

MARK WILLIAM ROCHE

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*Why Choose  
the Liberal Arts?*

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*With gratitude and thanks to  
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also involves having employees whose education has encouraged them to develop a moral compass and ask searching questions. In an age that has suffered tremendous financial crises—partly as a result of a failure of managers and leaders in business as well as in government to grasp the larger picture—the liberal arts are more essential than ever.

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# I

## Engaging the Great Questions

A liberal arts education can be defended first and foremost as an end in itself; that is, it is of value for its own sake independently of its preparing students for eventual employment. As an end in itself, a liberal arts education contrasts strongly with the increasingly common notion, informed by the credentialism and achievement ethos of our era, of education as primarily a means to an end. Indeed, a recent study has shown that “students and parents overwhelmingly believe the reason to go to college is to prepare for a prosperous career” (Hersh, “Intentions” 20). In the wake of contemporary society’s elevation of *instrumental rationality* (how do I achieve a given end?), we notice an increasing neglect of *value rationality* (which ends should I pursue?). A liberal arts education asks questions about those higher ends, those ultimate values. Not only does it help us discover intrinsic goods, it is itself an intrinsic good. Liberal arts students gain insight into what has supertemporal value, they explore the challenges specific to our age, and they learn to express wonder and awe. Becoming engaged with a range of

disciplines and questions is its own reward. A classic and compelling defense of this ideal of learning for its own sake was given by John Henry Cardinal Newman, who argued that “there is a knowledge worth possessing for what it is, and not merely for what it does” (86). Newman states further that “there is a Knowledge, which is desirable, though nothing come of it, as being of itself a treasure, and a sufficient remuneration of years of labour” (86).

Through the liberal arts, students explore profound and evocative questions, engaging issues that appeal to their curiosity and desire for knowledge and deepening the restless urge to see how ideas fit together and relate to life. Great questions naturally form themselves in the minds of young persons. I once spent a day exploring great questions with a group of advanced high school students in Germany. The conversation was part of an endeavor, undertaken by German philosophers, to understand what deep questions animate young persons. When I asked the students what philosophical questions most engaged them, they named quite a few, but two sets of questions dominated. The first set circled around God. After my original concept of God as an old man with a beard, sitting above a cloud, has been shattered, can I still believe in God? Is there a concept of God that is compatible with reason? And if a more mature concept of God is possible, what would it look like? Such searching questions are almost inevitable for young persons who have been raised in a religion and then encounter, for any number of reasons, doubts about their earlier, more naive concepts of God. The second set of questions revealed an innate interest in the natural world and a fascination with the place of the individual within the almost unfathomable vastness of the universe: Does space end, or is it infinite? Has time always existed, or was there a beginning? If there was a beginning, what existed beforehand, and if time has existed forever, how did we ever get to the present moment?

Those were not their only questions. They also wanted to know: What are the defining characteristics of our age and our generation? What virtues are most needed today? Why is there evil, and why must innocent persons suffer? What is the meaning of death? Are mathematical truths something we invent, or are they somehow already present, simply waiting to be discovered? How do we know that there are normative truths? Are there philosophical concepts that can help us in our conflicts with our parents and with others? Do we possess free will, or is everything determined? Questions such as these are often met with unease by parents. The questions are complex, and meaningful answers are not easy. Also, our broader society lacks a rich culture of conversation that would embrace, rather than cast aside, such questions. But complex questions such as these are essential to a deeper understanding of the world and of ourselves.

Even as students bring great questions with them to college, the university cultivates in them a curiosity about questions they had yet to consider: Why are there wars? What is the highest good? Is it better to suffer or to commit an injustice? What are the best conditions for human flourishing? What are the defining characteristics of the just state, and how might we most effectively change our state to approximate that ideal? What are the great artworks of the ages? How do planets form, and how did life on earth arise? Is there, or was there ever, life elsewhere? Why is there anything at all, and why not nothing? Do science and religion necessarily conflict? What were the great turning points in history? Why do some countries develop successfully and others stagnate? What are our generation’s most pressing moral obligations? Which, if any, of the world’s religions are true? Do animals have consciousness? How does the mind work? None of these questions permit simple answers, and they do not all have practical value in the truncated way in which we tend to define practical value, but they do *matter* to students. To

understand our world as it is and to understand our world as it should be are values in and of themselves.

What do students explore in the individual disciplines of the arts and sciences? In mathematics, students study patterns, both empirical and imagined. They learn how to explore numbers and shapes, to develop mathematical proofs, and to perform differentiation and integration, which are essential for measuring motion and change. They become familiar with the fundamentals of probability and randomness, learn methods of statistical analysis, and become astute evaluators of quantitative evidence. Through their study of logic, they advance their capacity for clear thinking, and in their exploration of both rigorous theory and wide-ranging applications, they begin to see in mathematics a discipline of beauty and wonder.

Students obtain through the natural sciences a richer comprehension of the world. They learn to observe natural phenomena with a keen and inquisitive eye. They gain an understanding of the universe, its evolution and structure; the fundamental laws and phenomena that underlie both physical and biological systems; the natural history of our planet, solar system, and galaxy; the composition and properties of elemental forms of matter; and the principles governing the activities of living systems in relationship to their environments. They learn to apply reason to evidence, to form concepts that relate to experience, and to induce laws from the sequence of phenomena. They develop a hunger for data, and they learn to test their theories against reality and to see in reality beauty and grandeur. In addition, they grasp the ways in which scientific principles and insights help to inform important issues of public policy and human welfare, and they become adept at assessing arguments that are based on scientific claims.

In psychology, students explore the human mind. They study the ways in which both biology and environment influ-

ence thought and behavior. They explore the development of the human being, from infancy to old age. They examine questions of perception, cognition, memory, and learning as well as decision making and problem solving. They develop and assess theories of personality and of interpersonal relationships, and they analyze individual and collective identity crises. They seek to understand, prevent, and alleviate mental health problems and to know the conditions necessary for human flourishing.

Through their study of the social sciences, students learn to analyze and appreciate the diverse ways in which social and political structures are organized. They achieve a greater awareness of the common and distinct characteristics of peoples and cultures. They study human development across time and cultures, cultivating a richer sense of the motives, attitudes, and values that animate individuals and societies. They explore the ways in which social structures influence human behavior. They devise categories for understanding the complex relationships, including the economic forces, that shape our world, and they learn to approach problems and questions with formal and statistical models. They investigate forms of conflict and power as well as diverse styles of leadership. They study the varied impact of scientific and technological change. They learn how to sift and evaluate the wealth of information and competing claims that crowd us on a daily basis, and they learn how to apply quantitative and qualitative methodologies to help analyze and solve complex problems.

Through the study of history, students cultivate an appreciation of diverse contexts and traditions, a sense of the complexity of causal forces as well as of the great debates of the ages and the dialectic of continuity and change. They learn what is involved in the analysis and interpretation of the past, including the sifting of a wide variety of documents and the close study of pertinent materials. They develop an empathy for and an appreciation of what is different. They learn to understand how contemporary challenges relate to, and derive from, earlier

developments, and through their knowledge of other eras, they gain a wider horizon and thus a richer perspective on contemporary challenges.

An experience of the arts, which appeals to our imagination, emotions, and intellect, makes visible to us the multiple riches of the senses and enables students to grow in self-awareness, creativity, and sensitivity. Through their exploration of the arts, students gain a greater understanding of nonverbal communication. The arts help students recognize the gap between the world as it is and the world as it ought to be while at the same time reconciling them to what is good and beautiful about the world they have inherited. Art assists the individual's search for edification and contributes to the collective identity of a culture. Indeed, art offers a window not only onto the collective identity of a given culture but also onto the complexity and dignity of humankind and indeed onto the transcendent itself. Participation in art gives students all of these qualities as well as experience in both disciplined collaboration and creative innovation.

The study of language and literature cultivates in students verbal precision as well as a sensitivity to language and its potential for complexity and elegance. It provides them with an awareness of rhetoric and style. It educates them to think more imaginatively, to see the world through metaphors and stories. The reading of literature gives students an appreciation for form, an understanding of, and empathy with, a wide range of human experience, and a nuanced grasp of hermeneutics, or the art of interpretation. It also alerts them to the persuasive and manipulative power of language. The study of other languages and literatures offers students encounters with the diversity and magnificence of human expression and affords them new insights into their own language and culture. It gives them experience with translation as well as a greater social sensibility and an awareness of another culture's history and civilization. In addition, it allows students to communicate with others across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

The study of religion offers students insight into religious artifacts, rituals, and texts and engages them in the complex interplay of faith and reason and the search for religious wisdom. At its depth, the study of religion is not only disinterested, allowing for objective exploration of the subtleties of religious practices and differences among religions, but also existential and formative, allowing students, within the paradigm of theology, to recognize a link between God and truth, to grow in understanding of the mysteries of their faith, and to experience a formation that speaks to the whole spirit oriented toward God in intellect and love.

Students of philosophy experience the joy of asking and exploring questions concerning the opportunities, obligations, and ultimate meaning of human life. They analyze methods of understanding reality as well as the processes and conditions of understanding itself. Philosophy gives students insight into the whole of knowledge and into the presuppositions and ends of the diverse disciplines. It teaches them how to justify correct positions and criticize false opinions, to uncover flaws in assumptions and arguments. It encourages them to relate all aspects of life to the principles of ethics. Beyond giving students tools for analysis and judgment, philosophy cultivates the love of wisdom and teaches them that thought is its own end.

Liberal arts students are encouraged to develop not only an awareness of knowledge intrinsic to their major but a recognition of that discipline's position within the larger mosaic of knowledge. The college or university citizen is invested in the search for not only specialized knowledge but also the relation of the diverse parts of knowledge to one another. To be liberally educated involves knowing the relative position of the little that one knows within the whole of knowledge (Höslé, "Great Books?"). Mathematics helps us see the basic structures and complex patterns of the universe, and the sciences help us understand and analyze the laws that animate the natural world, the inner world, and the social world. History opens a window onto the development of the natural and social worlds. The

intellectual fruits of art and literature, the wisdom of religion, and the ultimate questions of philosophy illuminate for us the world as it should be. In essence, then, the arts and sciences explore the world as it is and the world as it should be. While not every class at every college helps students grasp the higher principles articulated above, the ideal liberal arts classroom does more than focus on specialized questions and teach technical knowledge; it relates those specific pursuits to the overarching purpose of a discipline and of intellectual inquiry in general. An ideal liberal arts experience also ensures that students are familiar with the questions raised in disciplines beyond their own major or concentration.

A goal of every university is to explore the unity of knowledge across disciplines. A legitimate concern that arises when developing countries move away from the concept of the university and instead create focused institutions of business and engineering is the loss of this unity of knowledge, even as a regressive ideal. Wisdom is the ability to understand and interpret individual phenomena from the perspective of the whole. An institution of higher education that does not include diverse disciplines or a theory of learning that brackets overarching or ultimate questions is not well suited to the cultivation of wisdom, which is no less necessary to address the challenges of our age than are particular technical skills.

One of the greatest joys of serving as dean was gaining an understanding of a full array of disciplines beyond my own. Each time a department was evaluated, each time a promotion and tenure case was reviewed, each time a potential faculty member was interviewed, an opportunity arose to learn about the recent developments in and the most engaging questions of a given discipline. What are some of the most counter-intuitive insights ever discovered by psychologists? In what ways has economics evolved in recent years? What are the most pressing methodological debates in history? What are the most important unsolved problems in philosophy? Why should a student

major in English? What are the best strategies for teaching painting? Each field contributes in fascinating ways to the full mosaic of knowledge. These arts and sciences disciplines differ from fields, such as architecture, business, engineering, law, and medicine, whose goals are associated less with knowledge for its own sake and more with knowledge as it is applied to activity in the world.

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In some arts and sciences disciplines we recognize great historical progress; in others we develop extraordinary admiration for past achievements. Whereas science is almost always measured in terms of advancements, in the arts and humanities many peerless works derive from earlier eras. We do not today seek to understand the world via eighteenth-century biology, but we don't hesitate to read Plato and Sophocles, Dante and Goethe to engage in rich intellectual and aesthetic experiences and to understand the world better. Few would argue that such writers have somehow been superseded. The distinction between science as necessarily progressive and the arts and humanities as not participating in progress in quite the same way was one of the principal reasons for the historical separation of the arts and sciences in the seventeenth century (Kristeller 526). Some of the prerequisites for greatness in the arts and humanities—emotional richness, the cultivation of diverse virtues, breadth of knowledge, and formal mastery—may diminish through the ages. Certainly, within the arts and humanities we recognize the introduction of new forms and more contemporary themes. However, the greatness of a work is measured not simply by its formal innovation or the local currency of its theme.

This lack of progress is not necessarily to be lamented on the contrary; it means that the past is alive. We are not alone in our age but can find enriching perspectives in the past, which thereby becomes very much a part of the present. We have

reason to look toward other ages with great humility as we reflect on great works, whose forms embody their messages and in which the parts and whole reinforce one another in organic and inexhaustible meaning.

A humbling sense of the value of the past is essential for us as we recognize that not everything can be addressed via advances in instrumental or technical rationality. The balanced self requires not only rationality, analysis, and discipline, but also playfulness, sympathy, and beauty. Today, philosophical synthesis and reflection on eternal values have for the most part given way to specialization and utility. The pragmatic concept of truth as utility is intimately connected to the reign of instrumental reason, which usurps the traditional hierarchy of *theoria* (contemplation) and *poiesis* (production). In an era that elevates the act of making, we tend to neglect the value of contemplation and the leisure that makes it possible. The British philosopher Bernard Bosanquet captures the concept well, writing that “leisure” was for the Greeks

the expression of the highest moments of the mind. It was not labor; far less was it recreation. It was that employment of the mind in which by great thoughts, by art and poetry which lift us above ourselves, by the highest exertion of the intelligence, as we should add, by religion, we obtain occasionally a sense of something that cannot be taken from us, a real oneness and centre in the universe; and which makes us feel that whatever happens to the present form of our life the ephemeral personality, life is yet worth living because it has a real and sensible contact with something of eternal value. (1: 488)

For the early Christians this ancient concept still held sway and became in their eyes *otium sanctum*, or sacred leisure. Augustine writes: “the love of truth seeks sacred leisure” (*City of God* XIX.19, translation modified).

In modernity leisure seems to disappear. Technical inventions and eventually social techniques increase the pace of life. With technology the world moves more quickly. Not by chance Tommaso Campanella’s seventeenth-century utopia *City of the Sun* concludes with a description of a new invention followed by the lack of time to continue more leisurely discussion. Dialogue is not all that is threatened. From television screens in waiting rooms to cell phones, iPods, and BlackBerryes on the streets, meaningful solitude, which allows us to gain distance from the distractions and clichés of the age, is threatened. Already in the seventeenth century, Pascal took note of the range of human distractions and the hesitancy to spend quiet time with one’s own thoughts (e.g., 70, 165, 168, 515); the developments of technology only exacerbate this universal temptation.

Contemporary society has little patience for the apparent idleness of learning for its own sake. Today we elevate an instrumental form of thinking, a means-end rationality, in ways that tend to obscure what is of intrinsic value. Ironically, means-end thinking does not lead to happiness or well being. Happiness is not something that can be bought, purchased, sought; it comes to one with meaningful values as a gift. In addition, the elements of spontaneity and vitality, play and tranquility, which also belong to happiness, are neglected to the very extent that instrumental reason is elevated. Moreover, when reflection on how to reach certain ends becomes supreme, it easily overshadows the question, which ends should I seek to achieve.

In “The Organization Kid,” David Brooks underscores the ways in which contemporary students view college as a full schedule of industrious activities and a means toward further advancement. Rightly understood, however, a liberal arts education is more than a means to an end; it is a dose of *otium* (leisure) in a world driven by speed and utility. To devote one’s time to exploring the great questions is not to negotiate the automatic rungs of the ladder of success, but to step out, pause, and deliberate. The origin of the word “school” or Latin “*scola*”



derives from the Greek term for leisure (*scholē*). This is not leisure in the sense that most Americans think of leisure. It represents the values of rest and focus in advance of, as a respite from, and as a reward for, daily work, and it is analogous to repose and silence as presuppositions for meaningful communion with God. When we are gripped by substantive works and great questions, we may be so immersed in them that we forget the external world. We lose ourselves in what we are reading and thinking. Through the leisure of contemplation we abandon the contingent and engage the eternal; we conceive of ourselves as more than merely material beings. Such joy does not, and need not, serve a purpose beyond itself. If we believe Aristotle, we do not rest primarily in order to work more effectively; on the contrary, the business of work serves the external purpose of giving us the conditions for leisure and repose, on which the joy of contemplation, our highest end, depends (*Nicomachean Ethics* X.7).

The Paul Klee oil painting I chose for the cover of this book conveys, I think, a suggestion of what we might understand by the ordered and energetic leisure of a liberal arts experience. Klee paints a magically alluring canvas of diverse and interesting paths. The soft light of Klee's painting receives a certain vibrancy from the dominance of two colors at opposite ends of the color wheel, orange and blue. Inspired by a southern landscape, the painting is nonetheless mediated, abstract, reflective. The painting has been officially rendered by the Paul Klee Foundation as "Highway and by-ways" (*Paul Klee* 5: 297), but a more literal translation of *Hauptweg und Nebenwege* would be "Main Path and Side Paths." Whereas highway connotes a busy road, the German *Weg* implies a more leisurely, pedestrian path. A path (or way) is of course not simply a topographic marker but a metaphor for the journey of a human life, a life path. Klee's painting evokes a colorful but cerebral mosaic of an ordered main path enriched by more freely drawn side paths, on which one can also meander and which help to form the pattern of

one's life journey. The main path brings us forward, but the various side paths do not detract from our journey; on the contrary, they enrich and help to constitute it. In studying such a painting, not unlike experiencing the liberal arts, we are invited to meander freely and reflectively over many colorful paths, which form a complex, contemplative pattern and which lead upward to an open and inviting horizon.

In our age, consumerism and pleonasty, the bondage of worldly things, tend to distract us from the heights of contemplation. One of the dominant goals of modernity has been to increase living standards and consumption; both of these factors have contributed to the definition of social success. As Arnold Gehlen notes in *Man in the Age of Technology*, anyone with historical consciousness cannot help but recognize that earlier generations had a much different view of ascetic values: "In any case the individual who renounced the goods of this earth always enjoyed a moral authority, whereas today he would be met with incomprehension" (78, translation modified). Asceticism, according to Gehlen, "adds to the integration and composure of the personality, and at the same time sharpens the social impulses and increases spiritual awareness" (106, translation modified). One need only think of Augustine's elevation of fasting as resistance to the temptations of the world—sensual pleasures, shallow curiosity, and wealth—that draw us away from our highest values or of Aristotle's and Aquinas's arguments that the contemplative person is more self-sufficient, closer to the divine, engaged in what is most distinctive about human beings, and more removed from our common preoccupation with externals.<sup>1</sup> What is distinctive about human beings is thought, love of wisdom, and love of one another in the contemplation of highest values, including goodness. An engagement with great questions and a love of thought allow all external trappings to recede in importance.

Ancient wisdom, the precursor of the liberal arts ideal, recommends less immersion in the instrumental so that we can

devote ourselves more fully to the enjoyment of what is already available: contemplation, dialogue, friendship, the exploration of nature, and the experience of beauty. We see in this ancient wisdom an elevation of the intrinsic over the instrumental. The idea extends from the ancients to the medieval Christian ideal of contemplating divine truth. Augustine, for example, suggests that “contemplation is promised us as the end of all activities and the eternal perfection of all joys,” and Aquinas argues that the “essence of happiness consists in an act of the intellect” and “in the contemplation of Divine things.”<sup>2</sup> Modern human beings are hardly happier than their premodern predecessors, and persons in developed countries cannot be said to exhibit greater happiness than those in developing countries. Indeed, emotional poverty and depression are greater challenges in developed countries than in developing countries. This puzzle may underscore the wisdom in the often forgotten idea that to satisfy merely material needs is, beyond a minimal level and in the end, not our most meaningful or highest goal.

Indeed, the college experience is for most people a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to engage great works, ask deep questions, foster one’s identity, develop relations with peers, and pursue overarching principles for the most part unhampered by the distractions of material needs and practical applications. Anthony Kronman notes that “college is a time to explore the meaning of life with an openness that becomes harder to preserve the further one enters into the responsibilities of adulthood, with their many entanglements” (*Education’s End* 40). In the years and decades after college, the number of external demands experienced by graduates increases and those who long for a rich intellectual life often lament the lack of time to pursue it (Karchadourian and Boli 279). Colleges seek not simply to please but also to educate, fostering an ethos that privileges the life of the mind and encouraging students to develop an identity by focusing on what is most essential. I can recall several occasions in college—whether it was working on an essay that fasci-

nated me, going for an outing with friends, or spending a day with fellow students and a faculty member—when I intentionally placed my watch in my pocket to ensure that I was not distracted by time, by thoughts of what I needed to do otherwise or next. The symbolism of that gesture reinforced in me the value of complete focus, and many of those times remain among my most memorable. Only rarely is an adult able to recapture that level of freedom.

The isolation and almost otherworldliness of campus life serve a positive purpose. To garner through engagement with the great questions a sense of the world as it should be, we need distance from the world as it is. College, with its focus not on the everyday, but on the transcendent, its engagement as much with the past as the present, its consideration as much of the other as of the here-and-now, is an oasis of difference. The identity of the college student and the identity of a college as an institution are not reducible to serving the immediate needs and tendencies of the age. The liberal arts student has the capacity, removed from the everyday world and detached from primarily materialist or realist pursuits, to assess that world, not with the lens of someone immersed in it and already committed to this or that cause, but with the perspective of someone disinterested, who can bring to the world a different and transcendent standard, who can examine what is in the light of what should be, in the light of truth and justice and not in the light of particular and embedded interests.

In accord with this view, liberal arts educators do not always cater to student preferences. For example, setting up television screens in every common room on campus, such that quiet spaces for study and discussion are difficult for students to find, would be incompatible with the higher purpose of college. The goal of seeking knowledge for its own sake also serves the purpose of helping students see the world differently from those immersed in the categories of the age; it helps students see the world as it might and should be. The countercultural nature of

a college education, its cultivation of knowledge and meaning for its own sake, is not a weakness, but the very strength of a college, for it offers students a vision of life that is contrary to what is already given to them and all around them. I do not mean to suggest that colleges are mistaken in engaging their surrounding communities or that students should be discouraged from performing welcome community service. On the contrary, I rejoice in these connections. I do, however, mean that colleges should proudly see themselves as countercultural in their elevation of questions that transcend the currency of the age; the engagement with such questions is one of their richest, if most undervalued, contributions to society.

Universities are a privileged space for thinking that is not immediately utilitarian but which in the end may have tremendous value; this long-range perspective is one of their most central missions and should not be truncated by external pressures for immediacy. Science must be given room for non-goal-oriented breakthroughs, which are often unpredictable. Pure science often has ripple effects that are discerned only over time, when a given application becomes apparent. To tie science and mathematics down to goal-oriented applications would be to reduce their potential for broader impact in the long run.

Moreover, colleges must continue to recognize the centrality of those disciplines, such as the arts and humanities, that will never generate significant external dollars but which are among the best poised to ask some of our deepest questions. These fields can create a space for the pursuit of topics that transcend a short-term payoff. Unfortunately, the autonomy of universities today runs up against what David Hollinger has aptly described as “the force fields of capital, where profit functions like gravity, where knowledge takes the form of property, where human energy is converted into money, and where values dance to the sound of markets” (80). Colleges that value learning for its own sake must forcefully communicate that an institution that preserves the great questions serves society in a way that is

different from, but no less valuable than, an institution that addresses a nation’s economic needs. When a college is asked to give an account of itself, it tends to focus, not surprisingly, given the economic paradigm of our age, on its economic impact on the larger community. A great college offers its graduates and its surrounding community more than the potential for greater income. By articulating that it offers more, it elevates the rhetoric of society, helping others to see that we are often beholden to mere means rather than to our highest ends. A campus that serves as a locus of meditation and serenity embodies and awakens this distinctive dimension of college life.

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To study in order to engage the great questions and not simply to make a living is to raise our ambitions for what college might be. Often our ambitions simply are not lofty enough. There is a natural, human tendency to grab low-hanging fruit. If I can get by with a major in business and get a job, why not? After all, students in business consistently spend fewer hours studying than majors in the arts and sciences.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, at some institutions the decision by students to major in business frees them from requirements that are more common in the arts and sciences disciplines, such as advanced work in a foreign language.

Even faculty succumb to low ambitions, choosing at times not to take risks with their classes but instead offering well-tryed classes that they know have worked well in the past. Also, some faculty produce trickles of scholarship, so as to receive a decent raise or to be promoted, but do not desire to change their discipline or to write a work that will be read fifty years from now. Low ambitions are also manifest in the increasingly narrow areas of specialization that many of us carve out for ourselves. Not surprisingly, Stanley Fish, who has argued against doing anything more than instructing students in the formal tools of one’s discipline, titles one of his polemics against the lofty

rhetoric of educators “Aim Low.” Tocqueville analyzed the problem of ambition in his account of democracy in America, writing that all Americans are ambitious, but in small and petty ways, seeking “property, reputation, and power,” but everyday Americans lack, he argued, “lofty ambition” (627). Tocqueville continues, “For the most part life is spent in eagerly coveting small prizes within reach” (629). Some pursue nothing but “vulgar pleasures” and “paltry desires,” and he encourages us to project a higher idea of ourselves and of humanity (632).

One challenge to engaging the great questions are some of the trends and faculty proclivities at colleges and universities. The more specialized faculty members become in their research, the less likely it is that they will want to teach well beyond their area of expertise or to reflect on the higher purpose of their discipline. Many have themselves not experienced or no longer experience the intrinsic value of learning. Not all academics, as I have suggested, are intellectuals; that is, not everyone who teaches at a university is interested in more than solving limited problems. The ambition to tackle a great project in research or in teaching is not always frequent. This lack of ambition is not unrelated to a lack of confidence in measures of what constitutes a great work or even a great question. Further, the increasing unease with the concept of a great work has in the humanities led to considerable focus, in research and in teaching, on works that cannot easily claim to inspire the attention of students. Without a measure for greatness, many mediocre intellectual products have made their way into the halls of our colleges and universities. If the liberal arts attract students because of great texts and great questions, to the extent that faculty members substitute mediocre books that derive from faculty research interests or ideological perspectives, then student interest and passion will diminish.

This is not to say that great authors are not taught. They are, contrary to the image in the conservative media. However, it is to suggest that the range of works taught is much broader

now than ever before, and texts are sometimes justified for inclusion in a syllabus not because students will find them meaningful but because they satisfy the often less than persuasive interests of faculty members. A faculty member whose own research was not on great works once told me that he thought that students would find great works too difficult, so he decided in all seriousness that he would instead teach “pretty good” books which he viewed as a kind of technical term. Tocqueville would have been amused.

The very architecture of a college campus can foster the lofty ambitions we seek in students, just as it can nurture the sense of community and collegiality that is essential to good public discussion. When I arrived at Williams College as a first-year student, my dorm room, which I shared with two others, overlooked a set of stairs that led to West College, the oldest building on campus. Coming from someone who should be cynical after having served more than fifteen years in academic administration, it will sound idealistic and sentimental, but I still recall that I was deeply moved, indeed inspired, as a young man, seeking to develop my identity and thinking that college would be full of not only hard work but also lofty treasures, when I first read the words on the columns of Hopkins Gates, which frames the stairway to West College and which I passed every day of my first year: “Climb high / climb far / your goal / the sky / your aim / the star.” I was similarly inspired and intimidated by the names of the great writers engraved high on the facade of Stetson Hall, some of whom I had read, but others were just names to me: Homer, Dante, Cervantes, Molière, Goethe, and so forth. These were implicit signals to me about what mattered. I had so much still to learn.

When I was a graduate student in Tübingen, I was captivated by the idea that the university was celebrating its five-hundred-year anniversary. The same cobblestone streets and

alleys that I walked were also the paths of Hegel and Hölderlin and Schelling, all great writers I was studying. At Princeton there was a distinctive room in East Pyne Hall, layered with beautiful woodwork, from floor to ceiling, and filled with books. When the famous German writer Martin Walser entered the room, he elegantly said, "Hier lernit man von selbst." The expression, which cannot be gracefully translated, conveys the idea that in such a space one learns almost by osmosis. The very size of Ohio State conveyed to me a seriousness about learning; all of these resources and buildings, stretching further than the eye could see, were devoted to the ideals of learning and scholarship. The Golden Dome, which shines beautifully on the Notre Dame campus, similarly conveys an ennobling sentiment to faculty, staff, and students whose minds are looking for inspiration and higher aspirations. The layout of the campus itself, which takes the shape of a cross, echoes this sense of transcendent purpose.

Students benefit from every available form of assistance, as the wider culture does not tend to elevate the minds of young persons. In his 2007 commencement address at Stanford University, Dana Gioia, at the time Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, argued that higher education should offer students an opportunity to pass beyond "the easy comforts of entertainment" to "the challenging pleasures of art."<sup>4</sup> The comment could be extended more broadly: college is about great questions that students can learn to love, but like all great ambitions, it requires a passion for lofty aspirations and a willingness to engage in hard, yet rewarding, work. College is indeed a different kind of leisure.

Our experience of art and literature differs from the routine experience of consumption and utility. When we appreciate an object of beauty, we do not desire to possess or transform it, to consume or use it; we leave it free as it is. Our

experience of literature is of value for its own sake. It is "purposeless" in the higher sense of being its own end. When we read lesser works, we tend to focus solely, or at least primarily, on the information we take from them, reading such works for practical purposes. The experience of great literature differs; relevant here is the personal experience of reading, including the affective response triggered by a work's sensuous structures and components, which are not reducible to what we carry away from a work on the level of information. The experience of reading great literature is defined by intense concentration of attention, a lingering over the complexity of formal structures patience in exegesis, a love of continuing mystery. I can still remember reading Dostoevsky's deep and complex *Brothers Karamazov* on my sister's bed (she had moved out and her room had the best light in the house) in the summer before my senior year of high school; reading Thomas Mann's ambitious and gripping novel *Doctor Faustus* partly on the train in Germany; partly on a park bench in Tübingen; and reading Adalbert Stifter's richly ambiguous and moving tale *Abdias* while on a long flight across the Atlantic. Each of these works opened another world for me, whether it involved the various ways in which we long for ultimate knowledge, what is at stake when a character is tempted by evil, or how human aspiration and the possibility of redemption conflict with fate. Others will have analogously fond recollections of gripping reading experiences.

An engagement with great literature is its own reward, an experience of value in and of itself. In this sense it is higher than many values we elevate on a regular basis, yet which are themselves mere means to other values. Making money is both necessary and useful, but it is *merely* useful, undertaken for the sake of something else, whereas the joy of contemplation is an end in itself, an activity pursued for its own sake. The goods of the spirit do not have their end beyond themselves, in some other entity; they thus contrast with so-called useful endeavors, which, however, are useful only insofar as they serve other ends.

What is most useful, Brand Blanshard suggests paradoxically, is what is valued as an end in itself, that is, what is often passed off as useless: instead of helping us reach some higher goal, it is itself a most worthy goal (32). Josef Pieper argues that “there are certain things one cannot do ‘in order to . . .’ do something else. Either one does not do them at all, or one does them because they are meaningful in themselves” (58, translation modified).

Consider within this context the connection between the intrinsic value of reading great literature and the self-sufficiency and richness of play. Play is a childlike, but nonetheless meaningful, activity in which we experience, in a free and voluntary way, the intrinsic joy of engaging our faculties, including our imagination. Johan Huizinga argues in his classic study of this subject that, along with reason and making, play is central to our being. He thus proposes *homo ludens* (playing man) as complementary to the more popular *homo sapiens* (knowing man) and *homo faber* (working man). Play serves many hidden purposes: it allows us to rejoice in vital inclinations; it engages and expands the imagination; it conjures up a temporary world of order and beauty; it provides balance to the more instrumental and ordinary sphere of work through its disinterested and extraordinary dimensions; it proffers new modes of seeing and relating; and it offers us an experience of ritual. This elevation of leisure and play in the context of wisdom is vibrant not only in the Hellenic but also in the Judeo-Christian tradition, as is evident from passages such as Proverbs 8:30–31, where Wisdom plays before God and delights God; Sirach 38:24–25, which suggests that the wisdom of the learned person depends on the opportunity of leisure; or Luke 10:38–42, where Christ elevates Mary’s love of wisdom over Martha’s action and service.

In modernity, the theological paradigm, with its turn toward the transcendent, was increasingly displaced by the economic paradigm and its focus on the material and practical world. Although modernity, in glorifying work, action, and power, associated leisure with idleness, and play with indolence,

the eighteenth-century German writer Friedrich Schiller resisted this tendency to disparage mere play. He counters, “The agreeable, the good, the perfect, with these a person is merely serious; but with beauty he plays” (*Aesthetic Education* 105–7, translation modified). Schiller states more fully: “But how can we speak of mere play, when we know that it is precisely play and play alone, which of all our states and conditions is the one which makes us whole and unfolds both sides of our nature [that is, the rational and the sensuous] at once?” (*Aesthetic Education* 105, translation modified). Schiller adds, “A person only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being when he plays” (*Aesthetic Education* 107). Play is done for its own sake, as an end in itself, and yet this experience enriches, it does not impoverish. Play may also be a means to an end, but that is incidental; it is primarily an end in itself, and as such, it becomes a means to an end—it enriches our sense of the value of what is done for its own sake. A liberal arts education is infused with this element of intrinsic value.

It is important that students with a liberal arts education be able to earn a livelihood. Parents want their children to succeed, to have a job that ensures shelter and puts food on the table. However, the utility of a liberal arts education cannot be reduced to its materialist dimensions. The great questions and the intrinsic value of learning, the element of play, give us categories for meaning and self-worth that counter a self-worth defined by what one has.

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Answers to our searching questions are of interest whether or not they apply to the practical world. They satisfy an innate human longing for knowledge, indeed for wisdom. Yet not only the answers we discover, but also the simple pursuit of profound questions has intrinsic value. To explore a fascinating question, independently of the results, is to engage and elevate

the mind. The German Enlightenment writer G. E. Lessing once said, "If God held all truth in his right hand and the sole everlasting urge for truth in his left, with the result that I should forever and always err, and said to me, 'Choose,' I would humbly bow before his left hand and say, 'Father, grant me this. Pure truth is for you alone'" (13: 24). The search for truth, the engagement with different positions, the experience of learning more, develops our highest capacities. The possession of truth without a search would, according to Lessing, make us "quiescent, lazy, arrogant," whereas the search for truth gives value and vitality to our humanity.<sup>5</sup>

Of course a search for truth without any prospect whatsoever of recognizing what might be true, a belief that is not uncommon in the humanities today, is as much a death knell for meaningful inquiry as is the dogmatic belief that all truth is in our hands. Without any prospect of truth, we all too easily fall into indolence (as our search will always be in vain) or arrogance (if there is no objective truth, I am free to define truth as I see fit). There are truths we can discover, including, for example, the very value of the search for truth as well as various scientific insights and basic moral obligations, and there are others toward which we can only strive and which in their complexity and inexhaustibility will always partially elude us.

Faculty are sometimes hesitant to address the great questions with students, partly because in doing so, they are forced to move beyond their specialized competencies and become searchers themselves, and partly because they worry about the connection between great questions and delicate issues of moral values, but students are as interested in the questions and the infinite pursuit of truth as they are in precise and final answers. W. Robert Connor rightly notes that what students need are "not answers, but vocabularies, metaphors, exempla, and modes of thought" that will help them develop the "confidence, depth, and clarity" to think the questions through for themselves (10). Not every activity that is an end in itself reaches an end, and as

students become aware that the most fascinating questions have hardly been exhausted despite a long tradition of historical reflection, they are both inspired and humbled.

This sense of longing for more intellectual engagement is one reason why many outstanding undergraduates choose graduate study. As noted earlier, a liberal education need not be restricted to undergraduate learning. The emphasis on breadth, on student engagement, on close student-faculty interaction, and on discussion of the great ideas as well as the development of intellectuals, rather than simply academics, can also arise in graduate programs. In addition, intellectual community can be fostered at the graduate level as much as, or in some cases even more than, at the undergraduate level because of the smaller student cohort, because of the number of classes taken in common, because of the texts that are read together in preparation for examinations, and because of the opportunity to develop friendships that are fostered by not simply common experiences but common intellectual experiences. This cultivation of the liberal arts ideal can occur to some degree in disciplinary graduate programs, though not without some effort, given ever increasing, if understandable, trends toward specialization. Interdisciplinary graduate programs, such as those in cognitive science, environmental studies, history and philosophy of science, medieval studies, or literature, may offer greater opportunities for advanced liberal arts experiences.

At some colleges and universities, students are required to take a set of general education courses that satisfy requirements defined by ways of thinking that an educated person should have developed. These can be courses chosen from a menu of offerings in quantitative reasoning, social analysis, oral and written communication, cross-cultural awareness, ethical inquiry, and so forth. Instead of simply satisfying disciplinary requirements, students take courses that meet the learning goals

and outcomes desired by their institution. At a liberal arts institution, one could also imagine a course whose primary goal would be to help students reflect on the value of education itself. Those graduates who are vocationally trained will find that the specific practices that they learned in school will change over time. Because they might not have learned to reflect on the relation of those practices to a larger whole, they will likely be at a disadvantage compared to those graduates for whom broader reflection was an integral part of their education.

The student who experiences the intrinsic value of education develops autonomy, whereas the student whose education serves only an external purpose—a remunerative position or external accolades and recognition for accomplishments—lacks that privileged element of freedom. Such a person becomes dependent on that purpose; value comes not from the internal delight of exploring the life of the mind and engaging meaningful questions but from external approbation and success in the world. In his inaugural address on the value of studying universal history, Schiller suggests that the student who studies merely to make a living is interested in truth only insofar as it can be converted into “gold, newspaper praise, princely favors” (“Was heißt?” 751). The student, in contrast, who loves truth is not finished with knowledge when it has served its external purpose but instead takes joy in continual discovery. Moreover, the student who explores learning only for its immediate application has no capacity to draw on the principles that alone make possible its appropriate application. Liberal arts students experience truth as “invested with all its possibilities” (Whitehead 93), transforming knowledge into an intellectual and even poetic adventure, which can energize them for their entire lives. The liberal arts student whose education has been successful lives for ideas, for the life of the mind, in which ideas have no less value than things. Indeed, for such a person the comprehension and contemplation of ideas may be said to have ultimate value—also as the standard for how we should live. It is an an-

cient ideal, captured beautifully in Socrates’ dictum that the unexamined life is not worth living (*Apology* 38a).

After students graduate from college, they continue to be fascinated by the power of ideas, the complexities of the world around them, and artworks that they encounter for the first time. The joy of thinking and the enthusiasm of exploring will not cease for the liberally educated person. The strategies that best assist graduates in their pursuit of such experiences beyond college are to provide them with a solid base of intensive learning for its own sake—their college years—and to ensure that they develop during those years a love of learning as an end in itself. One of the ironies of a liberal arts education is that, although it is an end in itself, it is never-ending, that is, it is a lifelong process. The leisure of college, meaningfully structured, makes it more likely that future opportunities for leisure will be enriched by reading, visiting museums, attending performing arts events, asking deeper questions—in short, by activities that give meaning and add mystery to life. The liberal arts experience of the intrinsic value of knowledge allows us to be comfortable in our own company, in our own thoughts, which is a precondition of character and depth. John Dewey notes, “The dominant vocation of all human beings at all times is living—intellectual and moral growth” (310). College can give its graduates “sources of inner fortitude, self-knowledge, and personal renewal” (*College Learning* 23). As the German writer Jean Paul suggests, “A learned person is never bored” (1: 685).

College presidents sometimes refer to their elevator pitch. In the thirty or so seconds that they might be in an elevator with another president, a donor, or a journalist, they must succinctly articulate the strengths of their institution and back up their claims with selective data. Over my eleven year as



dean, I had a series of elevator conversations of a different kind. One of the laments of any dean is the lack of time to pursue scholarship. When I would finally get to the library, it was usually at the end of a day on semester break, and when I did manage to gather a stack of books, it was the time of year when restricted hours reigned, and on multiple such occasions the circulation desk was closed. The security guard had to fill out the withdrawal slips for me. I frequented the library regularly only in fulfilling my administrative duties as dean. At Notre Dame, the top floor of Hesburgh Library is the site of most of our university receptions. Access to that floor requires a special key, and student workers staff the elevators for special events. On such occasions, upon entering the elevator, I always asked the students what their favorite class was. Invariably, the answer was something like history or theology or film or politics. When I then asked them what their major was, they often answered that it was business. There was a disconnect between what they liked intellectually and what they chose as their major.

When I asked students why they were majoring in business, they often referred to parental pressure or, in a few cases, more subtly, they expressed the concern that since their parents had sacrificed to pay for their education, they felt inwardly obliged to major in something practical. When, in contrast, I asked students who had transferred from business to arts and letters why they did so, the most common answers were that they had become fascinated with a discipline in the liberal arts or that their vocational classes were too boring.

Toward the end of my first year at Notre Dame, I traveled to Innsbruck, Austria, and interviewed all of the participants in our study abroad program there to get a sense of what was working well and what we needed to change. One question I asked every student was, "What did you like most about your year in Innsbruck?" The answers were varied. For some, it was making great advances in the language. For one, it was understanding Austrian history in a way that she never could have in the United

States. For others, it was the relationship with a host family, or the beauty of the city and the surrounding landscape, or the education in the center of Europe and the opportunity to explore museums and other attractions throughout the continent. Of the twenty or so students in the program, there was only one business major. While the arts and letters students struggled with the question, unsure of what to elevate as most singular above other wonderful experiences, the business major responded, "Oh, that's easy. Being around all these arts and letters students. They're so interesting."

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One factor working against the elevation of intrinsic value is the overriding competition principle that rules our age. I am a tremendous fan of competition and of markets and introduced an abundance of incentives, efficiencies, and differential adjustments when creating new initiatives and assessing departments and faculty members at Notre Dame, but there are some departments that must be supported even if they do not bring in sufficient numbers of students or dollars. There are some values for which we need to sacrifice the competition principle, for it, too, is after all only a means to greatness, and we must be watchful for victims along the way.

Because faculty are not impervious to the tremendous demands on them and because most of them want to succeed in both teaching and research, colleges should offer ample opportunities to help them develop meaningful teaching strategies that are not unduly time-consuming. During my first weeks as a Notre Dame faculty member, I enrolled in an effective workshop entitled "Teaching Well, Saving Time." While no substitute exists for time devoted to one-on-one advising of students, how faculty prepare for classes should be as efficient as possible.

The competition principle has affected salaries at universities, driving many prospective faculty members to more lucrative positions outside the academy or to more applied fields

within it, such as business, engineering, and law. To attract great students into the arts and sciences, universities and colleges need to offer them a vision of engaging the great questions that compensates for the loss of income and external prestige. In a world driven by speed and measurable advances, it takes considerable imagination to win students over to the life of the mind and to questions that transcend our age. Not surprisingly, liberal arts colleges, which tend to foster faculty-student relations and active learning on the part of students, including undergraduate research, do very well in producing graduates who go on to receive Ph.D.'s. Data on recipients of doctoral degrees in the humanities as well as in the social and natural sciences show that the percentage of graduates of liberal arts colleges who receive doctorates is much higher than at research universities and at other universities.<sup>6</sup>

Because the economy is tight for academic positions in most fields, faculty must nurture interest in this path among their best students and also counsel caution. I can recall one of my history professors at Williams inviting me to his home one afternoon. He peppered me with questions about my interest in pursuing a Ph.D. Did I know that I would not be guaranteed a job? Did I know that professors work unbelievable hours and are still not assured of tenure? Did I know that I would be dependent on the jobs available in a given year and would not be able to live where I might otherwise choose? Did I know that I would earn much less as a faculty member than in other professions? When I responded that all of that was just fine, that I viewed graduate school as an extension of my liberal arts education, and that I was flexible in my needs and so forth, he stepped back and said, "OK, you can go." I was grateful for the lesson.

In certain contexts, our challenge to students needs to shift in the other direction. At some universities, the dominant achievement ethos sends the best humanities students on to investment banking and law school, and students do not consider the joys of the life of the mind. As parents, professors, and uni-

versity administrators, we need to remind students of the intrinsic rewards that trump power and salary. At Notre Dame, every year some 17–19 percent of the graduates in the College of Arts and Letters, in their desire to serve God and their fellow persons, devote themselves to a year or more of full-time volunteer service. But it should not be overlooked that an academic vocation is another way to come closer to God, engaging not in practical service but in contemplation as an end in itself, which is the activity that most mirrors the divine.

Most faculty members chose their profession because of a love of learning or because of a professor who inspired them and a resulting desire to offer similar experiences to others. There are some professors who report that, as graduate students, they were initially driven more by the research ideal than by the teaching ideal. However, I have found that for many of them, in the early stages of their decision to opt for graduate school, a desire to teach is dominant, and then it often recedes, as they identify with the profession as it becomes defined for them. We would do well to remind faculty members of their intrinsic sense of vocation. When I taught graduate students at Ohio State, most of them wanted to teach at liberal arts colleges. They wanted to be in a smaller community where they could get to know their students. Most faculty members would have advised them to aspire to jobs at research universities. When my first doctoral student had multiple offers, including one from a Big Ten university and one from a liberal arts university, Wake Forest, and chose the latter, one of my colleagues shook her head in disbelief. I admired the decision.

A liberal arts college cultivates for faculty as well as for students the intrinsic value of learning. When I was a student at Williams, we took four courses each semester and a so-called Winter Study, an intensive study of one course during the month of January. Students were encouraged to take courses outside

their primary areas of interest, to widen their horizons. I can recall taking courses in music and in creative writing. Faculty members were likewise encouraged to teach courses outside of their primary areas of expertise. Such stretching fostered the elements of curiosity and intrinsic interest that are central to the liberal arts.

Scholars at a liberal arts college have the opportunity to experience the intrinsic value of knowledge in a special way. The former president of a highly ranked liberal arts college who has also served in prominent leadership positions at two premier research universities once told me the following story. A scientist at his former liberal arts college was a superb researcher in every respect. The president asked the scientist, given his compelling research record, if he had ever considered moving on to a research university. "At a research university," the scientist said, "the pressure for funding is such that one has to be funded and, therefore, one has to do research in those areas where funding exists. At a liberal arts college, I have more freedom. I can do research on what I want, and if there happens to be funding in that area, then I apply for it." Another distinction of liberal arts colleges is their integrative dimension of scholarship, which tends to differ from more specialized disciplinary knowledge (Ruscio; Oakley, *Community* 155–56). Because smaller colleges have fewer faculty members, they must teach a wider range of topics, and because the communities are smaller, forging intellectual bonds with colleagues in other disciplinary areas tends to be easier. Finally, frequent contact with undergraduate students, who are themselves not specialized, as are graduate students, encourages broader questions, in teaching and subsequently in research.

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What transcends the liberal arts years are not only the intellectual interests that are formed but also the friendships. Over time these become among our longest-lasting friendships. Aristotle famously said that the highest friendships are based not on mere pleasure or mutual utility but on shared values and

an intrinsic appreciation of one another (*Nicomachean Ethics* VIII and IX). In the highest form of friendship, we cultivate in one another what is the highest potential of humanity and the highest activity of the soul, goodness and intelligence. Such friendships are ends in themselves. We experience a shared commitment to the good, to what transcends and elevates us. In these relationships we learn how to become better persons. The intrinsic value of college friendships arises out of a context of identity formation in connection with a sharing of discussion and thought, an engagement with the great questions, whose primary purpose is not utility but meaning.

This vertical elevation to the transcendent has the effect of strengthening horizontal bonds. One of the marks of a liberal education is that it enables lasting friendships to form over ideas. When graduates visit with college friends, they share thoughts about what they are reading and what they think about recent world events. They ask about each other's vocation and professional puzzles. The liberal arts offer a vocabulary that sustains a language of deep friendship.

Intellectual activity and creativity are fostered by social interaction and intellectual community, by the back-and-forth of thinking out loud and contesting one another's ideas (Collins). College graduates are not surprised to hear that "the strongest single source of influence on cognitive and affective development is the student's *peer group*" (Astin, "Involvement" 126). For this reason, a meaningful liberal arts education presupposes a vibrant "community of learning" (Oakley, *Community*). The best liberal arts courses foster friendships. They encourage students to contribute in class, to offer their own perspectives and experiences, to comment on each other's work. The challenge, which can be met partly by the mediating role of caring faculty members, is to help students see a connection between their learning and their friendships, so that friendships are not purely social, something alongside schoolwork, but interwoven with learning and ideas. Such friendships are formed less often via clubs or activities or parties than in the classroom and in

informal discussions surrounding class. What students in their inner core desire are trusted friends with whom they can speak about issues that matter. Such friendships, like the education in which they develop, are defined by their intrinsic value. Friendship and love, including the love of wisdom, are of value for their own sake.

I can recall the many ways in which community was fostered while I was an undergraduate at Williams. On the very first day, every first-year student lined up to shake the president's hand; it meant something to me, as well as to my parents, that the president knew me, even if only in a formal and symbolic way. I went to college when the drinking age was still eighteen and binge drinking, while it existed, seemed rarer, not least of all because drinking was not forbidden. I admired the fact that Williams had eliminated fraternities ten years or so before I arrived on campus. The college retained the buildings, which were located on campus, and turned them into intimate residential halls. As a sophomore, I lived in one of these halls and was approached by a group of seniors who asked me if I wanted to contribute twenty dollars to buy a keg for the basement lounge. The rules were that no one drank more than one or two beers per day, and no one drank before ten o'clock in the evening. The purpose was not to get drunk, but to engage in meaningful discussion. The kegs would be replenished until the money ran out. I was impressed with the concept and turned over my money. The conversations ranged from new art movements in Düsseldorf, Germany to what kinds of majors the investment banks in New York City prefer. My twenty dollars lasted the entire year. I never knew if it was because we drank so little or because one of the wealthier students decided to contribute more.

The former fraternities had their own dining halls. Once a week we had a special meal, with tablecloths and candles, and we could invite faculty members, who often lived near campus. Twice a week we had German Table at lunch, and a small number of students ate with faculty members, as they sought to de-

velop their language skills further. I was invited to the homes of faculty members and still remember those evenings quite vividly. Today, I do the same for my students, and I can tell from their comments and occasional letters that such events mean a great deal to them. Not least of all, these gatherings bring the students together and indirectly endorse student fellowship. At Notre Dame, we recently received a generous endowment to support such activities. Our Table Talk program reimburses faculty members for the costs of purchasing food for meals at their homes and for meal tickets in the student dining halls. Because these events transform the atmosphere in classes, the program will pay more if an evening at a faculty member's home takes place during the first half of the semester instead of at the end of the semester.

Faculty sometimes forget that a sense of community is essential to any flourishing intellectual pursuit. Community is as important to graduate students and faculty as it is to undergraduates. When I was applying to graduate school, I submitted my applications from Germany and so did not visit any of the campuses. Upon arriving at Princeton, I discovered that most of the other students in our class of seven had narrowed their choices the previous spring to Princeton and Yale. Several visited Yale and told the same story. At Yale, there was at the time, in contrast to Princeton, little sense of community among the students or between students and faculty members. As a result, each of my colleagues chose Princeton. When in the early 1990s we resolved at Ohio State to fly the top prospective graduate students to campus before they made their decisions, we found that the yield of accepted students who chose to come to Ohio State rose dramatically. We offered them a community of learning that they could visualize. In the penultimate year of my tenure as dean at Notre Dame, the department of theology received a yield of 91 percent against the best universities in the country, consistently winning in head-to-head competition with Chicago, Duke, Emory, Princeton, and Yale. The department was not only strong academically, but the coordinators of the different fields

arranged for prospective students to visit faculty homes; surely, the students could imagine the supportive social and intellectual environment that would be conducive to meaningful discussions in their years as graduate students.

While faculty-student contact is important, student-student contact is even more meaningful. Peer interaction is often cultivated by administrators who know that learning is deepened when student conversations don't simply flow from residential hall patter but build on discussions in classes. Some colleges have found it successful, for example, to place students from the same hall in at least one first-year class together or to offer occasional classes in the residence halls. For a number of years, the Ohio State University has offered a one-credit course on a "big idea," which brings students of various disciplinary perspectives together with faculty members and members of the community to explore a topic. Examples have included evil, passion, war, cities, immigration, and values. One of the goals of the course is to help students take ideas seriously and become conversant on important topics across disciplines (Livingston).

Student-student engagement not only fosters the best learning; it mimics the pursuit of learning that will continue after college. One of the virtues of a liberal arts education is the way in which it awakens or deepens curiosity and wonder, which in turn fosters continued learning beyond college, learning that will come more from peers than from superiors. The desire to continue to learn is a practical value, as we will see below, but it is first and foremost a human quality that ensures that our being is enriched by the life of the mind. To ask great questions that give meaning to ourselves and others is joyful, and for most persons this joy is fostered more easily at college than at any other time in our lives. Not so much the answers given, or the information learned, but, as Locke stressed already centuries ago, the habit of learning and thinking is what matters most, and that habit is not simply an intellectual value but a life value and its own reward.<sup>7</sup>

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## 2

### Cultivating Intellectual and Practical Virtues

To elevate contemplation as the highest good is not to suggest that action has little value, for the possibility of contemplation requires resources obtained through action, and only the practical intellect can address problems, such as abject poverty, that challenge human dignity and awaken our sense of duty. Students are called away from the contemplative to the active life, from college to work, in order to address their most basic needs, to develop further through experience, to participate in shaping the world, and to aid in the welfare of others. It is, therefore, not only ironic but also appealing that the very education we elevate for its intrinsic value cultivates virtues that serve meaningful external ends and prepares students for the needs and challenges of practical life, even if that is not its primary purpose. Although instrumental values are not the highest values, they are necessary if the highest values are to be realized in society. In a knowledge economy, moreover, the traditional dichotomy between the liberal arts, which focus on knowing and have their ends in themselves, and the practical arts, which focus on action and utility, is not absolute.