

AIMS OF A UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

DAVID A. STEWART*

THE fundamental aim of the Arts student is to learn how to become human, a process that terminates only with death. Thinking, feeling and doing are the three essential activities of human beings, variously expressed in different persons according to their insight, humour and judgment.

Education in the Arts course, and indeed in most university courses, might be said to be primarily concerned with insight, most in need of a sense of humour, and pointless without a concept of value. Insight is not necessarily gained in an Arts course—many wise men have not felt an urge to take a B.A.—but we believe that for the majority of us insight is sharpened by the experience gathered in a study of literature, of the scientific and social disciplines, of philosophy, of art and of music.

Of all education, technical and general, it may be fair to say that learning is relating. The undergraduate is to subordinate all specific motives, such as job-seeking, social prestige and academic honours, to the central aim of growing human, developing personality, deepening perception, and broadening judgment in a dynamic network of relatable knowledge. Requisite to this serious ideal is the fostering of a sense of humour. Nothing so well shatters pious dignity and vain pretensions, twin enemies of clear vision, as the ability to laugh at oneself.

In relating university disciplines to one another and to life, the student is guided by some philosophy of value. It is hard to think of a concept of value more basic than a faith in life; indeed, without this faith our whole inquiry would be irrelevant. This faith in life presupposes the prizing of human dignity, the respecting of persons, of the self and of others. We believe this faith in life to be the democratic faith.

The Arts training, therefore, is general. We do not understand it to be a technique for mastering particular areas of knowledge, nor do we say that it is a "higher" education in the sense that provokes an invidious distinction between a privileged class and the masses. Though we appreciate, we do not

*Professor of Philosophy in the University of New Brunswick; graduate of Dalhousie University.

quite endorse the aphorism "the liberal B.A. trains a man for nothing and prepares him for everything." We say simply that the undergraduate is potentially a human being who is alive, we hope, even under the discipline of his course. His time at university is a meaningful chapter in the human adventure, and therefore his training is a phase of the art of living itself. We wish to avoid the attitude that in these troubled times he is being armed against the slings and arrows of outrageous rivalries, or groomed for a safe spot in an aristocratic society. We regard the art of living, not as a facile technique in how to win friends and tip the servants gracefully, but a realistic insight into what it is to become a human being in a democratic society.

By developing this insight the Arts Faculty may help the student to achieve these objectives:¹

1. To stimulate traffic in a "free market of ideas." President Conant of Harvard stresses that at no time in history has the need been so great as it is now to examine freely and fairly all claims to the solution of human ills. Thomas Carlyle's remark "The healthy know not of their health, but only the sick" is a pertinent commentary on the state of human society to-day. A clear view of rival political philosophies is the right of every student in a democratic university.

2. To develop for the regulation of the student's personal and civic life a code of behavior based on ethical principles consistent with democratic ideals. Rather than run the danger of becoming a self-righteous patron prescribing rules of conduct, the professor can stimulate the principles of honesty, kindly feeling and fair play by sharing, not judging, the student's problem.

3. To participate actively as an informed and responsible citizen in solving the social, economic and political problems of one's community, province and nation. Much here may be done by setting up a common front in the social sciences. Professors of ethics, sociology, psychology, economics and political science can join forces in junior and senior seminars to provide a rounded, realistic view of the total problem under discussion.

4. To recognize the interdependence of the different peoples of the world and the student's personal responsibility for fostering international understanding and peace.

5. To understand the common phenomena in the student's physical environment, to apply habits of scientific thought

¹ Points 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 are drawn from *Higher Education for American Democracy*, Harpers, 1948.

to both personal and civic problems, and to appreciate the implications of scientific discoveries for human welfare.

6. To understand the ideas of others and to express one's own effectively. The three concepts of *measure*, *communication* and *relation* take one out of the subjective and the self-centred, and reveal that the prizing of life is not reserved to any particular group, creed or race.

7. To attain a satisfactory emotional and social adjustment. This may be done without slavishly conforming to the *status quo*. A student can be consistently related, without conforming, to the culture in which he finds himself.

8. To maintain and improve one's health and to co-operate actively and intelligently in solving community health problems.

9. To understand literature, art, music and other cultural activities as expressions of personal and social experience, and to participate in some form of creative activity. Instruction in the speaking, writing and reading of English is the basic need of every undergraduate. The exploration of other languages follows. Art and music, created or appreciated, are needed to supplement the emotional experience partly supplied through literature.

10. To acquire the knowledge and attitudes basic to a satisfying family life. All professors of the Arts Faculty may well contribute to this objective, but it is a challenge directed especially to the psychologist and sociologist.

11. To choose a socially useful and personally satisfying vocation that will permit one to use to the full one's particular interests and abilities. This important objective calls for the assistance of the Deans or of a well-qualified counsellor. Whoever is selected for this very practical need should have the full co-operation of all his colleagues.

12. To acquire and use the skills and habits involved in critical and constructive thinking. Latin, Greek, mathematics and formal logic have proved to be effective instruments for training the power to think. But there is no reason to believe that we should subscribe dogmatically to these four. Almost any discipline, well conducted, may permit sound thinking.

13. To promote adult education programmes, to persuade the student to foster intellectual and spiritual interest in all persons qualified, but unable, to attend university. The great paradox in general education in our time and society is that people who have to make crucial responsible decisions are denied access to opportunities for enlightenment available to

students in universities, young people who have limited influence in the shaping of societies. This paradox may be met head-on by a vigorous program of adult education.

14. To try to bring to the university well-qualified students hampered by financial difficulties. Faculty and students can encourage such people through moral support, and urge the government and private benefactors, through intelligent persuasion, to increase grants, scholarships and low interest loans in the belief that education is the best investment in our culture.

15. To cultivate religious understanding in oneself and in others. If one thing distinguishes the democratic peoples of the world more than all else, it is the belief in a reality deeper than anything that human beings can scientifically create or logically explain. The meaning of life, in this belief, is not to be exhausted by any one of its predicates, such as material well-being, pleasure, power or a well-run society, any more than a motor car can be defined by its color, weight or speed. To equate life with some portion or instrument of it is to define the whole by the part. Religion, a "binding together," has never been so necessary as it is to-day, an age in which a part here or a part there contends for the governance of the whole. To be adventurous yet humble and reverent in our endless speculation about the meaning of life and of the universe is essentially what it means to be human. Personal privacy and "inwardness," respected by religious insight, are needed in a free society to balance the urge, to-day, for mass action and group ecstasy.

Throughout these objectives of insight may be noted the twin aims of *personal growth* and *social participation*, of which the basic skills are reading, observing, listening, talking, writing, doing and making, applied in the study of natural science, philosophy, history and social science, literature, art and music.

The traditional conflict in education between those who defend the pursuit of truth for its own sake and those who stress the preparation of students for their life work is solved in the thesis of personal growth. The Ivory Tower clique and the champions of vocation, both of whom have produced misfits in those who are lost outside the library and in those unable to cope with problems outside their "field," have failed to deal successfully with the central need of students, the urge to live fully and well rather than to become intellectually excellent and mechanically skilful. Intellectual excellence and mechanical skill are obviously to be desired, but only as the tools for

rich, mature living. It may not be too simple-minded to say the obvious: it is better to be fully than to be partially alive.

In both the formalist and progressive principles of education, the rational faculties tend to be exploited and emotional tones subdued. The great books programme of the formalists stresses the traditional ideas of impersonal subject matter, while Deweyites stress pragmatic activity based on scientific method. Each has its place, but neither can be represented as satisfactory in a world in which tradition totters and pragmatic adjustment means conforming to confusion. Where can a man to-day feel sufficient in his library or in his job without serious thought, as to his personal destiny and the fate of his troubled culture? To try to solve the problems of human destiny, the university should be primarily a community of human beings, secondarily, a repository of books, and lastly a workshop. In a democratic community, the development of personal relations is served by the basic skills in the belief that personal dignity is to be prized above all human ideals. The principle of educating a man to live in a particular time or place, to adjust him exclusively to any particular environment is foreign to the concept of personal growth as treated in this thesis. The defect of the uneducated man is his restriction to a habitual routine, and his discomfort in anything but an instinctual and ordered pattern. This is not to ignore the fact of differences in habits and customs and the cultural advantage of tradition. It is rather to point out that the educated man will be able to respond to change and growth while respecting individual differences and treasuring his cultural heritage. In the cultivation of personality, the situation, ideally, should be the same for all men in all societies. We are assured by the psychologists that desire, emotion and intellect are inseparably fused in human behavior, so that to develop them in the interests of the individual is at the same time to develop them in the interests of society, for society, when it is more than an abstract term, is a community of human beings who differ, yet understand one another. We should, then consider material prosperity, peace, justice and virtue as no more than abstract fictions when they are not the means of producing personal growth.

Personal growth requires, besides insight, a sense of humour, especially the ability to laugh at oneself, and a sense of value. "Life," George Santayana tells us, "is tragic in its fate and comic in its existence." This we may well know, but we often forget

that the funniest thing of all is ourselves. To be able to laugh at oneself, to disarm the pose, to come forth "without wax" is to know the best antidote to anxiety and tragic fate that can be conceived by all our scientific therapies taken together.

As to a concept of value, it is clear that the one posited by this thesis is self-realization, an intrinsic value not to be exhausted by science or the soundest type of social organization. Happiness, justice and social well-being are not spread by disciplines but by people. The tradition behind this concept of self-realization is Greek philosophy, Judaism and Christianity whose flexible fusion is the core of the democratic faith; this core, this ancient good, may be organically related to the body of contemporary social science without losing its identity.

Though particular values always arise in persons and though obviously a man cannot prize life apart from his experience, the three concepts of *measure*, *relation* and *communication* save one from the confusion of gross relativism and subjective taste. Measure yields logical principles and scientific method; relation exposes the Lockean fallacy of autonomies and reveals the need to relate thinking, feeling and acting in a creative synthesis; communication is the spread of intelligent thinking, feeling and acting.

This thesis repudiates any claim that autonomous interests or disciplines can solve human problems. The "nothing-but" philosophies are self-destructive:

Bergson and Pragmatists, Adler and Freud, the Dialectical Materialism boys and the Behaviorists—all tootle their variations on it. Mind is nothing but a tool for making tools; controlled by unconscious forces, either sexual or aggressive; the product of social and economic pressures: a bundle of conditioned reflexes.

All quite true, as far as it goes, but false if it goes no farther. For, obviously, if mind is only some kind of nothing-but, none of its affirmations can make any claim to general validity. But all nothing-but philosophies make such claims. Therefore they can't be true: for if they were true, that would be the proof that they were false.¹

But the tendency to abandon oneself to science is no worse than the romantic pessimism of those who utterly disdain science and relegate human destiny to the care of a "Wholly-Other," as modern neo-orthodoxy would have us do. This thesis, therefore, urges reunion of science and human purpose, lament-

2. Huxley, A. *Time Must Have a Stop.*

ably separated in the long sequence from Descartes through Kant, Kierkegaard, Hegel, Marx and Freud and the Logical Positivists, for whom either reason or emotion, science or value was supreme; all of them failed to envisage the complete man, the forgotten man of Christ, Moses and Socrates.

The sciences, in relating themselves to one another, may agree that their common aim is to understand man as well as the universe; only in this way can the *relation* between the two be fully understood. The related elements and conditions of university disciplines will enrich but not exhaust human experience; honesty, aspiration, achievement, love and art are not produced by science but by persons. The person grows and creates: in his growth and creation he finds his values and the meaning of life; if he does not find them, nothing else can find them for him, though external aids may prove helpful and stimulating. If men do, indeed, shirk the responsibility of their own decisions and values, other forces are eager to take over and direct their life through legislation and law: but the blind, unreasoning adherence to state or group compulsion destroys choice, and to destroy choice is to kill freedom, and to kill freedom is to barter life for mere survival.

The seven basic skills are not to be pursued separately; a little thought on any one of them reveals its interfusion with the others. Why do we so often ignore this simple fact when we come to apply the basic skills in university disciplines? Why do university departments proceed as though they were unaware of one another's existence? And how can such attitudes fail to impress the students who are under their influence? Far worse, however, than the lack of relatedness among the university disciplines is the absence of the relation of any one of them to the life the student eventually leads in the world beyond college walls. It is of these errors in our system that Mr. Herbert Read writes:

I have found that most people whose minds have responded to a formal university training are like monoliths. They are bodies at rest. They have acquired during their university years a choice armory of information, and they assume that it will serve them for the rest of their lives. Many of them sell their classics to the second hand bookseller before they "come down" from Oxford or Cambridge; or if they keep them, it is for the sake of sentimental associations. They are stored in a glazed book-case behind the "chesterfield", with a college shield on the wall above and a tobacco jar on the ledge. In a few years the once

proud possessors of a first in Greats will have forgotten all but a few tags of his Greek and Latin, and will be reduced to defending a classical education for its supposed disciplinary virtues. He can boast of "having done" his Plato or his Aristotle, his Aeschylus or his Euripides: but these are names now, mingled with his sentimental recollections of professors and dons. They had not become a part of his life, a continuing influence and ever-present inspiration. They and the whole galaxy of classical poets and philosophers are dead and distant worlds.³

All this is no more the proper aim of the Arts course than a "realistic" obsession with the professions and skilled occupations.

The training of the ability to relate is the method urged in this thesis, not only to relate university disciplines to one another, but to the problems of living as well. There is no economics without a social philosophy; there is no sociology without an ethical and a psychological basis: geography and history that are not mere records always refer to human purpose and value. Political science assumes certain principles of economics, sociology and psychology. Education, psychology and philosophy operate in vacuums when they do not find material and application in all the others. Language, painting, music and science may well be represented as having disciplinary or intrinsic value, with a beauty and mental satisfaction all their own; but this value, beauty and spiritual joy will cease when the arts and sciences are cut off from personal meaning and fail to link the printed page, the picture, the orchestration, or the experiment with living experience. We need not be pragmatists or utilitarians to insist that even intrinsic values must be vital.

Those disciplines can be brought together if only we admit the same common-sense inter-relatedness among Arts courses as exists in the seven basic skills of which they are areas of application. It is next the task of both teacher and student to relate their findings to the problems of their lives, as individuals and as members of society. Personal growth, thus conceived, can hardly be accused of producing either "monoliths" or robots, for there is no place for them in a lively interbreeding of fruitful learning and intelligent living. The educated man, enlightened by the disciplines, in which he has cultivated the basic skills common to all human beings, will see the unity of his training in the development of his personality; he sees not only the personal interpretation he has given them and to which he is entitled as an individual; he sees also his relation to society,

3. *Annals of Experience.*

of which he forms a part, and the common rights and duties that all human beings share in that society. It therefore matters little whether one starts with the organic view of society or the social contract view. Broadly conceived, one view will be seen to complement the other. The social contract may be first in point of time, but the organic view must ultimately be sighted unless we prefer to live under the law of the jungle and forget our cultural heritage. The social contract theory alone, uninspired by insights into organic relationships in the universe, is the power philosophy of Hobbes, Nietzsche, Machiavelli, Marx and Hitler, the strident voice of destructive power, not the persuasive voice of productive living, mutual support and kindly feeling.

Along these lines, the university can produce graduates in Arts who will have a real voice in the conduct of human affairs; they will be people who, drawn into communication by a common interest in the social sciences, will mould a creative society rather than puppets whose training becomes nostalgia in a foreign land or a tool in the hands of ruthless power. They will be people, too, conscious of the joy of intrinsic values, personally to be treasured and not to be bartered for animal survival alone.

REFERENCES

- Higher Education for American Democracy* (A report of the Presidents Commission on Higher Education) Harpers, 1948.
- Program of the Basic Arts*—Dean Barden, Cleveland College, 1948.
- Psychology and Social Purpose*—William Line, presidential address, annual meeting of the Canadian Psychological Association, Montreal, May, 1945.
- Education in a Divided World*—J. B. Conant, Harvard University Press, 1948.
- The Universities in Transformation*—Adolf Lowe, Sheldon Press, 1940.
- The Function of the University*—R. S. K. Seeley, Oxford University Press, 1948.
- Universities Quarterly*—Vol. I—Nos. 2 and 3 (Extracts on Harvard, Columbia and Yale reports on liberal education; also review of Ortega's *Mission of a University*).