To the extent that we engage in learning from great teachers of the past, a well developed "historical sense"—a sense of the motion of history—gives us the perspective and orientation needed for docility. We in the modern world have this historical sense much more highly developed than any earlier epoch of European culture. We owe it to the technical achievement of modern historical scholarship.

The truth is timeless, but human thought, intricately conditioned by its concrete cultural situation, is dated. Historical relativity cannot be avoided, but through acknowledging the limitations imposed upon any thinker by his time and place, we can disengage the truth from its historical accidents. The imagery which embodies thought, and the language in which it is expressed, are always local. By discerning these externals as belonging to a cultural moment, we can transcend them a little, and find the timeless in the heart of time. The truth itself, *whenever* it is achieved or *however* it is embodied and expressed, is not explained by history. But history does explain the errors men have made in the search for truth. The truth our ancestors won belongs to us as much as to them. History helps us to possess it by enabling us to transcend the cultural accidents which separate us from them. The errors our ancestors made are theirs alone. We shall make others, perhaps, but we should not repeat theirs. History helps us to reject such mistakes by showing us their causes in the cultural limitations of past epochs. Aware that we are subject to similar limitations, we should be able to look down at the past without pride.

Historical relativity is greater in some fields of thought than in others, in politics, for instance, more than in ethics, in the philosophy of nature more than in metaphysics. To disengage the political truths of Aristotle and Saint Thomas from the accidents of local imagery and language, as well as from the fallacies that surround them, requires much more historical insight than a similar effort in ethics. Unless we have such insights, we are likely to be subservient, accepting errors because they accompany truth, or we may be indocile, rejecting the truth because of the errors, or because the truth is strangely garbed in foreign dress. The modern student should be able to attain a greater docility precisely because he has better historical perspective and orientation. The ancient and medieval worlds lacked the historical sense. To the extent that their works reveal them as students of their predecessors, we can see how Aristotle and Saint Thomas suffered from this privation, characteristic of their times. With greater historical knowledge, Aristotle might have been less indocile toward the pre-Socratics, and Saint Thomas might have been less subservient toward Aristotle.

The historical sense is not simply a sense of the past. It is even more a sense of the future, and an awareness of the present as a point in motion between past and future. Through realizing the slow, and often imperceptible, progress of history, we can take advantage of the respects in which our present cultural location elevates us above the past, and at the same time we can appreciate the limitations of the present as we look forward to the future. Thus we can combine gratitude toward the past on whose shoulders we stand, with humility toward the future. Neither fawning nor unduly self-reliant, we recognize ourselves as creatures of time. Through a docility thus fortified by a historical sense, we are emancipated both from the dead hand of tradition and from the provincialism of the present moment. Only the docility of the living present can make the tradition live and perpetuate itself through myriad transformations.

If I were asked to name the virtue which most singularly distinguishes Jacques Maritain as a philosopher, I would say his docility. All of its manifestations will be detected by those who see how deeply his Thomism is motivated by a sense of the future. Philosophy is perennial for him, not as a monument which endures the ravages of time, but as a living thing which enjoys time as its dimension of change and growth. The dead bones of philosophy are not building materials. Not a reverence for relics, but for the spirit they have disembodied, is the docility which encourages Maritain to regard Saint Thomas as a cooperator in the work of preparing for a philosopher greater than Saint Thomas, as he was greater than Aristotle.

We have considered all the impediments to docility, the difficulties to be overcome in ourselves, in our educational systems and in our culture. It would be wise, in conclusion, to remember a point that is central in the whole theory of virtue, namely, the integration of the virtues. No one of the cardinal virtues, nor any of their parts, can be possessed in isolation from all the rest. Whether it be considered as a part of prudence, in relation to practical matters, or as a part of justice, in relation to the theoretic life in which there are doctors and students, docility is impossible apart from fortitude and temperance. One may be docile by natural temperament, but that is not the true virtue which belongs only to those whose will is rectified by the simultaneous possession of all the principal virtues.

It has become sufficiently clear how courage is indispensable to docility. Perhaps a word more is needed to indicate the need for temperance also. It may suffice to recall that a part of temperance is the virtue most closely related to docility, *studiositas*. No one can be docile who is not rightly directed in the matter of pursuing knowledge. Studiosity opposes the vice of curiosity. It appoints the right end of all our intellectual labors. The means of learning will be well used only if they are used for the right end. As Saint Thomas tells us (*Summa Theologica*, 11-11, 167, 1), we must avoid studying for the sake of taking pride in our knowledge; we must not seek to know the truth "above the capacity of our intelligence, for by so doing we fall easily into error"; we must make a proper estimate of the worth of various subject matters as these are disposed in a true hierarchy of studies; and the due end, to which all our efforts in research must be referred, is the knowledge of God.

Invitation to the Pain of Learning (1941)

In Adler's view of education, learning is not something one acquires externally like a new suit. It is, in his own words, "an interior transformation of a person's mind and character, a transformation which can be effected only through his own activity." It is as painful, but also as exhilarating, as any effort human beings make to make themselves better human beings, physically or mentally. The practices of educators, even if they are well-intentioned, who try to make learning less painful than it is, not only make it less exhilarating, but also weaken the will and minds of those on whom this fraud is perpetrated. The selling and buying of education all wrapped up in pretty packages is what is going on, but, Adler tells us, it is not the real thing. This essay was published in The Journal of Educational Sociology (February 1941).

G.V.D

One of the reasons why the education given by our schools is so frothy and vapid is that the American people generally—the parent even more than the teacher—wish childhood to be unspoiled by pain. Childhood must be a period of delight, of gay indulgence in impulses. It must be given every avenue for unimpeded expression, which of course is pleasant; and it must not be made to suffer the impositions of discipline or the exactions of duty, which of course are painful. Childhood must be filled with as much play and as little work as possible. What cannot be accomplished educationally through elaborate schemes devised to make learning an exciting game must, of necessity, be forgone. Heaven forbid that learning should ever take on the character of a serious occupation—just as serious as earning money, and perhaps, much more laborious and painful.

The kindergarten spirit of playing at education pervades our colleges. Most college students get their first taste of studying as really hard work, requiring mental strain and continual labor, only when they enter law school or medical school. Those who do not enter the professions find out what working at anything really means only when they start to earn a living—that is, if four years of college has not softened them to the point which makes them unemployable. But even those who somehow recover from a college loaf and accept the responsibilities and obligations involved in earning a living—even those who may gradually come to realize the connection between work, pain, and earning—seldom if ever make a similar connection of pain and work with learning. "Learning" is what they did in college, and they know that that had very little to do with pain and work.

Now the attitude of the various agencies of adult education is even more softminded—not just softhearted—about the large public they face, a public which has had all sorts and amounts of schooling. The trouble is not simply that this large public has been spoiled by whatever schooling it has had—spoiled in the double sense that it is unprepared to carry on its own self-education in adult life and that it is disinclined to suffer pains for the sake of learning. The trouble also lies in the fact that agencies of adult education baby the public even more than the schools coddle the children. They have turned the whole nation—so far as education is concerned—into a kindergarten. It must all be fun. It must all be entertaining. Adult learning must be made as effortless as possible—painless, devoid of oppressive burdens and of irksome tasks. Adult men and women, because they are adult, can be expected to suffer pains of all sorts in the course of their daily occupations, whether domestic or commercial. We do not try to deny the fact that taking care of a household or holding down a job is necessarily burdensome, but we somehow still believe that the goods to be obtained,

the worldly goods of wealth and comfort, are worth the effort. In any case, we know they cannot be obtained without effort. But we try to shut our eyes to the fact that improving one's mind or enlarging one's spirit is, if anything, more difficult than solving the problems of subsistence; or, maybe, we just do not believe that knowledge and wisdom are worth the effort.

We try to make adult education as exciting as a football game, as relaxing as a motion picture, and as easy on the mind as a quiz program. Otherwise, we will not be able to draw the big crowds, and the important thing is to draw large numbers of people into this educational game, even if after we get them there we leave them untransformed.

What lies behind my remark is a distinction between two views of education. In one view, education is something externally added to a person, as his clothing and other accoutrements. We cajole him into standing there willingly while we fit him; and in doing this we must be guided by his likes and dislikes, by his own notion of what enhances his appearance. In the other view, education is an interior transformation of a person's mind and character. He is plastic material to be improved not according to his inclinations, but according to what is good for him. But because he is a living thing, and not dead clay, the transformation can be effected only through his own activity. Teachers of every sort can help, but they can only help in the process of learning that must be dominated at every moment by the activity of the learner. And the fundamental activity that is involved in every kind of genuine learning is intellectual activity, the activity generally known as thinking. Any learning which takes place without thinking is necessarily of the sort I have called external and additive—learning passively acquired, for which the common name is "information." Without thinking, the kind of learning which transforms a mind, gives it new insights, enlightens it, deepens understanding, elevates the spirit simply cannot occur.

Anyone who has done any thinking, even a little bit, knows that it is painful. It is hard work—in fact the very hardest that human beings are ever called upon to do. It is fatiguing, not refreshing. If allowed to follow the path of least resistance, no one would ever think. To make boys and girls, or men and women, think—and through thinking really undergo the transformation of learning—educational agencies of every sort must work against the grain, not with it. Far from trying to make the whole process painless from beginning to end, we must promise them the pleasure of achievement as a reward to be reached only through travail. I am not here concerned with the oratory that may have to be employed to persuade Americans that wisdom is a greater good than wealth, and hence worthy of greater effort. I am only insisting that there is no royal road, and that our present educational policies, in adult education especially, are fraudulent. We are pretending to give them something which is described in the advertising as very valuable, but which we promise they can get at almost no expense to them.

Not only must we honestly announce that pain and work are the irremovable and irreducible accompaniments of genuine learning, not only must we leave entertainment to the entertainers and make education a task and not a game, but we must have no fears about what is "over the public's head." Whoever passes by what is over his head condemns his head to its present low altitude; for nothing can elevate a mind except what is over its head; and that elevation is not accomplished by capillary attraction, but only by the hard work of climbing up the ropes, with sore hands and aching muscles. The school system which caters to the median child, or worse, to the lower half of the class; the lecturer before adults—and they are legion—who talks down to his audience; the radio or television program which tries to hit the lowest common denominator of popular receptivity—all these defeat the prime purpose of education by taking people as they are and leaving them just there.

The best adult education program that has ever existed in this country was one which endured for a short time under the auspices of the People's Institute in New York, when Everett Dean Martin was its director, and Scott Buchanan his assistant. It had two parts: one consisted of lectures which, so far as possible, were always aimed over the heads of the audience; the other consisted of seminars in which adults were helped in the reading of great books—the books that are over everyone's head. The latter part of the program is still being carried on by the staff of St. John's College in the cities near Annapolis; and we are conducting four such groups in the downtown college of the University of Chicago. I say that this is the only adult education

that is genuinely educative simply because it is the only kind that requires activity, makes no pretense about avoiding pain and work, and is always working with materials well over everybody's head.

I do not know whether radio or television will ever be able to do anything genuinely educative. I am sure it serves the public in two ways: by giving them amusement and by giving them information. It may even, as in the case of its very best "educational" programs, stimulate some persons to do something about their minds by pursuing knowledge and wisdom in the only way possible—the hard way. But what I do not know is whether it can ever do what the best teachers have always done and must now be doing; namely, to present programs which are genuinely educative, as opposed to merely stimulating, in the sense that following them requires the listener to be active not passive, to think rather than remember, and to suffer all the pains of lifting himself up by his own bootstraps. Certainly so long as the so-called educational directors of our leading networks continue to operate on their present false principles, we can expect nothing. So long as they confuse education and entertainment, so long as they suppose that learning can be accomplished without pain, so long as they persist in bringing everything and everybody down to the lowest level on which the largest audience can be reached, the educational programs offered on the air will remain what they are today—shams and delusions.

It may be, of course, that the radio and television, for economic reasons must, like the motion picture, reach with certainty so large an audience that the networks cannot afford even to experiment with programs which make no pretense to be more palatable and pleasurable than real education can be. It may be that the radio and television cannot be expected to take a sounder view of education and to undertake more substantial programs than now prevail among the country's official leaders in education—the heads of our school system, of our colleges, of our adult education associations. But, in either case, let us not fool ourselves about what we are doing. "Education" all wrapped up in attractive tissue is the gold brick that is being sold in America today on every street corner. Everyone is selling it, everyone is buying it, but no one is giving or getting the real thing because the real thing is always hard to give or get. Yet the real thing can be made generally available if the obstacles to its distribution are honestly recognized. Unless we acknowledge that every invitation to learning can promise pleasure only as the result of pain, can offer achievement only at the expense of work, all of our invitations to learning, in school and out, whether by books, lectures, or radio and television programs will be as much buncombe as the worst patent medicine advertising, or the campaign pledge to put two chickens in every pot.