

IRVING BABBITT'S NEW HUMANISM: AN OUTSIDER'S PERSPECTIVE ON  
CURRICULAR DEBATES AT THE TURN OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

By

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requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the educational ideas and beliefs of Irving Babbitt (1865-1933). As the co-founder of the New Humanism, Babbitt advocated throughout the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century for an education that helped put a check on the naturally expansive tendencies of the individual. Babbitt believed in a dualism found in the inner life of each individual: a part of us that is capable of exercising control and a part of us that needs controlling. Babbitt bemoaned the gradual loss of this inner control within each individual, a loss that was precipitated by the “new” education. In this dissertation, Babbitt’s place within the humanist faction of the curricular battles of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is explored, along with the historical and philosophical basis for his New Humanism. In addition, Babbitt’s criticism of humanitarianism, in opposition to his “genuine” humanism, is examined. His definitions and criticisms of sentimental and scientific humanitarians are applied to two of the curricular factions of the time: the child-study advocates and the social efficiency experts, respectively. Babbitt argued that these two stances, despite their profound differences, at least on the surface, actually shared the same philosophical foundations and reinforced each other within education. Additionally, Babbitt’s philosophical qualms with Charles W. Eliot and John Dewey, the two figureheads of American education in Babbitt’s lifetime, are explored. I conclude by contemplating Babbitt’s theoretical response to the latest attempts to introduce a humanist curriculum back into American schools.

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## Introduction

“Dualistic philosophers have been rather rare in Kansas but let us hope that your activities there may bear fruit.”

--Babbitt, letter to Paul Elmer More, March 2, 1913

Socrates advised his male listeners to marry no matter what. If you are fortunate enough to marry a good wife, his reasoning went, then your life will become blissful. But if you marry a bad one, it will force you to become much more philosophical. In the end, for Socrates, either outcome was desirable. After a number of years of teaching in a high school classroom, I have begun to apply Socrates' counsel to my profession. And after a rather miserable first year of teaching high school English, I too became much more philosophical about my field. If I were so dejected, and both other teachers and many students displayed some of the same levels of despondency, I began to ask questions, to myself, concerning “how” and “why.” How did we get to such a point? Why are things the way they are? Why do we keep soldiering on the way we do? I quickly found myself in a Ph.D. program in Social, Historical, and Philosophical Foundations of Education to search for answers. In a break during summer session classes, I entered a used bookstore and accidentally came across a book entitled *Literature and the American College: Essays in Defense of Humanities* by Irving Babbitt. After reading an intriguing couple of pages, I decided to purchase the book (for five dollars). This dissertation was thus born.

I quickly devoured Babbitt's *Literature and the American College* and moved to his other books. His ideas throughout my first readings remained remarkably consistent, even though his works spanned decades. More importantly, though, his ideas resonated with many of my questions and difficulties within my classroom experience. But initially I was also intrigued with Babbitt's place in the history of education, especially his leadership of the New Humanism (a term then unbeknownst to me). I had sporadically read Robert Maynard Hutchins and Mortimer J. Adler, along with briefly studying Great Books programs, but I really did not consider their historical contexts – I did not hold a good conception of the place of humanistic education in American schooling, especially in the public schools. Babbitt, though, rarely addressed the lower schools in his works. His first book (*Literature and the American College: Essays in Defense of Humanities*), published in 1908, focused solely on higher education, the place Babbitt knew best, as he began teaching at Harvard in 1894. Babbitt remained at Harvard in the Romance Languages Department until his death in 1933, and his focus on higher education reflected this. Gradually I came to realize that Babbitt and the New Humanists marked the first revolt against the changing university curriculum, a stance later taken by Hutchins, Adler, and others.

Yet as I read Babbitt's works, primarily consisting of literary criticism, certain philosophical strands kept repeating themselves. And though Babbitt concerned himself mostly with literary works and figures, he nearly always commented on education's fundamental place in all philosophical questions and beliefs. Further, even though Babbitt's target was the university curriculum and its methodology, my perspective as both a teacher and as someone fascinated by the curricular battles in the public schools at

the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, his views on higher education struck a chord for me in both roles. In short, even though Babbitt wrote solely on higher education and subsequent scholars focused only on this facet of his ideas on education, I came to believe that his ideas could easily (and appropriately) be applied to the public schools.

This notion stemmed from both Babbitt's definition and subsequent warnings of "humanitarianism" – strands that run deeply through all of Babbitt's works. The idea will be explored much more in detail in Chapter 3, but Babbitt believed that the humanist curriculum (and consequently the humanistic way of life) was being overrun by two strands of humanitarianism, the sentimental and the scientific. The strands at their core promote a ceaseless expansion, something Babbitt spent his works fighting against. The sentimental humanitarian, following the precepts of Rousseau, seeks an unwavering expansion of emotions, feelings, and sympathy. In higher education, for Babbitt, the sentimental humanitarian's influence brought about the elective system, as students' interests and desires were to override all other concerns in choosing their course of study. The scientific humanitarian, taking his/her cue from Sir Francis Bacon, follows a ceaseless expansion towards scientific knowledge, material progress, and efficiency. Babbitt pointed to the new research-based universities and the promotion of the specialist as being products of Bacon and his scientific humanitarianism. Babbitt's humanism was to serve as the antidote to these strands in higher education.

Again, though, both my job and my academic interests resided in the public schools. As a high school teacher, I was fascinated by the seemingly continual conflict amongst my colleagues on how to characterize the nature of our duties. One group adamantly believed that our job was largely to prepare our students for the "real world,"



the world of work. As such, it was our duty to impart those skills and habits needed in their future workplace. Any sort of student complaint about “too much work” or about the tyranny of school rules was deflected with the belief that we were looking out for their future well-being. In providing training for future careers, efficiency played an integral role- the efficiency of running the school and classroom certainly gave students the experience of the desired efficiency of the workplace. But on the other hand, some teachers strongly defended the notion that our students needed to discover their interests and ideas on their own. We were there to nurture these interests and proclivities towards subjects, and we were not to dampen these inclinations in the least (the phrase “the students should take ownership of their assignments” was often used). These teachers certainly did not advocate students controlling the school and unregulated classrooms; rather, we were to consider the emotional and psychological aspects of each student when teaching. The students were not ready for the harshness of the real world quite yet; their training could wait. This conflict itself never really manifested itself in overt debate or argument; instead, I felt this divide to be present at all times beneath the surface, but never reconciled.

I could not reconcile this difference of mentality even within myself. I seemed to change my mind minute by minute. During the same class period I would battle myself internally: “I need to get these kids ready for college or to work hard at their jobs, so let’s diagram sentences. No, I should try to promote and celebrate what is going on in their lives, so let’s write about the weekend.” As someone studying the curricular battles of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, I was fascinated by this divergence too. The two major curricular factions that emerged out of this “struggle” were the child-study advocates and the

efficiency experts. How, I wondered, could these two seemingly opposite mentalities not only exist, but prosper, in the school curriculum beginning at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century? How did they both emerge victorious in this battle and thrive in the following century? How were their contradictory aims and means never reconciled during this century of prominence? How was this possible? Irving Babbitt was able to answer these questions for me.

Babbitt's explanation was that these two strands of humanitarianism, though seemingly contradictory on the surface, actually shared the same fundamental principle of perpetual expansion. Not only do they share this founding belief, but they actually reinforce each other within education. The sentimental humanitarian promotes the individual tastes and interests of the student; no subject matter is to be promoted over another. The student is to pursue these interests without constraint. The scientific humanitarian, subsequently, promotes the constant expansion of knowledge. The goal is to produce specialists. No subject is to be promoted over another either, as to serve the progress of humanity the best, specialized knowledge needs to be ascertained in all things. One mentality complements and reinforces the other; one Babbitt scholar puts this idea succinctly:

In the field of education the same cooperation between Rousseauist and utilitarian can also be studied. The former, being opposed to every super-individual, objective norm for education, would let each individual develop his originality freely and follow his main bent. The latter would utilize this main bent of the individual in order to make of him a specialized cogwheel in the machinery of progress. (Leander 96)

Instead of considering these curricular factions as separate, Babbitt's ideas, detailed through his six major books and numerous essays, led me to consider them as a single entity. As a teacher, I was then able to perceive that our curriculum promoted Babbitt's idea of a ceaseless expansion from both factions: mutually in promoting student interest in individualized projects or electives, alongside preparing students for future jobs with an ever-increasing specificity. Within my own English classroom, my desire both to encourage the interests and idiosyncrasies of my students advanced Babbitt's notion of expansionism, just as did my desire to create assignments to practice reading and writing skills in as many and various work-related contexts ("real world applications") as conceivable. As an educational historian, I was then able to perceive how these two seemingly contradictory curricular factions were able not only to exist, but prosper, within the American schools for a century. By transferring Babbitt's definitions of sentimental and scientific humanitarianism, along with their relationship, to the curricular battles of the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the subsequent results, I was able to make better sense of my philosophical quandaries. This, then, was what intensified my interest in Babbitt's ideas on education, and I believe his perspective concerning his two strands of humanitarianism provides an insight into the curricular battles that has received too little attention. It is my hope that the following study elucidates Babbitt's viewpoint not only for educational historians examining the curricular "struggles," but for educators perhaps facing their own curricular "struggles."

Unfortunately, Babbitt remained quite vague in advocating for specific educational policy throughout his works. In terms of university education, Babbitt did pinpoint a few reforms, especially in restructuring Ph.D. programs. But in terms of

public education, Babbitt offered virtually no specific reforms or new methodology. As such, my argument is historical and philosophical. I can offer no evidence that Babbitt's ideas "worked" in his time or would work now, as he left no specific plans for use in a classroom, past or present. But as Babbitt was the co-founder of the New Humanism, it is perhaps fitting and proper that this dissertation uses a humanistic framework. In so doing, I follow Ellen Condliffe Lagemann's essay, "Does History Matter in Education Research? A Brief for the Humanities in an Age of Science," as a guide. Lagemann provides a brief history of the methodology of educational research by tracing the rise of "science" as the primary research apparatus. For Lagemann, "a work of science" "was based on documentary evidence, or 'facts,' as opposed to opinions, suppositions, or untutored imagination" (12). These scientific approaches have dominated educational research for well over a century and continue to do so, even more strongly, today.

Lagemann, for one, suggests that "greater attention to the principles of science would strengthen the field of education research," but only to a certain point (10). Even more scientific research in education is now needed, Lagemann asserts, but "Given the complex, uncertain character of education, it would be folly to believe that science alone can provide sufficient guidance to educational policy and practice" (19). The ideal is to incorporate research that balances scientific, quantitative research with qualitative research framed by the humanities. "Science is the best way to illuminate laws, patterns, and regularities," Lagemann points out, but

it is not the best way to investigate human dilemmas, aberrant phenomena, or erratic occurrences. For those – for the unexpected, unwanted, unplanned events – the humanities are more powerful. The humanities –

history, philosophy, literature, the arts, and aesthetics – expose us to what science cannot reveal. They open us to the buzz of a classroom, to the imponderable elements of exchange between teachers and students. (19)

Babbitt wrote philosophically about education; again, he provided no specific plans or methods for use in the lower schools. His humanism, in fact, was something that could be practiced only on a deeply personal level. One of Babbitt's favorite phrases in describing the nature of his humanism was "minding one's own business." He adamantly believed that a genuine humanistic education involved a personal "conversion." "Reformers in the modern sense," according to Babbitt, follow the precepts of Rousseau, in that "they are concerned not with reforming themselves, but other men" (*Rousseau and Romanticism* 136).

The highly individualized nature of Babbitt's educational "reforms" does not allow for any quantitative analysis, either for his time or ours. Babbitt's ideas were never instituted in a public classroom, so any wide-scale promotion of Babbitt's ideas in today's classroom has no quantitative, scientific basis. Therefore, I cannot offer Babbitt's educational philosophy as a panacea for all of today's educational ills. As an educational historian, I am simply offering a perspective on the curricular battles at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century I believe deserves more recognition and study. But as a teacher, I have been influenced in my classroom by my study of Babbitt and his humanism. At the very least, I have come to recognize aspects of my teaching and the entire educational apparatus in new and enlightening ways. And as Babbitt's educational ideals involved a high degree of individualism, the qualitative framework of my argument maintains the same personal characteristics. This is the point James L. Paul and Kofi Marfo make in

their article “Preparation of Educational Researchers in Philosophical Foundations of Inquiry.” Paul and Marfo examine the challenges schools of education face in training graduate students in both quantitative and qualitative research methods. In delineating this difference between methodology, they offer that “Many qualitative researchers, although certainly not all, tend to be relativists, believing that reality exists in multiple mental constructions” (533). Paul and Marfo go on to quote E.G. Guba’s “The Alternative Paradigm Dialog” that these “multiple mental constructions” are ““socially and experientially based, local and specific, dependent for their form and content on the persons who hold them”” (533). Because Babbitt provided no form for his educational principles, the form to be “used” in a classroom can only take place within the interpretation of his words. My interpretation follows, but full-fledged lesson plans or teaching methods from Babbitt’s ideas do not.

This lack of specificity should not, though, dissuade us from considering Babbitt’s ideas on education in today’s contexts. Just because Babbitt provided no far-reaching plans does not mean he had nothing to say concerning our present conditions in education. The solely philosophical nature of Babbitt’s works simply makes “using” his ideas within a classroom today more vague and imprecise. But all educational questions and practices involve degrees of precision. Bruce Novak faces a similar scenario in his essay “Humanizing Democracy: Matthew Arnold’s Nineteenth-Century Call for a Common, Higher, Educative Pursuit of Happiness and Its Relevance to Twenty-First-Century Democratic Life.” Novak interprets Arnold’s mid-19<sup>th</sup> century social criticisms of education in Europe as speaking to our notion of democratic education today. Arnold’s philosophical style provided no quantitative or specific guidelines for Novak to

enlist for today's American classrooms, so he provides a philosophical argument himself in thinking about current educational matters. Incidentally, Babbitt often praised Arnold's notions of education and democracy in his own works; Novak's analyses and interpretations of Arnold's ideas upon the current educational system in America evoke a qualitative approach that is accomplished quite well. For example, Novak asserts that

It is noteworthy that the all-important battle against 'anarchy in the moral sphere' is fought most fully in peaceable ways: through eloquence and example, through human understanding, and above all, through careful arrangement of an environment with the capacity to foster reflection. (624)

Further, Novak argues that "It seems that the 'openness' and 'flexibility' that he [Arnold] called the great modern, democratic virtues needed to spring from a solid core of individual character, a core that needed close tending at a young age in order to satisfactorily come into being" (624). Throughout his informative essay Novak interprets Arnold's direct observations concerning the educational practices in Europe and smoothly transfers them to our current educational practices, particularly in terms of our notions of democratic education. Novak certainly believes that Arnold's ideas can (and should) still speak to us today, and this constitutes my hope for Babbitt's ideas as well.

Chapter One considers the factions doing battle for dominance in the American school curriculum at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The long-standing humanist curriculum came under attack; consequently, Babbitt's position as an "outsider" in this struggle, along the promotion of his "genuine humanism" as opposed to the humanist curriculum then in place, are considered in this historical context. In Chapter Two I attempt to define and examine Babbitt's "genuine humanism": how one became a genuine humanist, the

“inner working” it entailed, and why Babbitt advocated this philosophical position. Chapter Three considers Babbitt’s philosophical (and pedagogical) enemy: the humanitarian. He opposes his humanism to humanitarianism, a category he divides into two: sentimental and scientific humanitarians. It is my belief, as mentioned above, that Babbitt’s classifications align perfectly with the two of the major curricular factions that “won” their place in American schools in Babbitt’s time. Chapters 4 and 5 examine Babbitt’s philosophical qualms with the two major American educational figures of his lifetime: Charles W. Eliot and John Dewey. Much has been written about Babbitt’s arguments with Eliot concerning education, particularly the institution of the elective system at Harvard. I attempt to explore Babbitt’s remarks concerning Eliot’s ideas on the lower schools, especially in Babbitt’s later work. Babbitt’s major argument against Dewey concerned Dewey’s definition and use of experience in the classroom; Babbitt questioned Dewey’s practice of valuing the individual experience of the student while neglecting the accumulated experience of humanity found in classical texts. I conclude by examining the latest call for infusing a humanist curriculum in American schools, E.D. Hirsch, Jr.’s “cultural literacy,” and I surmise Babbitt’s reactions to his ideas. I can make no claim, again, that the adoption of any or all of Babbitt’s educational ideals will institute profound, far-reaching change. It is doubtful that such a practice could even be fruitfully begun. Consequently, I can only speak of my individual interpretation of Babbitt’s ideas on education, both as an educational historian and as a high school teacher. Babbitt spent his career in part explaining the difficulty of gracefully moving between the general and the particular: my attempt has been to make this move, in both directions, between Babbitt’s ideas and my own classroom.



## Chapter 1: Babbitt and the New Humanism

“Some one has to make a beginning though it is disheartening to stand out almost alone against the main drift of one’s time.”

--Babbitt, letter to Paul Elmer More, July 3, 1907

“... a time when the very foundations of civilization are being menaced by ruinous fads in education.”

--Babbitt, letter to Paul Elmer More, July 10, 1916

In his *Struggle of the American Curriculum, 1893-1958*, Herbert M. Kliebard examines the “curriculum ferment” of the 1890s by pointing out that this era marked the transition from the teacher-dominated school to one controlled by the curriculum. Kliebard argues that the “educational center of gravity” in the American public schools of the time “shifted from the tangible presence of the teacher to the remote knowledge and values incarnate in the curriculum” (1). Up until the 1890s the public school curriculum had been relatively stable: the infamous “three R’s” served most younger students, while Latin and perhaps Greek were required for students able to make it further along in their schooling. The almost unquestioned rationales for such a curriculum centered on the desire to pass along cultural knowledge to the younger generations while providing students with a form of mental discipline. School officials and experts perceived the mind as a muscle, and as such, it needed to be exercised in order to stay vital. Subjects such as Latin and trigonometry were therefore justified for a school population who, for the most part, would never be exposed to such material ever again.

But as Kliebard goes on to detail, by the 1890s these justifications were suddenly under attack. The importance of passing cultural knowledge to successive generations became diminished as American society and the economy underwent massive changes in this era of expansive industrialization; waves of immigrants entered an economy no longer based on the country's agrarian past. New skills were needed to perform new jobs. Schools emphasizing cultural knowledge, to some experts, were doing a disservice to students who were entering this pristine job market. The notion of the mind as a muscle was under attack as well. Kliebard posits that

By the 1890s, visible cracks were becoming apparent in the walls of mental discipline. As a theory of curriculum, after all, it represented a curious and not very stable compromise. If, indeed, the mind were really like a muscle and could be strengthened by exercise, why could not we exercise it on a wide variety of different subjects rather than the restricted set that was customarily prescribed? Why, even, could not a faculty like memory be developed through exercise with nonsense syllables? (6)

Of course, if any sort of mental "training" could help shape and solidify the mind, then it only makes sense to use this training for other ends, such as an education suitable for the ever-changing commercial culture. The edifice that these more liberal subjects stood upon began to weaken in this period. And as Kliebard relates, we now "see beginning to gel the interest groups that were to become the controlling factors in the struggle for the American curriculum in the twentieth century" (7).

Kliebard describes four different interest groups in this curricular battle. The developmentalists "proceeded basically from the assumption that the natural order of

development in the child was the most significant and scientifically defensible basis for determining what should be taught” (11). This child-study movement sought to examine the child to monitor his/her development naturally and then to develop and arrange curricula based upon these observations. G. Stanley Hall emerged as the leader of this faction, as his works focused on “an inventory of the contents of children’s minds” (11). Kliebard’s second category consists of the social efficiency educators. These experts believed that a “scientifically constructed curriculum at its core” could lay the foundation “in creating a coolly efficient, smoothly running society” (24). Leaders such as Franklin Bobbitt and David Snedden sought varied curricula that would suit students in their future fulfillment of certain roles in society. The means and ends of this differentiated curricula reflected the desire and prestige of the time of striving to be both scientific and efficient. Kliebard labels his third group the social meliorists. This faction’s premise “put education at the center of any movement toward a just society” (23). Advocates looked to a curriculum in which students were able to learn and thus act in ways in which those unsavory aspects of American society could be recognized and remediated once students entered into it. The social meliorists re-emphasized the perennial American “faith in the power of education to correct social evils and promote social justice” (23); and as the American culture, society, and economy underwent profound changes at the turn of the century and the following few decades, social meliorists were never short on advocates.

Kliebard’s fourth group represented the status quo of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: the humanists. These were the “guardians of an ancient tradition [who were] tied to the power of reason and the finest elements of the Western cultural heritage” (23).

Seemingly the humanist curriculum was so entrenched within American schools in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that a prominent leadership was not demanded. As new curricular groups arose to find a place in American schools at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, their leaders needed a visible place in the educational conversation, and often these leaders were immersed in the schools. The irony concerning the humanist faction was that though their curriculum clearly dominated American schools, their leaders were mostly absent from schools themselves. A few reasons can probably be attributed to this. First, prominent and outspoken leaders were not needed to promote a curriculum that remained mostly unassailable for the course of American educational history. No curricular battles had to be fought; teachers, students, and the public had this particular notion of schooling ingrained in them. It was only when the humanist curriculum came under attack that leaders were looked upon. Secondly, these leaders who did emerge were often affiliated with universities, as the universities were often perceived as creating and guarding the curriculum of the lower schools. In fact, many critics of the 1893 curricular recommendations of the Committee of Ten charged that because most of the members on the Committee were college men, their counsel called for the same academic curriculum in schools that perpetually fed universities their students. Therefore, if one goal of the humanist curriculum was to prepare students for higher levels of academics, then it made sense that the leaders would be positioned, for the most part, in universities. Thirdly, it is probable that the leaders of the other curricular factions had a much easier opportunity to enter the schools directly because of the nature of their advocacy. The developmentalists studied children, while Raymond E. Callahan has clearly documented the interaction of efficiency experts with the daily operations of the schools.<sup>1</sup> The humanist leaders had

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<sup>1</sup> Callahan's *Education and the Cult of Efficiency: A Study of the Social Forces that have Shaped the*

very little desire or need to enter into this fray, as “their” curriculum was already well in place. And as Kliebard points out, though these leaders

remained, for the most part, outside the professional education community, they exerted a powerful influence through their standing in the academic world and among intellectuals generally. To them fell the task of reinterpreting, and thereby preserving as best as they could, their revered traditions and values in the face of rapid social change and a burgeoning school system. (23)

It is therefore intriguing to examine the shadowy and almost distant advocates of the humanist curriculum that so dominated the American school curriculum up to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as they remained outside of this realm. Diane Ravitch focuses her treatment on the humanist leaders on two figures:

The two most influential educators in the 1890s were Charles W. Eliot, president of Harvard University, and William Torrey Harris, U.S. commissioner of education. As vigorous proponents of liberal education, they believed that the primary purpose of education was to improve society by improving the intelligence of individuals. (30)

Eliot, of course, fit the classical profile of a humanist advocate. A graduate of Harvard, Eliot was elected its president in 1869. His stature in American education was unquestioned, and he was asked to lead the Committee of Ten in 1892. But of course, Eliot’s voice concerning the lower schools came from afar. And this caused consternation for some critics of the Committee of Ten’s 1893 report. The report

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*Administration of the Public Schools* (Chicago: U of Chicago P., 1962) is the foremost study of the efficiency experts and their influence on American education at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Callahan’s work is also considered in Chapter 3.

produced four different courses of study that were suggested for American high schools: Classical, Latin-Scientific, Modern Languages, and English. Though this seemed to provide schools with more leeway for differentiated curricula, critics pointed out that all four tracks were still dominated by academic subjects, especially Latin. Eliot certainly desired for the academic subjects to remain central. Edward A. Krug tells that

In an address to the New England Association in October, 1893, before the completion of the report, Eliot deplored the representation of the modern studies by what he called ‘an extraordinary number of scraps of miscellaneous subjects, instead of a limited number of substantial subjects each treated with some thoroughness.’ He disparaged ‘the scrappy, ineffective programs’ substituted for the classics, adding, however, that it was ‘one object of the conference to show the way to make the so-called English, or modern, side of our high schools just as firm, substantial, and valuable as the classical side.’(63)

Though Eliot conceded that part of his job was to “show the way” on making a more modern curriculum as academically rigorous and valuable as the standard Classical curriculum, some critics felt that Eliot did not go far enough in his charge. And the persistent argument that Eliot and the rest of the Committee were college men implementing a college-preparation curriculum continued. Krug explains that “During the spring and summer of 1894 it was in fact the college men on the Committee and in the conference, with their alleged ignorance of schools, who had drawn most of the popular fire” (77). Many city superintendents’ biggest problem was that “It was largely that the college men were meddling with the elementary schools, especially by their

recommendations for the introduction of subjects in seventh and eighth grades” (77). Of course, Eliot would undoubtedly be at the forefront of these types of attacks. As the long-time President of Harvard, Eliot made revolutionary changes, such as implementing the elective system early in his tenure at Harvard. Seemingly, though, the perception persisted that his position led him to advocate the traditional academic curriculum which many educators believed to be sorely outdated in America at the turn of the century.

But Eliot’s position as a (or perhaps *the*) humanist leader eventually became tenuous. Apparently his more progressive views concerning Harvard and higher education gradually influenced his position on the lower schools as well. Kliebard details this philosophical shift and labels Eliot’s change of heart as both “startling” and “almost inexplicable” (105). Earlier Eliot had advocated a humanistic curriculum for all students regardless of their probable future occupations. Many students in school in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had the means and opportunity to use the schools as a foundation to attend universities and then to become professionals – the majority of students did not need to learn a specific skill or a certain type of technical expertise to use in a career. A humanistic education was much easier to defend in this societal and economic context. But once the population of the United States rose significantly, school attendance did as well. Seemingly, then, by 1908 Eliot recognized the quickly changing American economy and society and decided that the schools could serve a more practical and therefore important function for this influx of students. One aspect of this role was that “teachers of the elementary schools ought to sort the pupils and sort them by their evident or probable destinies”; in fact, he believed there was “no function more important” (qtd.

105).<sup>2</sup> The other aspect connected with this sorting mechanism was Eliot's call for manual education. After all, not all students' futures involved higher education, so vocational options needed to be offered for those increasing number of students. In fact, as Kliebard points out, Eliot's change of philosophy sounded nothing like what he reported as the head of the Committee of Ten; instead, he began to echo the sentiments of G. Stanley Hall and the developmentalists on the need to study children early in their schooling in order to create and offer the education most suited to their future needs, what eventually became known as tracking (105). Through these curricular struggles Eliot was able to foresee that the humanists had to make some adjustments to their program for any semblance of their ideas to be vital in the schools. Kliebard surmises that

If the humanist values he cherished could not be instilled in the entire school population, as Eliot would have undoubtedly preferred, they could at least be preserved in that segment whose 'destiny' it was to go on to college. Without that compromise, it must have seemed conceivable, at least in the context of educational reform during the first decade of the twentieth century, that humanist values might be eradicated altogether from the American school curriculum. Curriculum makers and leaders in the professional education community more and more saw the temper of American life in the early twentieth century and, to some extent, mass public education itself as inconsistent with humanist values and traditions, and this perception served to isolate the humanist tradition from the mainstream of American educational policy making. With the tide of

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<sup>2</sup> In this respect, one could make the argument that Eliot simply left the humanist camp for the social efficiency camp.



educational change running against them, humanists seemed to be reaching an undeclared *détente* with the social-efficiency educators, whereby the traditional academic curriculum would be preserved, but only in connection with a select portion of the school population, increasingly defined as ‘college-entrance’ students. (105-6)

Eliot’s reversal, along with his perceived progressive implementations at Harvard, caused some humanists to question his authority as a leader of the humanists and at the same time search for a more authentic voice as the century began.

Ravitch couples William Torrey Harris along with Eliot as a leader of the humanist camp at the turn of the century. Harris too was a prominent leader in American education at this time, as Lawrence A. Cremin claims he was “undoubtedly the commanding figure of his pedagogical era” (14). Serving as the superintendent of the St. Louis public schools from 1868-80 and as the United States Commissioner of Education from 1889-1906, Harris could not be charged with being disengaged from American schools as critics characterized other humanists. But he did share with other humanists a belief that “the purposes of education must be tied to time-honored principles deeply imbedded in the wisdom of the race” and that the school “was merely to play a part in confirming an order that had already come into existence” (17). Harris is probably best known for his advocacy of disciplining the expansive tendencies of individuals through the education of the “five windows of the soul – mathematics, geography, literature and art, grammar, and history” (19). Through these five portals a student could receive the humanistic discipline to check the naturalistic tendencies that Rousseau and his followers celebrated. And beyond this, Ravitch argues that “Harris defended classical studies on

unusual grounds,” in that he “spoke of the value of ‘self-alienation’” (36). Self-alienation was Harris’s notion that students needed to be taken away from their everyday surroundings (not physically, but academically) in order to confront the great ideas, events, and people found in the classics. Vocational education, therefore, did not provide students this distance or opportunity for engagement, Ravitch continues, but as the rise of industrial education began, Harris “appeared to be an old foggy” (37). As Cremin notes, and as is often the case in educational history, “his pedagogy itself became the target of a succeeding generation of protest” (20). And as Joseph Watras argues,

When Harris died in 1908, there was no one of similar stature who could or would defend the idea that the nature of intellectual pursuits differed from those of practical activities. One of Harris’s recent biographers, William Reese, contends that, in the early years of the twentieth century, educators repudiated virtually everything Harris advocated. According to Reese, Harris had little influence beyond his lifetime because he did not teach at a university and failed to write a major text that kept his message alive. (13)<sup>3</sup>

Harris’s death in 1908 came at a time when the other curricular factions were in their relative infancy. Therefore, the humanists lost a vital leader within the American school system at a time when their opponents were just beginning to gain prominence.

One such hopeful successor to Harris’s humanist throne was William Chandler Bagley. Bagley began his career in relative obscurity, as he started teaching at Montana State in 1902. He eventually made his way to a position at Teachers College in 1918, and

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<sup>3</sup> Watras quotes Reese from “The Philosopher-King of St. Louis,” found in *Curriculum and Consequence: Herbert M. Kliebard and the Promise of Schooling*. Ed. Barry M. Franklin. NY: Teachers College, 2000. 155.

as his biographer L. Wesley Null, in 2003, details, Bagley's role as a humanist leader culminated in his notion of Essentialism. Bagley's Essentialist platform included restoring the primacy of the teacher, a return to a more systematic organization of instruction, the teaching of democratic core ideals, and the right of students to be taught a body of subject matter (253). These tenets became the rage in certain educational circles and for many concerned citizens as a reaction against the perceived "softness" (i.e. child-centered principles) of the Progressive educational ideals that had been in place for years. Because of the years of Progressive education being at the forefront of Americans' minds in the decades leading up to the Great Depression, the perception existed that this neglect of basic skills and the allowance of students to set their own educational course perhaps led the nation into the Great Depression in the first place. In other words, the belief existed that the lessened influence of the traditional, "hard" subjects caused a generation of American students to lose sense of the American ethics of hard work and sacrifice. Null chronicles that Bagley and the Essentialists reached the pinnacle of their influence on February 25, 1938, at the American Association of School Administrators meeting in Atlantic City. Bagley and Dewey gave successive speeches to the audience documenting their respective educational beliefs. Though both men in their speeches came to agreement on numerous tenets, the press, perhaps anxious for a story, reported that a philosophical battle had taken place. One headline even stated "Bagley Declares War on Dewey" (241). Thus, Bagley and the Essentialists arguably reached the national scene with a humanistic curriculum that was gaining greater popularity. The problem for this humanist campaign was that Bagley's Essentialism march was rather short-lived. Bagley and the Essentialists made a national splash, but Null provides an explanation why this

movement was so fleeting. First, Essentialism's co-founder alongside Bagley, classicist Michael Demiashkevich, tragically committed suicide in August of 1938, only months after this movement came upon the national scene (251). Secondly, Bagley still felt compelled to keep his focus on teacher education and the reality of the actual classroom (a charge that most humanists could not easily dismiss). Bagley therefore filled his leadership roles with administrators and teachers from the public schools. But this tendency hurt Bagley's cause in the long run, as his fellow leaders were in a losing battle of perceptions when debating the likes of luminaries such as Dewey and George S. Counts. And thirdly, Hitler's invasion of Poland forced Bagley to admit that American educational concerns paled in comparison to focusing on the threat of another world war (252). As far as the humanist curriculum goes, therefore, Bagley's influence was rather short-lived and came decades after the most critical period of the battle for the curriculum.

### **Babbitt and the New Humanists: An "Outsider" Perspective**

Educational scholars seem to have neglected or perhaps overlooked the contribution to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century curriculum struggle performed by the New Humanists, a group of university scholars who deplored certain aspects of both American culture and its education at the turn of the century. J. David Hoeveler, Jr.<sup>4</sup> explains that

The New Humanism sprang from a profound disaffection with the modern age. Centering its attention on the governing ideas of the contemporary world, it surveyed the triumph of relativism in philosophy and social thought, of

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<sup>4</sup> Hoeveler, Jr.'s *The New Humanism: A Critique of Modern America, 1900-1940* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1977) provides the best account of the New Humanism movement in its social, historical, philosophical, and political contexts.

materialism in daily living, and of romanticism and naturalism in literature, and was convinced that twentieth-century man had lost his bearings. (3)

This conservative faction was headed by two academics, Irving Babbitt of Harvard and Paul Elmer More of Princeton. Babbitt and More's first followers included a handful of their students, most famously T.S. Eliot, Norman Foerster, and Stuart Pratt Sherman, though of course those outside this initial circle but sympathetic to the causes of the New Humanism also were included in the ranks. The New Humanists banded around identifying the problems of the contemporary American culture, including religion, literature, and the arts, but education was never far from the New Humanists' central view. Of course, this should come as no surprise considering how intertwined education is (and was) with American culture. In fact, Hoeveler, Jr. proclaims that "the first major outline of the New Humanism" was Babbitt's 1908 *Literature and the American College: Essays in Defense of the Humanities*. As Babbitt's title indicates, because all of the New Humanism's leadership was made up of scholars, their primary focus concerning education usually involved colleges and universities. This, perhaps, is why educational historians have generally ignored the New Humanists in regards to studies of the public school system in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is my stance, however, that the New Humanists certainly had a voice concerning the curricular battles taking place in the schools and were not just commenting on the affairs of higher education. Babbitt in particular led this charge. As Hoeveler, Jr. notes, "Babbitt was, indeed, a crusader for Humanism. He proposed to meet the moderns on their own ground and make Humanism defensible empirically without appeal to metaphysics or dogmatic religion. [...] [He] did not avoid controversy and was often the object of attack" (10). This personality of the

“Warring Buddha of Harvard” contradicted his fellow leader More, the “Hermit of Princeton” (11). More was content to spend his career writing in seclusion, especially about humanism’s relationship to religion, and he eventually left academia altogether to become editor of the *Nation* (11). In fact, More once rhetorically asked “Plato and a garden, what more should human nature desire?” (12). Babbitt, then, took the onus of spreading the gospel humanism to the public, particularly in matters concerning education.

Babbitt was born in 1865 in Dayton, Ohio. Contrary to common perceptions, perhaps, his life consisted of none of the elitism one might attach to someone who received two degrees from Harvard and who taught there for nearly forty years. The youthful Babbitt spent some time as a ranch-hand on his uncle’s farm in Wyoming and as a newspaper boy in New York City when his family briefly relocated there. His uncle helped Babbitt with finances in attending Harvard, and once there he stood apart from most of his classmates by his love of the classics and his aloofness towards the modern subjects. He graduated with honors in 1889. After a year of teaching classics at the College of Montana in Deer Lodge, he studied Eastern languages for another year in Paris. Babbitt then returned to Harvard and received his A.M. in 1893. The next year he taught Romance languages at Williams College and then arrived back to Harvard in 1894 to teach there until his death in 1933. Babbitt’s long teaching career at Harvard was a tumultuous one. He began teaching in the French department until entering the Comparative Literature department in 1902. He was granted tenure and promoted to full professor finally in 1912, though Babbitt’s desire throughout was to become a member of the Classics department. But partly due to budgetary constraints and partly due to his

outspoken views on his perceived failures of higher education, including his disparagement of a selection of his colleagues whom he felt betrayed the humanist ideals a university should promote, Babbitt was never able to procure this position. Babbitt was also not shy in publishing his critiques of Harvard president Charles Eliot and his elective system, making his professional rise even tougher. Babbitt, though, published works throughout his career<sup>5</sup> and promoted the New Humanism in his classroom.<sup>6</sup> The common threads and tone of Babbitt's works, which crossed four decades, are quite firm, as More once described him as someone who seemed to have "sprung up, like Minerva, fully grown and fully armed" and that "there is something almost inhuman in the immobility of his central ideas" (Manchester and Shepard 325). Remarkably Babbitt's ideas on education include the same central tenets in the writings that spanned his long, intellectually active career; he was unwavering in his ideas.

And yet, Babbitt's influence on American education is either ignored or relegated to the realm of higher education. It is vital to note that *Literature and the American College*, Babbitt's first full-length book, came out in 1908, the same year as Eliot's monumental shift in thinking on the aims of the American school curriculum. In addition, this is the same year in which William Torrey Harris died, leaving Watras to claim that no other humanist could or would fill his leadership role within the curriculum struggle. My contention here is that Babbitt's thought needs to be re-examined in terms of these curricular battles, and not just in terms of higher education. Cremin's canonical

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<sup>5</sup> As a literature professor, Babbitt primarily published works of literary criticism, though, as will be presented more fully later, most of these works included his thoughts on and critiques of education. Often he attributed the current state of letters to education, and vice versa.

<sup>6</sup> The two best biographical accounts of Babbitt's life and career are found in Stephan C. Brennan and Stephen R. Yarbrough's *Irving Babbitt*. (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), and Thomas R. Nevin's *Irving Babbitt: An Intellectual Study*. (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1984).

*The Transformation of the School* (1964) makes no mention of Babbitt. Neither does Ravitch in her *Left Back: A Century of Battles Over School Reform* (2000), easily the most conservative examination of curricular history, and consequently, the one book most in tune with Babbitt's ideology. Krug's meticulous *The Shaping of the American High School* (1964) makes one mention of Babbitt in a bibliographical note (482) concerning one of his essays attacking Eliot.<sup>7</sup> Late in his book Kliebard examines those humanists protesting educational aims and methods which fell under the heading of "Progressive education." He brings up Babbitt by asserting that other

humanist scholars, such as Irving Babbitt, speaking from his perch at Harvard University, consistently deplored the state of decay into which American scholarship had fallen. But apart from the eternal complaint that students were arriving at the great centers of learning with ever-weaker preparation for the rigors of scholarly endeavor, academicians in the 1930s rarely bothered to intervene in the internal affairs of elementary and secondary schools. (190)

Kliebard mentions earlier in his book (as quoted above) that most humanists of the day were in scholarly positions and outside the curricular fray. And yet his tone concerning Babbitt seems almost dismissive. But if we are ready to admit that most humanist scholars were in academic positions, then it does not seem to follow to discount such a voice because it comes from a university "perch."

Additionally, Kliebard groups Babbitt with Robert Maynard Hutchins and his Great Books Program (190). Though both men advocated a return to a more classical, liberal education in colleges and universities, Hutchins' views became popular after

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<sup>7</sup> This citation is from Volume 1 of Krug's *The Shaping of the American High School*. NY: Harper and Row, 1964. All other citations from Krug are taken from Volume 2 of *The Shaping of the American High School, 1920-1941*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1972.



Babbitt's death in the 1930s. This grouping seemingly causes Babbitt's analysis of American education in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to be overlooked. This categorization is evident elsewhere as well. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs* (2002), Elliot W. Eisner briefly looks at the historical context of the six curriculum ideologies found in American schools. Eisner asserts that

Rational Humanism locates its modern roots in the Enlightenment and its ancient roots in Plato. Today, its most visible educational manifestation is found in Mortimer Adler's (1982) *Paideia Proposal* and, in the 1930s through the 1950s, in the Great Books Program promulgated by Robert Maynard Hutchins and Mortimer Adler. (62-3)

To be fair, Eisner's focus is not on curricular history, as his purpose is to examine current curricular practices in American schools. But his treatment of the humanists seems to be representative of how many critics categorize them. While conceding that humanism has an extensive history beginning with the Greeks and Plato, the study of the American version of humanism and its proponents often seems to be quickly summarized and subsequently ignored. Hutchins and Adler are usually enthroned as the keepers of this tradition, as earlier leaders and the intricacies of their definitions of the means and ends of humanism are often disregarded. Eisner also points out that Hutchins, in the 1950s, voiced his displeasure for the proliferation of the elective system and vocational education in American education (66). Babbitt and the New Humanists too brought these concerns to the forefront of curriculum struggle, but this was done in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The notoriety gained by Hutchins is certainly merited, but it often

causes the neglect of humanists, particularly Babbitt, before him. Kliebard also puts William Chandler Bagley in this group of those protesting against Progressive education principles. But, again, his most profound influence occurred in the 1930s as well. Seemingly the humanist timeline, at least for educational historians, involves the crowning of Eliot and Harris as leaders as the humanist curriculum came under attack in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. And 1908 serves as a watershed mark, as Eliot changes his philosophical stance and Harris dies; yet, the humanist leadership seems to be void until the 1930s when Bagley's Essentialism and Hutchins' Great Books Program reach the national scene. Babbitt's voice seems to be the lone one advocating humanism during these three decades.

But again, whatever examination scholars have given to Babbitt and the New Humanists concerning education almost always concerns higher education. Gerald Graff's *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (1987) is undoubtedly the most detailed historical account of Babbitt's influence on the university level, as Graff's account traces the historical development and place of English departments and the teaching of literature within American higher education. Graff groups Babbitt and the New Humanists into a larger category he denotes as the "Generalists" at the turn of the century. In fact, he labels Babbitt as the "arch-generalist, whose *Literature and the American College* could be taken as the definitive statement of the generalist philosophy" (83). This emphasis on higher education should come as no surprise of course, as most of the New Humanists were students of Babbitt and More at Harvard and Princeton respectively, who then went on to academic careers in other institutions such as Yale, Berkeley, and Chicago. This notion serves as ammunition for critics of Babbitt and the

New Humanism: their perceived elitism is generally subject to attack. For example, Russell Kirk brings up the example of “Granville Hicks, then a Marxist, who declaimed that the New Humanists had nothing to say to mill hands, Colorado beet-toppers, and screw tighteners on the Ford assembly line” (“The Enduring Influence of Irving Babbitt” 19). Yet Graff is quick to point out that “the same reactionary outlook that scorned the vulgarity of the masses scorned also the vulgarity of organized business and the assimilation of higher education by the values of the industrial workplace” (83). Periodically in his works Babbitt pointed to Henry Ford and John D. Rockefeller by name – his conclusion was that their education failed them in producing any law of restraint of material wealth and any inclination to follow a higher law within themselves. And this is Babbitt’s concern with education in general; he reminded readers of Socrates’ fear of teaching students to be efficient as an end to itself, as it was likely to produce people who are efficient in anything but goodness.<sup>8</sup> Graff concludes that all in all “the generalists’ educational aim was essentially to adapt the old college ideal of liberal culture to the challenges of modern times” (85). For those New Humanists concerned with education, reaching this goal became the rallying cry. Babbitt’s book set the tone for this charge and others followed suit, particularly Foerster and his *The American Scholar* (1929) and *The American State University* (1937).

It is my contention that the New Humanists, led by Babbitt, turned their attention to the public schools as well. For a group with a certain position concerning culture, society, literature, art, and higher education, it is nearly impossible to believe that concerns about this ideology was not transferred to the public schools as well. How can a

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<sup>8</sup> This passage is found in *Literature and the American College* (108) and will be discussed in more detail in later chapters.

group so concerned with American culture not at the same time be interested in the education this culture provides to its children? Babbitt did comment on specifics of the curricular struggle, especially his derision for Eliot, Dewey, and the child-study advocates of the time. Babbitt was also very particular about the definition of “humanism,” and those whom he thought were posing as humanists but who were promoting something quite different. And beyond this, it is appropriate to examine Babbitt’s ideas on the culture in general with the educational system as a part of it, as the two conventions are inextricably bound. So what view of life and this culture did Babbitt and the New Humanists believe and promote? Kirk answers that their

genuine humanism is the belief that man is a distinct being, governed by laws particular to his nature: there is a law for man, and there is a law for thing. [...] The disciplinary arts of *humanitas* teach man to put checks upon his will and his appetite. Those checks are provided by reason – not the private rationality of the Enlightenment, but the higher reason which grows out of a respect for the wisdom of our ancestors and out of the endeavor to apprehend order in the person and order in the republic.

(“Introduction,” *Democracy and Leadership*, 15)

Always under this central framework, Babbitt and the New Humanists certainly took an intense interest in the educational debates of the time. Hoevelar, Jr. notes that “The real struggle of the day, Babbitt thought, would be in education – ‘the one altruistic activity of the humanist’” (107). Had he lived, Babbitt even expected to write a second book on education.<sup>9</sup> But as it stands, he ended up writing six major works, devoting only

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<sup>9</sup> Brennan and Yarbrough attest that in Babbitt’s “last years he also began promising his followers a book on ‘Humanism and Education,’ meant to be the capstone of his thought and a practical program for

one work solely to education, though his thoughts on education can be found in all of his books. Along with *Literature and the American College* in 1908, Babbitt also published *The New Laokoon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts* (1910), *The Masters of Modern French Criticism* (1912), *Rousseau and Romanticism* (1919), *Democracy and Leadership* (1924), and *On Being Creative and Other Essays* (1932). In addition, a collection of his essays was published posthumously in 1940 under the title *Spanish Character and Other Essays*, which includes fourteen of Babbitt's essays that had been published previously elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> As Kirk maintains, both the order and the permanence of the cultural past exude the tenets of the New Humanism. Therefore, it is no surprise that in an age of new and varying educational ideas, programs, aims, methods, and curricula, Babbitt and the New Humanists felt the need to impose a sense of order, and perhaps even constraint, upon these warring factions. After all, if the apparatus educating the young is itself splintered, then what can we expect of the results? "Collectively," Hoeverler, Jr. points out,

the new forces in education had at least one common effect, the Humanists believed. They all violated the essential purpose of education – to link the cultural past to the present. The new course then became in their eyes a major symptom of an age trying desperately to find itself and not knowing where to go. The ideals of service, utility, individualism, and the cult of

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humanistic education. Finally, however, he could discover no way to order the chaos of American education. The manuscript fragment in the Babbitt Papers at Harvard is largely a nostalgic view of humanist education from ancient Greece to the Renaissance and breaks off the moment Rousseau turned childhood into an ideal instead of a state to outgrow" (111-2). Reading this manuscript myself, I agree wholly with Brennan and Yarbrough's summary.

<sup>10</sup> This collection of essays was republished in 1995 under the title *Character and Culture: Essays on East and West*, containing a new introduction by Claes G. Ryn and an index to all of Babbitt's books. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1995). I use this 1995 edition when quoting from Babbitt's essays contained within.

learning for its own sake merely signaled the abandonment of any effort to rediscover the permanent in the human condition and betrayed the modern fallacy that a greater involvement with the present will uncover the principles needed to resolve its problems. (108-09)

Perhaps their positions from afar allowed for the humanists to observe these battling factions acutely. After all, the assault upon the humanist curriculum only gained strength after Eliot's change of belief and Harris's death. For Babbitt and the New Humanists looking in upon the schools from their university positions, they seemingly perceived chaos reigning. Developmentalists, child-study advocates, social-efficiency experts, administrative-efficiency experts, social meliorists, and a variety of professionals who fell under the vague heading of Progressive Education all fought for predominance within the curricular landscape. It appears that within this perceived chaos, the only notion Babbitt and the New Humanists could understand for certain was that the transformation of cultural knowledge advocated within the humanist curriculum was clearly under attack and losing its influence.

This presents one instance in which society and schools demonstrate their inextricable nature. Babbitt and the New Humanists were quick to attack the propensity for both society and the schools to adore and covet the newest trends and fads. Their position was one in which the permanence of the past was to be held above the flux of the current day; an education that ignores the wisdom of our ancestors in exchange for the new educational fad of the day was symptomatic of a culture which worshiped all things new. Babbitt spoke directly to this throughout his works. He claimed that American society (and education) has produced "the man who does not care where he is going [...]"

provided he can go there faster and faster” (*Democracy and Leadership* 3-4). And in the beginning of his *Literature and the American College*, Babbitt claimed that “The firmness of the American’s faith in the blessings of education is equaled only by the vagueness of his ideas as to the kind of education to which these blessings are annexed” (71). Babbitt went on to call for a re-examination of the means and ends of education, as he believed that “The task of organizing and operating a huge and complex educational machinery has left us scant leisure for calm reflection” (71). Seemingly Babbitt witnessed clearly the curriculum struggle and the rush to newness it entailed. Progressive education promised just that, a progression from the past that, for Babbitt and the New Humanists, also ignored this past. And as Hoeverler, Jr. asserts,

Especially in a nation such as the United States, Babbitt believed, the first principle of education needed a stentorian defense. Nowhere else had the fact and ideal of newness been more completely a principle of living than in this country. [...] America had always been lured by concepts of the perfectibility of man and by evolutionary notions of progress. It had come to believe that each new decade was a gain over the last. The result was a kind of tyranny of the present. The emancipation from this tyranny, Babbitt insisted, was the chief benefit to be gained by a humanistic education that reflected the continuities of history. (109)

And as Kirk adds,

For no less than the ancients whom he much admired and emulated, Babbitt was convinced that education and culture are not a discrete technique, an autarchic act, or an abstract theory, splintered from the

historical situation. Rather they are a continuous and integral part of a nation's life. This consummate process, Babbitt insisted, includes reverence for a sense of measure and proportion that both emerges from and brings about a true union of will, imagination, and reason. ("The Enduring Influence of Irving Babbitt," 3-4)

But as the American culture continued on its course towards the new and the progressive, especially prevalent in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, educators felt this unabated influence as well. Babbitt and the New Humanists certainly appeared to be serving as reactionaries in both the cultural and educational realms, and this did not help their popular cause. After all, it was rather difficult for Babbitt and the New Humanists to gain a popular following as they stood against progressive principles both in the culture and in education. Their argument more subtlety was not against progress and advancement per se, but to where this endeavor was actually leading. But the easy strategy was (and is) to label this group as overly conservative reactionaries.

### **1930 and Humanist Success**

Babbitt once warned More in an October 31, 1907, letter, concerning one of More's works he planned on publishing, that "Certainly you should not bring in my name more than once, if once, in the notes. We shall get the name of mutual puffing, which will aid neither of us." For Babbitt and the New Humanists, their cause was certainly an uphill battle both culturally and educationally. But Babbitt and the New Humanists did find some success, though. Milton Hindus claims that

The year 1930, which marked the onset of the most famous of American economic Depressions, was also the *annus mirabilis* of Babbitt's career,



which saw the publication of two essay collections (Norman Foerster's *Humanism and America* and C. Hartley Grattan's *Critique of Humanism*) that centered their attention on Babbitt and made him, for a brief season, almost a household name among American intellectuals, merging insensibly with the identical name of Sinclair Lewis's fictional character of a decade before. (39)

Kirk adds that "John Dewey and his associates, in 1933 [the year of Babbitt's death], alarmed at the growing interest in the American Humanism, made a disingenuous attempt to capture the word 'humanism'" ("Introduction," *Democracy and Leadership*, 14). This "capture" culminated in Dewey and his followers establishing the American Humanist Association and publishing *The Humanist* magazine beginning in 1933. Seemingly, then, Babbitt and the New Humanists had gained a substantial following in the decades preceding the 1930s. Babbitt throughout his life and works warned of America's obsession with material wealth to the neglect of more spiritual and educational concerns. Perhaps Babbitt picked up followers who were likewise concerned with America's growing economic prowess in the beginning of the century, and perhaps 1930 serves as a sort of crossroads in which Babbitt's humanistic warnings began to come to fruition.

Hindus mentions that Foerster's *Humanism and America* in 1930 cemented this year as the New Humanists's peak in popularity. Foerster was an undergraduate student of Babbitt's at Harvard, and "became the most consistent and enduring exponent of Babbitt's ideas and the major Humanist voice after the deaths of Babbitt and More in the middle 1930s" (Hoeveler, Jr. 19). But while Babbitt and More were still the prominent leaders of the New Humanism in 1930, Foerster edited a collection of essays concerning

humanism's place in American society, including, of course, its educational principles. Foerster's book stands as the epitome of the defense of humanism put forth by the New Humanists. The collection consists of fourteen essays, all written, as Foerster explains in his Preface, "to work toward a set of definitions and a terminology neither too rigid nor too loose, to consider the requirements of humanism in the various activities of modern thought and life, to determine the special tasks that confront humanism in this latest moment of time" (xvi). Included are essays by More, T.S. Eliot, and Babbitt's "Humanism: An Essay at Definition," his final explanation after decades of defining and promoting humanism. Remarkably Babbitt had included a chapter in *Literature and the American College* in 1908 entitled "What is Humanism?" And yet, by 1930 Babbitt apparently felt the need to once again delineate humanism, as in both essays he implores those involved in the educational debates of both times on the need for the proper definition of terms such as humanism that tends, on the surface, to be quite vague. This seems to suggest that the years between 1908 and 1930 saw a proliferation of people using the term "humanism" in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons. As Babbitt states in his 1930 essay, "The boundaries of a genuine humanism are broad and flexible. It is plain, however, that the word is being appropriated for points of view that cannot be brought within these boundaries, however generously extended" (25). Within the curriculum struggle, it is interesting to note that the strongly embedded humanist curriculum at the secondary level supported at various times by the likes of Eliot, Harris, and Bagley, is perhaps even a corruption of the "genuine humanism" of the New Humanists. In fact, we have to consider why the New Humanists insisted on labeling themselves as "new." As I will propose later, Babbitt and the New Humanists saw many

aspects of the humanist curriculum with which they philosophically disagreed. And it is striking to note that Babbitt felt the need, both in 1908 and again in 1930, to give “genuine humanism” its proper definition and defense from threats on both the inside and outside.

These so-called outside threats were potent enough for Foerster to illustrate and attack them in his Preface. He pointed to four “special lines of attack by its naturistic opponents (x-xi)” put upon Babbitt and the New Humanists by 1930. First, Foerster reported that “Humanists are said to be academic,” a charge heard beginning from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (xi). He went on the defensive by assuring his readers that “it is obviously not true” that all Humanists are academics, or that they are not interested in practical affairs (xi). Later in his Preface, Foerster claimed that “In consequence of a diversity in occupations, as well as in temperament and personality, the authors of the book display numerous divergencies in outlook, in emphasis, and especially in tone” (xvi). But back to the charge that the New Humanists were simply academics sheltered in the ivory tower of American universities, Foerster did concede that

If it means that our humanists have been more interested than the workaday journalist critics in concrete knowledge and in general ideas, then indeed they may be termed academic. They perceive that when a new movement of thought and life is to be got under way, the first stage is naturally one of acquiring and organizing knowledge – particularly neglected knowledge. (xi)

This seems an apt description of what particularly Babbitt was trying to accomplish when he set out to define humanism in the midst of the varying factions within the curricular

battle. In a very real sense, Babbitt and the New Humanists were not overly “interested” in the “workaday” world in which many of the curricular factions were attempting to bring more prominently into the schools. Instead Babbitt called for an education that recognized the permanent as being above the flux; throughout his works he emphasizes the need to distinguish the One and the Many, as humanism sought to promote a central view of life through the permanence of the One in relation to the constant flux of the Many. For Babbitt, then, his genuine humanism stood above the fluctuation of the varying educational forces struggling for control of the American school and its curriculum.

Foerster went on to bring up three additional charges against the humanists and his quick dismissal of all three: they are un-American, reactionary, and Puritans in disguise. Foerster defended the un-American charge by claiming that the humanists recognize the historical reality of “the past cultural movements,” in that the “native expresses itself in the main unconsciously under the incitement of the foreign” (xii). The humanist curriculum in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was under attack in part because of its perceived indulgence on classical subjects that ignored the reality of the current American culture and society. For Foerster, “It is doubtful whether a *real* American culture could ever spring from our own experience; it is certain that it could be *caused* to spring from our own experience by a happy use of foreign culture” (xii). Humanists were also attacked for being reactionary. But as Foerster pointed out, “Being, in the main, historically educated men, however, humanists are well aware that a return to the past is impossible” (xii). Babbitt echoed this sentiment throughout his works; he asserted in his *Democracy and Leadership* that “I am myself a thoroughgoing individualist, writing for

those who are, like myself, irrevocably committed to the modern experiment” (143). Babbitt also recognizes that a return to the past is unattainable and also undesirable, and he vowed to meet the moderns on their own ground by being both positive and critical of the current age. Foerster’s last defense was against the notion that the humanists were really disguised Puritans. After arguing that the definition of Puritanism was rather vague, he surmised that critics actually meant that humanism only concerned itself with “regimentation or discipline” (xiii). This is an interesting charge especially in terms of education. The humanist curriculum of the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century came under attack by some who viewed schools as being too dictatorial. The school day was regimented as to make students appear to be automatons; the classical curriculum lent itself to this charge as well. After all, Latin was often taught grammatically with little or no regard to the meaning of the texts. This provides the perfect example of mental gymnastics, as the brain was being exercised regardless of the meaningless nature of the means. Foerster did admit that “the attainment of the ideal of completeness of life [...] is fatally frustrated at the start unless the ideal of centrality or self-control is introduced as the regulating principle” (xiv). Foerster went on to explain that

There have been enough humanists in the world to prove that in fact (and not only in theory) this image of a dull humanistic uniformity is another scarecrow. It is not the humanists, certainly, who look forward to a millennium in which all men and women will be superbly alike! (xiv-xv)

In his *Rousseau and Romanticism*, Babbitt explicated the emergence of Rousseau and his ideas from his time to the present. As a part of this shift from the Neo-Classical period, Babbitt places much of the blame on the classicists of Rousseau’s time and the generation

before. He talks about “the mechanical imitation and artificial decorum of a certain type of classicist” (44); “the late and degenerate classicist” (46); “because the classicism against which romanticism rebelled was inadequate it does not follow that every type of classicism suffers from a similar inadequacy” (14). It is probable that Babbitt considered the educational scene in a like manner: because schools imparted an over-arching regimentation over students while teaching a classical, humanistic curriculum, it does not mean that the curriculum itself has to be thrown away as well because it is somehow tainted. The flux of the curriculum struggle brought about the notion that the structure and organization of schools, along with their teaching methods, were hopelessly outdated and detrimental to many students. From Babbitt’s perspective, unfortunately the humanistic curriculum became inextricably tied to these problematic aspects of American education.<sup>11</sup>

George A. Panichas reminds us that “To the very end of his life and career, Babbitt’s preoccupation with educational issues never wavered” (135). Unfortunately, the coverage and examination of Babbitt’s interaction with educational issues of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century has not met the levels of his own preoccupation. It is my desire and hope to begin to bring about changing this seeming neglect. In the process, I hope to show Babbitt’s definition of humanism within the curricular struggle and his critique of the

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<sup>11</sup> Babbitt charged certain “defects” were part of “Our traditional education” (*Democracy and Leadership* 310). He maintained “though we need to revive our sense of tradition, we cannot afford to be mere traditionalists, lest we suffer from [a] lack of ideas. [...] Our holding of tradition must be in the highest degree critical; that is, it must involve a constant process of hard and clear thinking, a constant adjustment, in other words, of the experience of the past to the changing needs of the present” (“Are the English Critical?” 44). In *Rousseau and Romanticism*, Babbitt critiqued the tradition of Jesuit education and its “formalistic taint”: “The Greek and especially the Latin classics are taught in such a way as to become literary playthings rather than the basis of a philosophy of life; a humanism is thus encouraged that is external and rhetorical rather than vital” (118). Babbitt’s concerns certainly echoed those critiques of the humanist curriculum and its “inhuman” methodology from its critics, especially in terms of the mind as a muscle. I believe it is safe to assume that Babbitt felt the same about aspects of the humanist curriculum—this idea will be explored in more detail in the following chapter.

philosophical trends in American schools he believed to have adversely affected this education, even though some of these strands paraded under the guise of humanism. In addition, I propose to detail Babbitt's ideological quarrels with both educational luminaries John Dewey and Charles W. Eliot within the context of the curricular struggle of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Babbitt contends that "Life does not give here an element of oneness and there an element of change. It gives a *oneness that is always changing*" (*Rousseau and Romanticism*, xiii). In light of the innumerable, various educational methods, techniques, and proposals inundating today's American schools, it is perhaps important to keep Babbitt's notion of oneness, in midst of all of this change, in mind.

## Chapter 2: Babbitt's Beliefs

“One critic ventured to say, if humanism could be explained in simple terms, most people would accept it.”

--Louis J.A. Mercier (1)

“By definition, there is really nothing new about [humanism], nothing in fact which the man in the street does not take for granted as immediate data of consciousness. It merely asserts that there is such a thing as ‘man as such.’”

--Mercier (13)

In delineating the educational ideas, particularly in terms of the curriculum, proposed by Irving Babbitt and the New Humanists, we must be careful in knowing precisely for what we are searching. Hoeveler, Jr. asserts that “Their critics rightly pointed to one of the major deficiencies of the movement – its lack of program” (139). We cannot fall into the temptation of looking for something as tangible as the later humanism promoted by Hutchins and Adler and their specific texts within the Great Books Program; likewise, we cannot use the earlier humanists as a guide: Eliot’s Committee of Ten Report and Harris’s “five windows of the soul” point to a specificity that Babbitt and the New Humanists, for the most part, avoided. This “lack of program” is something that Babbitt and the New Humanists actually strove for, though it did give their critics ammunition and perhaps hindered the New Humanists’ cause with a general public always anxious for specific educational programs. The wished-for educational reform of the New Humanists, partially based upon the ideas of Plato and Aristotle,



seemingly struggled for popularity in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, Babbitt and the New Humanists pointed to other curricular programs as inherently flawed because of their adherence to a structured program. Foerster, in his 1938 *The Future of the Liberal College* (published five years after Babbitt's death), examined the new educational theories and methods being promoted at Teachers College, especially regarding the social meliorists and their attempt at building a new social order. Foerster remarked, echoing the educational theory of Babbitt and the New Humanists at its simplest,

Bad institutions, as Rousseau declared long ago, are the root of evil; substitute good ones, and evil withers away. Such is the Utopian solution of the ancient problem of evil which Columbia has just discovered. If evil is more deeply rooted than the liberals saw, it may also be more deeply rooted than the radicals see, namely, in human nature itself, which remains to be dealt with under any system whatsoever. The remedy, so far as any exists, would seem to lie in the reform of individuals, and the ethical function of education would seem to consist in the development of individual integrity, not in the furtherance of social innovations. (33)

The idea was that educational programs and curricula tend to ignore the ethical center of the individual student; as a result, these systems of educating remove the emphasis from the individual to the group. The social meliorists and the social efficiency experts, seemingly for Babbitt and the New Humanists, gave primacy to society itself and only concentrated on how the individual fitted into this structure. Speaking religiously, Babbitt claimed that “The main concern for the Hindu, as it was for the medieval

Christian, is the salvation of the individual soul, whereas the interest of the modern man centers more and more in the progress, not of the individual, but of society” (“A Century of Indian Epigrams” 148). The developmentalists, on the surface, studied the individual student, but Babbitt would be quick to point out that this study was based solely on science. As Babbitt detailed throughout his works, this emphasis on the naturalistic and behavioristic aspect of the individual left the purely human (i.e. ethical) aspect of the individual short-changed. Pointing to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Babbitt posited that

Under the scientific influence man came to be looked upon more and more as entirely subject, in Emerson’s phrase, to the ‘law for thing.’ He is [...] to be explained entirely in terms of environment, heredity, climate and similar factors. Moral responsibility in the humanistic or religious sense is eliminated. (*Reading with a Purpose: French Literature* 45)

It was the job of the humanist to keep focused on what uniquely made us human. Thus for Babbitt, the need for the education of the individual was deeply rooted on the inner, ethical self. Any sort of educational strategy or program that put undue emphasis on the larger society or the naturalistic aspects of individuals was considered deficient. And as these other curricular factions became more popular and viable in American schools, Babbitt’s call for a New Humanism that reversed this trend only grew stronger. As he remarked in *Democracy and Leadership*, “My own objection to this substitution of social reform for self-reform is that it involves the turning away from the more immediate to the less immediate” (7).

What we have then is Babbitt’s idea of the primacy of the inner-self. For Babbitt this notion boiled down to what he called throughout his works as “the civil war in the

cave.” The warring factions were composed of a dualism between impulse (and what he also termed “expansion”) and control. Babbitt conceded that we have a natural tendency to succumb to ever-expansive impulses that need to be continually checked by our ability to control them. “The aim of the humanist,” said Babbitt,

and that from the time of the ancient Greeks, has been the avoidance of excess. Anyone who sets out to live temperately and proportionately will find that he will need to impose upon himself a difficult discipline. His attitude towards life will necessarily be dualistic. It will be dualistic in the sense that he recognizes in man a ‘self’ that is capable of exercising control and another ‘self’ that needs controlling (*On Being Creative* xiv-xv).

Because this inner-control/inner-check is outside of our immediate perceptions, it can therefore be troublesome in properly defining. Milton Hindus explains that “Babbitt’s effort throughout his books is to supply a satisfactory meaning to the expression the *inner check*” (10). “What Babbitt means by the *inner check*,” Hindus continues,

could be illustrated from the writings of many authors, sacred and profane, whom he quotes. There is, for example, that favorite personage of Babbitt’s, the Buddha. One of the striking verses of *The Dhammapada* [which Babbitt translated in 1927 and was published posthumously in 1936] reads as follows: ‘If a man conquers in battle a thousand times a thousand men, and if another conquers himself, he is the greater of conquerors.’ And then there is the passage from John Milton which reads

[...]: 'He who reigns within himself and rules passions, desires, and fears is more than a king.' (10)

Education, thus, is the strengthening of this vital control so that we do not become slaves to our natural, vital impulses. But the education Babbitt saw in place at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century tended more and more to ignore this nurturing of control. And for Babbitt religious institutions and the culture in general were becoming more deficient in promoting this check as well: "With the decline of the inner life, there has been a weakening of control over the expansive lusts of the natural man – whether the lust of knowledge or the lust of sensation or the lust of power" (*Democracy and Leadership* 190). Seemingly, then, Babbitt believed that the "new" education did not do enough in developing and strengthening the vital control found in the dualistic nature of each student. The various curricula factions all emphasized different aspects of the student: the child-study movement vowed to examine students' natural inclinations in their environment, ignoring, or at least devaluing, according to Babbitt, the inner check within students' natural tendency towards expansion. The social efficiency advocates (desiring a smoother running society) and social meliorists (looking to ameliorate the ills of American culture) both looked to the larger American society first, leaving the inner life (i.e. "the civil war in the cave") of students to develop on its own. Students, Babbitt believed, were seen as mere instruments to plug into a society once they reached a certain age when their schooling was over; they entered these eventual roles with no training on controlling their natural, expansive impulses. Babbitt's humanism would make sure that this inner-check was well developed.

It is also necessary to examine Babbitt's critique of the humanistic curriculum of his time, as he sought to replace even that with his "new" humanism. Though Babbitt obviously directed much of his ire towards the various educational schemes invading the humanist curriculum, it is interesting to note that he arguably saves his most damning critique for the current humanistic curriculum itself. For what Babbitt perceived was a degeneration of a humanistic education and curriculum that easily allowed other educational factions the opportunity to criticize, attack, and usurp it within the American schools. As with most of Babbitt's ideas on education, he looked at the problem from an historical and philosophical perspective, including a survey of the arts and literature in which these ideas were presented. He pointed to the classical education given by the humanist curriculum as being corrupted beginning with the neo-classical age of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Critics of the humanist curriculum of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> illuminated its perception of making learning purely passive and imitative; students were not given strong encouragement to use their imaginations, and their creative abilities were ignored for the sake of mechanically acquiring knowledge of the classics. Kliebard documents the influence of muckraking journalist Joseph Mayer Rice and his reports on schools beginning in 1892. Rice published scathing articles after "he traveled through thirty-six cities [...] making careful observations of the schools and classrooms he visited" (17-8). Rice's first-hand accounts told of the "monotony and mindlessness of school life" (20), and his "survey conveys a sense of urgency that many reformers felt about what had become a largely lifeless system of schooling" (18). Babbitt traced this admitted defect to a corrupted neo-classicism:

By making the arts purely imitative the neo-classicist had reduced the role of the spontaneous, the unexpected, the original. He [the corrupted neo-classicist] aimed to bring everything so far as possible under the control of the cold and deliberate understanding, to the neglect of all that is either above or below a certain rational level, - the sense of awe and mystery as well as the sense of wonder. He would have everything logical, conventionally correct, dryly didactic, able to give a clear account of itself when tested by the standards of common sense and ordinary fact. By his unwillingness to allow for the unconscious and the unpremeditated, he tended to identify art with the artificial. (*The New Laokoon* 62-3)

It is my contention that we can safely apply Babbitt's notion of the arts in general and place his thoughts within the specific realm of education. He clearly recognized the mechanistic shortcomings of the classical education provided in American schools by the humanists. In his view, a supposed humanistic education that was based solely upon "cold and deliberate understanding" while ignoring those imaginative faculties that bring out in us what is most human, was, of course, a sham. This, then, was the reasoning behind the push for a "new" humanism by Babbitt and his followers.

### **Babbitt's Imagination**

Lest Babbitt and the New Humanists be labeled alongside the "dry" humanists of this period, it is integral to note well their contempt for a system of education that had lost all claims to the imagination and the poetic nature of teaching and learning. Babbitt argued that "The intellect is at best only an intermediary power; the first things and the last are equally hidden from it. What knowledge it has of either it must owe to intuition"

(“Pascal” 74). In other words, Babbitt acknowledged that our intellect can only go so far in making sense of the world: for young children, the intellect has very little influence on all of the sensory experiences (“the first things”) they must navigate. For adults whose intellects are well developed, contemplation, intuition, and other aesthetic acts (“the last [things]”) are all more valuable and proper than using merely our intellects. Since any type of direct sensory experience with reality or ability to imagine did not really involve the intellect, the humanists of this period regulated these parts of education to the periphery. Instead students were to develop their intellect with no regard to the first things of experiencing reality with the senses or the ability to rise above the intellect in reflection, contemplation, or intuition. It is then simpler to see Babbitt’s point that the current humanist curriculum offering a classical education opened itself up to attack. He proclaimed, in referring to the arts, “When beauty is conceived in so mechanical a fashion some one is almost certain to wish to ‘add strangeness’ to it” (*Rousseau and Romanticism* 56). Babbitt went on to tell of related neo-classicists of the 18<sup>th</sup> century who complained that there were no symmetrical patterns in the stars or that mountains were rough and irregularly shaped (56). With a dry and deliberate curriculum found in education, Babbitt perceived as inevitable that people would “add strangeness to it”: for him this meant the challenging curriculum factions, especially the child-centered educators following the tenets of Rousseau. To “add strangeness” to the curriculum was the natural reaction and response to the humanist curriculum that allowed for little or no intuition or imagination- the problem for Babbitt was that this reaction suffered from the same problem of the humanist curriculum of not properly mediating between the two

extremes of a purely subject-based curriculum and a purely child-based curriculum. He argued that

We suffer to the present day from this neo-classical failure to work out a sound conception of the imagination in its relation to good sense. Because the neo-classical held the imagination lightly as compared with good sense the romantic rebels were led to hold good sense lightly as compared with imagination. The romantic view in short is too much the neo-classical view turned upside down; and, as [French literary critic] Sainte-Beuve says, nothing resembles a hollow so much as a swelling. (*Rousseau and Romanticism* 14)

More will be said about the Rousseau-inspired child-centered education found often under the heading of Progressive Education in the next chapter. But for now it suffices to recognize that Babbitt and the New Humanists saw a glaring weakness in the humanistic curriculum and education of their time. They themselves recognized that the traditional education they promoted was certainly something opposed to the dry and mechanical education they currently found in the American schools. But they were not ready and willing to concede that humanism as its core needed to be thrown out along with the manner in which it was presented. As Babbitt reminded us, “Because the classicism against which romanticism rebelled was inadequate it does not follow that every type of classicism suffers from a similar inadequacy” (*Rousseau and Romanticism* 14). The central issue pertained to Babbitt’s belief in the vital role of imagination in learning as opposed to the formal and didactic humanism he witnessed in American education at the time.



What, then, was Babbitt's definition of "imagination," and how did it fit into his genuine humanistic education? Along with the dualism of the expansive desires and the inner check, Babbitt also seemingly conceived of an inherent dualism between the intellect (reason) and the imagination. He believed that the mediation of this dualism was also being shortchanged by the humanistic education of his era, as the rationalism of this curriculum ignored the student's natural inclination for imagination. Babbitt began by affirming that "No view of life is sound that lacks imaginative wholeness." He continued by quoting French moralist Joseph Joubert's notion that "'Whatever we think, we must think with our whole selves, soul and body,' and above all avoid one-sidedness" (*Masters of Modern French Criticism* 42). Along this strain, Babbitt noted Joubert's contention that "'Man is an immense being in some sort, who may exist partially but whose existence is delectable in proportion as it becomes full and complete.'" Babbitt concluded "It would not be easy to find an utterance more satisfying than this from the point of view of the humanist" (42). Babbitt's views on education certainly stayed true to his humanist notion of moderation in all things. All of the curricular factions seemed, using Babbitt's humanist mantra as a guide, to excessively promote a certain mean and end to the ignoring of all else, a critique Babbitt held of the current humanist curriculum itself. The key was finding a proper balance to avoid this "one-sidedness," a concept John Dewey wrote much about and Babbitt believed would be solved through his humanism.

Babbitt certainly recognized both the need for imagination in education and that the current humanist/classical curriculum of American schools generally avoided this type of nurturing. His goal was to achieve a proper balance of focus between the intellect

which was being emphasized too much within the humanist curriculum and the imagination, which for Babbitt, was being emphasized too much within other curricula, particularly of the child-centered movement of Progressive Education. But Babbitt certainly understood the complexity of his task: “the supposed opposition between reason and imagination was accepted by the romantic rebels against neo-classicism and has been an endless source of confusion to the present day” (*Rousseau and Romanticism* 353). It was Babbitt’s purpose to unite these two properly within a student’s humanistic education. He did not quarrel with the standard meaning of reason which was being trained in schools; it was that faculty that perceives and discriminates information. In 1933 Louis J.A. Mercier published *The Challenge of Humanism*, a book that further explicated Babbitt’s ideas.<sup>12</sup> Mercier hoped to aid Babbitt in this philosophical struggle both for education and in life itself. He detailed Babbitt’s beliefs on the relationship between reason and the imagination, adding that “The analytical intellect – reason – perceiving any given set of facts, and immobilizing them as at the given time and place, will tend to erect them into a dogma or at least into a convention. This is to set up fixed standards and to stop all progress” (69). Seemingly this result was what many critics of the humanist curriculum, including Babbitt, railed against, as students were perceived to be provided a given set of facts that were to stand on their own. Students were not greatly encouraged to strive for any attempt to make and discover connections between

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<sup>12</sup> Mercier was a French scholar who took to the New Humanist cause. In the foreword of this book, he thanked both Babbitt and More for the help in explaining their ideas for use in his writing. Mercier also included a lot of material concerning Dewey in this work, and it will be examined further in chapter 5. Mercier also wrote a remembrance of Babbitt in *Irving Babbitt: Man and Teacher* (Eds. Frederick Manchester and Odell Shepard. NY: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1941), a book containing nearly forty essays memorializing Babbitt’s life and career. In this essay, Mercier explained that he entered the same academic department of Babbitt at Harvard in 1911 as a fellow scholar, where he then considered Babbitt “one of the gods on the academic Olympus whom one may salute, but scarcely approach without good and sufficient reason” (192).

these pieces of information, and this education certainly, as Mercier and others lamented, became dogmatic and conventional. “But,” Mercier pointed out,

as Babbitt limits the term intellect or reason to a purely analytical function, reason thus conceived cannot get at reality, since reality is not dissociated elements but a living whole. It is not the tree cut up by the woodsman, but the growing, changing tree standing in the wood. [...] In so far as it analyzes, therefore, the intellect immobilizes life, and hence cannot reach living truth. (68)

Babbitt believed that the intellect was an integral part of learning, as it performed the function of grasping the reality of facts and phenomena. It is what allows us to grasp certain concepts and principles in a given situation, something that the humanist curriculum of Babbitt’s time was adept at producing.

But, of course, Babbitt was not satisfied with developing merely the intellect. As Mercier pointed out, “Babbitt does not give the first place to reason as the Greeks did” (67). Instead Babbitt awarded this first place to the imagination. This faculty for Babbitt was the one “that gathers things together, that sees likenesses and analogies and in so far unifies what were else mere heterogeneity” (*Democracy and Leadership* 13). Further, it allows us “to determine on experimental grounds to what degree any particular view of life is sanctioned or repudiated by the nature of things and rate it accordingly as more or less real” (14). In other words, the imagination for Babbitt was the faculty that allows individuals finally to see reality as a totality. Using the facts and information processed through the intellect, individuals then use the imagination to perceive how these make a coherent whole. For example, we would use our reason to recognize a character in a

book as being greedy, but it would be the function of our imagination then to recognize this characteristic in real people in real situations.<sup>13</sup>

Neither the reason nor the imagination can stand alone. He believed the imagination must, to be sure, be supreme, but it should be an imagination disciplined to the facts. If the imagination is not present, the facts will not be unified; they will remain inert and isolated. But the intellect must also be present – and by intellect I mean the power in man that analyzes and discriminates and traces causes and effects. (*Democracy and Leadership* 233)

Babbitt seemingly acknowledged that current educational factions often promoted one aspect to the neglect of the other, as he asserted that “the modern world has thus tended to oscillate between extremes in its attitudes toward the imagination” (*Rousseau and Romanticism* 354). For Babbitt, the ideal was to find not only the proper balance between the two, but to be able to use both faculties in accordance with each other. He noted that “The imagination reaches out and perceives likenesses and analogies whereas the power in man that separates and discriminates and traces causes and effects tests in turn these likenesses and analogies as to their reality: for we can scarcely repeat too often that though the imagination gives unity it does not give reality” (*Rousseau and Romanticism* 363). Reality comes to us through our reason in pieces and is then unified by our imagination. And so Babbitt was able to sum up his position by looking at education (and life) as a continual trek between truth (reason) and fiction (imagination): “For the true classicist, it will be remembered, the two things are inseparable – he gets at his truth through a veil of fiction” (*Rousseau and Romanticism* 21). Apparently, then,

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<sup>13</sup> My most memorable attempts at making this connection with my students are through Ebenezer Scrooge.

Babbitt diagnosed the current educational scene as a battle between extremes – the promotion of one faculty to the neglect of the other. His “new” humanism was to provide the balanced cure.

For Babbitt it was the imagination (whose nurturing was neglected in the humanist curriculum) that was then responsible to connect these facts into a coherent whole. But lest we become unbalanced in the other direction, the imagination had to be disciplined, unlike what Babbitt perceived was being advocated in the “new” education. “The classical imagination,” Babbitt argued

is not free thus to fly off at a tangent, to wander wild in some empire of chimeras. It has a centre, it is at work in the service of reality. With reference to this real centre, it is seeking to disengage what is normal and representative from the welter of the actual. It does not evade the actual, but does select from it and seek to impose upon it something of the proportion and symmetry of the model to which it is looking up and which it is imitating. To say that the classicist (and I am speaking of the classicist at his best) gets at his reality with the aid of the imagination is but another way of saying that he perceives his reality through a veil of illusion.’ (*Rousseau and Romanticism* 102)

The idea that the imagination must be based on a “real centre” stems from Babbitt’s long-held and much elucidated recognition of another duality, the duality he labels variously as “the one and the many,” “the permanent and the flux,” and “the law of the spirit and the

law of the members.”<sup>14</sup> He often pointed to a quickly changing and transitory American society at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century for the dire need of a central viewpoint to rise above the flux. Babbitt related “humanism must, like religion, rest on the recognition, in some form or other, of the inner life, or, what amounts to the same thing, on the opposition between a law of the spirit and a law of the members” (*Democracy and Leadership* 195). He used the ever-present and increasingly popular daily newspaper as the exemplar of the flux; we receive a multitude of bits of information on a consistent basis, but these facts are meaningless, for Babbitt, without a permanent viewpoint that rises above the flux in order to conceive of the information in a coherent whole. Based on the curriculum struggles of the day, educational policy presumably suffered from the same perception. Fads came and went on seemingly a daily basis, all without a permanent vision to oversee such a flux. “To deny such a conflict in man,” he warned,

between a law of the spirit and a law of the members is simply to avert one’s face from the facts and so to fall short of being completely positive and critical. The result of such an evasion is moral anarchy, all the more dangerous, one may add, when combined with an ever increasing grip on the natural law, or what amounts to the same thing, an increasing mechanical and material efficiency. (“Matthew Arnold” 51)

Without any sort of permanent belief in the ends of education, schools and their curricula were vulnerable to the fads of the day.

As Babbitt pointed out, this was particularly problematic regarding “mechanical and material efficiency.” Under the guidance of the social efficiency experts, the schools,

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<sup>14</sup> Babbitt used all three phrases synonymously throughout his works. All three represented his belief that a constant, abiding element of reality was continuously held above the various and changing aspects of everyday life. Humanism helped in our attempt to mediate between the two realms.

for Babbitt, opened themselves up to the whims of society, particularly industry. If it was decided that America needed more engineers, then the schools were expected to tailor their curricula to meet this demand, but if moments later a new call arose for more architects, then the schools were again expected to placate this demand. Babbitt warned that no permanent vision easily allowed for an education that served the whims of society; as such, the ends of education were in constant flux, presumably leading students into the flux of society with no individual vision of the permanent laws of the spirit (i.e. properly mediating the perpetual “civil war in the cave”).

Babbitt’s warning for education was haunting:

There is the One, says Plato, and there is the Many. ‘Show me the man who can combine the One with the Many and I will follow in his footsteps, even as in those of a God.’ To harmonize the One with the Many, this is indeed a difficult adjustment, perhaps the most difficult of all, and so important, withal, that nations have perished from their failure to achieve it. (*Literature and the American College* 84)

In other words, if an educational system refused to acknowledge and consequently impart any sense of abiding and permanent knowledge and truths, then students were more vulnerable and susceptible to being swept up in the latest fads and demagoguery. To be able to face the ever-changing facets and circumstances of real life while simultaneously guided with the sense of the abiding and permanent truths of reality, for Plato (and subsequently Babbitt) made for the truly educated person. For Babbitt and the New Humanists, this permanent aspect of education was based upon the wisdom of the past, especially in the Western tradition. With no permanent guiding vision, a culture was

always vulnerable to the flux of the present, making any attempt at enduring tenuous. Of course, Babbitt did not deny that the flux made up half of this duality; he simply insisted that more recognition and nurturing of the permanent, those truths that have stood the test of time, needed to take place for students to be able to navigate the duality between the one and the many. His genuine humanist “rests his discipline and selection upon the past without being a mere traditionalist; whose holding of tradition involves a constant process of hard and clear thinking, a constant adjustment, in other words, of the experience of the past to the changing needs of the present” (*Masters of Modern French Criticism* 362). He “keeps watch for every new sail on the horizon, but from the height of a Sunium” (*Masters of Modern French Criticism* 364).<sup>15</sup> This was precisely what Mercier detailed concerning Babbitt’s relationship between the imagination and the intellect:

The higher imagination has alone the power to get an intuition of the abiding essence in the midst of the accidents of circumstance, but the application of its findings needs to be tested by the reason in light of new practical circumstances. It belongs to the reason to apply the universal timeless, spaceless truth to the particular time and place. The role of the reason is to formulate the particular application of the flexible universal standard which it is the role of the higher imagination to discover. (71)

Babbitt’s humanism stayed true to the humanism of his time in American schools by demanding that students be exposed to a set of permanent and traditional values and

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<sup>15</sup> Sunium was the mountain from which Theseus’ father, Aegeus, jumped to his death after viewing the black flag (meaning Theseus at died in challenging the Minotaur) instead of a white flag (meaning Theseus was alive and returning from his adventure). This phrase is the most apt and imaginative in capturing Babbitt’s conception of the duality of the One and the Many.



knowledge. But the manner in which this was passed down was where his “new” humanism certainly differed. A balanced relationship between the intellect and reason was what Babbitt envisioned in a period in which curricular factions seemingly endorsed one aspect of this duality to the disregard of the other. Interestingly enough, Babbitt’s advocating of a balance between the imagination with the classical curriculum seems to resemble the balance Dewey called for in American education as well. Although the “balance” each demanded was quite philosophically opposed (as I detail in chapter 5), Dewey is admired as a humanitarian visionary rightly reacting to the stringent formality of American schooling. Babbitt, though he too sought a balance between a structured curriculum and the student’s imagination, is never seen in this light; in fact, the opposite is true. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Babbitt and the New Humanists were often considered elitists, inextricably connected to the formal and rigid classical curriculum. Hoeveler, Jr. asserts that “The main problem in education, Babbitt said, was the same as in art or in government: the balancing of the elements of freedom and restraint, individuality and proportion. To go to either extreme was easy, but a judicious combining of the two was the most difficult task of all” (111). A new appreciation of Babbitt’s insistence on educational “balance” is long overdue.

Mercier summed up the relationship of the imagination and reason with the permanent and the flux: “What Babbitt pleads for, then, is a cooperation of the higher imagination and the analytical intellect or reason, the first giving an intuition of the abiding element in the midst of the everlasting flux of change, the second testing and applying this intuition in the new situation” (71). It is both interesting and integral to note Mercier’s use of “testing” when describing Babbitt’s belief, as Babbitt was insistent

on putting forth a “new” humanism that was open to such an examination. It was tempting for critics of Babbitt and the New Humanists to paint them as traditionalists who uncritically held on to the past. But Babbitt was quick to put this charge to rest by admitting that “A literal return [...] to the past in general is, I have said, out of the question” (*Masters of Modern French Criticism* 387); additionally, he asserted that “I am myself a thoroughgoing individualist, writing for those who are, like myself, irrevocably committed to the modern experiment” (*Democracy and Leadership* 143). As Hoeveler, Jr. puts it, “Babbitt constantly insisted that he was prepared to meet the moderns on their own ground by defending human dualism on the immediate data of consciousness, without appeal to revelation” (“Babbitt and Contemporary Conservative Thought in America” 180). Religion never played a role for Babbitt within education; in fact, his religious views were often a source of confusion and contention. While never avowing a certain faith in public, Babbitt became more and more intrigued with Buddhism and its focus on the inner-life towards the end of his life. And his lack of practicing a designated faith led to a public debate with his former student, T.S. Eliot, about whether it was possible for Babbitt’s New Humanism to operate without the structure of religion to help support it.<sup>16</sup> But as far as education goes, we must note well that any sort of “revealed”

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<sup>16</sup> Eliot published a book of religious essays entitled *For Lancelot Andrewes* in 1928. Brennan and Yarbrough explain that Eliot “charged” Babbitt’s humanism “with being ‘parasitical’ because it could exist only in a society with a strong religious heritage, and then only for a short time” (74). Hoeveler, Jr. articulates that Eliot “argued that more effective than the inner restraints of Babbitt’s Humanism were the ‘external restraints’ supplied by orthodox religion. It alone could provide the unity and discipline as a spiritual force that the relativism of Humanism could not. To hope that regeneration in the modern age might spring from each individual checking himself through his private notions and judgments, Eliot thought, was ‘pretty precarious’” (165). In his 1930 essay “Humanism: An Essay of Definition,” Babbitt responded: “In his attempt to show the inadequacy of humanism apart from dogmatic and revealed religion, Mr. T.S. Eliot has painted a picture of the humanist exercising in a sort of psychic solitude self-control purely for the sake of control. It is evident however that the real humanist consents, like Aristotle, to limit his desires only in so far as this limitation can be shown to make for his own happiness. This primary reference to the individual and his happiness is something with which we are nowadays rather unfamiliar” (48). Elsewhere in this essay, in direct reference to Eliot’s charges, Babbitt added that “A broad survey of

truth had no place in Babbitt's scheme. As quoted earlier, Babbitt demanded that people look at education (and life) in a "positive and critical" fashion. Brennen and Yarbrough point out that historically

values tend to shift from one extreme to the other – from too much discipline to too much freedom, from formalism to expressionism, from synthesis to analysis. But the humanist's goal [...] cannot be achieved within any sort of hegemonic system. True humanism must be both positive and critical. (44)

The "critical" aspect of Babbitt's charge can be seen thus far in his derision of many aspects of neo-classicism; he criticized vociferously too the social efficiency experts and those advocates who followed the tenets of Rousseau, especially Charles W. Eliot and Dewey.<sup>17</sup> Babbitt warned against being a "mere traditionalist" (an indictment often used against him), as he admonished that "Our holding of tradition must be in the highest degree critical; that is, it must involve a constant process of hard and clear thinking, a constant adjustment, in other words, of the experience of the past to the changing needs of the present" ("Are the English Critical?" 44). The "hard and clear thinking" Babbitt demanded was found in studying the past in order to use that knowledge in the "changing

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the past does not, however, confirm the view that humanism is thus either precarious or parasitical. The two most notable manifestations of the humanistic spirit that the world has seen, that in ancient Greece and that in Confucian China, did not have the support of Christianity or any other form of revealed religion" (37). But it should be noted that this philosophical divide did not intrude on the personal. In the 1941 *Irving Babbitt: Man and Teacher*, Eliot wrote his remembrance of his former teacher, including the lines often quoted by scholars studying this relationship: "I do not believe that any pupil who was ever deeply impressed by Babbitt, can ever speak of him with that mild tenderness one feels towards something one has outgrown or grown out of. If one has once had that relationship with Babbitt, he remains permanently an active influence; his ideas are permanently with one, as a measurement and test of one's own" (104).

<sup>17</sup> The following three chapters are devoted to Babbitt's critiques of these theories and the individuals who promoted them.

needs of the present.” The tendency, instead, was for educators to look only forward and not backward in formulating the curriculum of the present.

But the “positive” function reveals a side of Babbitt and the New Humanists that can easily be overlooked. Scholars have claimed that Babbitt’s “most important tactic was his effort to meet science on its own ground; he preferred Aristotle’s emphasis on experience” (Brennan and Yarbrough 63). Babbitt’s positivism, the belief that knowledge comes scientifically through experience, was founded on the experience not only of the individual but particularly on the records of the experience of the past that have been handed down to us. This was Babbitt’s foundation for a classical curriculum which exposed students to the canonical works of both the East and the West. His positivism went beyond the experience of the individual to the experience of civilization as a whole. He said “the past should be regarded primarily neither as a laboratory for research nor as a bower of dreams, but as a school of experience” (“Are the English Critical?” 45). His emphasis on experience, though collective, allowed him to defend his “new” humanism on “the same grounds” as the moderns he was pitted against, especially Dewey and his followers. Dewey advocated using a student’s own experience in an educative setting to bring about learning. He felt that we learn something by experiencing it. But Babbitt’s problem with merely stopping at this point was that these experiences change constantly, bringing us into a state of flux with no permanent bearings. If our education brings us into one experience after another, then is there any abiding element rising above these continually changing conditions? As Mercier asked, “If these impressions are always changing, if the world about us is always changing, and if we are changing with it, as is evidently the case, is there any abiding element anywhere

– in short, is there any reality whatsoever at all worthy of the name; is there not merely, on the contrary, only ceaseless ‘becoming’?” (64). Babbitt’s qualm, then, was with the use of experience solely in an individualistic sense without going further into a collective historical sense. Why use one form but not the other? This was particularly vital for Babbitt in the sense that Dewey’s experience for students was seemingly open to constant change, as one experience will simply be replaced immediately by another. Dewey believed this “continuity” allowed individuals to take all of their immediate experiences with them as they faced new situations and problems in the future. Babbitt, though, looked to the experience of the ages as providing something that could be tested positively and could provide permanence amongst the flux of individual experiences. He explained that “I do not quarrel with the pragmatists for their appeal to experience and practical results, but for their failure, because of an insufficient feeling for the One, to arrive at real criteria for testing experience and discriminating between judgments and mere passing impressions” (*Literature and the American College* 84, n.4). Mercier added that since Babbitt “wishes to be truly positivistic, truly ‘experimental’ as he calls it, he naturally searched through the records of the race for the confirmation of his own findings. For what possibility is there of determining the constants of human nature by a mere consultation of our own experience or of such experiments as we can devise?” (110).

Much more is detailed in Babbitt’s philosophical quarrel with Dewey concerning experience in chapter 5. But for now it is enough to recognize that Babbitt and the New Humanists did not promote an education which either accepted religious revelation or sought an uncritical return to the past. Instead, Babbitt attempted “to meet the moderns

on their own ground” by being both positivistic and critical. Babbitt even made the distinction between being a modern and a mere modernist in this regard:

the measure of the modern is based on a perception of the something in himself that is set above the flux and that he possesses in common with other men; whereas the perception with which the modernist is chiefly concerned, to the subversion of any true measure whatsoever, is of the divergent and the changeful both within and without himself.

(“Humanism: An Essay at Definition” 32-3)

He, like Dewey, looked to experience as the foundation of education. Of course, their beliefs concerning kinds of experience were at odds. But it is crucial to note well that Babbitt and the New Humanists were not simply ivory-tower reactionaries who entered the educational fray in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by promoting religious dogma or a return to some glorious past, as some of their critics avowed. He recognized the charge:

Humanism, one of our modernists has argued, may have done very well for other times and places, but under existing circumstances, it is at best likely to prove only a ‘noble anachronism.’ A similar objection to humanism is that it has its source in a psychology of ‘escape,’ that it is an attempt to take flight from the present into a past that has for the modern man become impossible. (“Humanism: An Essay of Definition” 27)

But as he argued throughout his life, humanism followed the “‘laws unwritten in the heavens’ of which Antigone had the immediate perception, laws that are ‘not of today or yesterday,’ that transcend in short the temporal process. The final appeal of the humanist

is not to any historical convention but to intuition” (“Humanism: An Essay at Definition” 27). With these larger guidelines in mind, Babbitt’s dualism of the “civil war in the cave,” his dualism of the one and the many regarding the intellect and the imagination, and his quest to be both positive and critical, it is now the moment to examine how Babbitt defines his “genuine” humanism within these frameworks.

### **Humanism Defined**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Babbitt was praised by New Humanist co-founder Paul Elmer More for being able to occupy the same basic philosophical position from the beginning of his career to his death. We are able to witness such stability in his two most overt attempts at defining humanism, in works from 1908 and from 1930. This window of time, of course, witnessed dramatic change in the American culture and its schools; and yet, Babbitt’s notion of humanism remained constant. The 1908 definition is found in Babbitt’s first book, *Literature and the American College: Essays in Defense of the Humanities*. After spending over a decade teaching at Harvard, Babbitt took this opportunity to write a book which critiqued the manner in which higher education was proceeding in America. Babbitt was obviously sympathetic towards humanistic education remaining the central feature of the American college, as he ostensibly perceived firsthand the beginning of the rise of the research university and its emphasis on utilitarian ends. He apparently surrendered any hope or desire to stop the ascension of the research universities, but he held on to hope that the small liberal arts colleges could remain bastions of humanistic education. His book, including chapters entitled “The College and the Democratic Spirit” and “Literature and the Doctor’s Degree,” looked to provide this defense.

But for our purposes, his first chapter, “What is Humanism?,” sets out to define his position on a “genuine” humanism he felt was being attacked within education. And even though Babbitt’s book was focused primarily on higher education, his chapter in delineating humanism was purposely written broadly enough to apply to education outside of college. Twenty-two years later Babbitt felt the need to once again define humanism on a national stage, certainly suggesting that he became concerned with what was taking place under the guise of the humanist curriculum in American schools. The 1930 essay was included in Norman Foerster’s *Humanism and America: Essays on the Outlook of Modern Civilisation*. Foerster was Babbitt’s student at Harvard and Babbitt’s essay “Humanism: An Essay at Definition” was arguably the central work in Foerster’s collection. In his preface Foerster asserted that Babbitt “has done more than any one else to formulate the concept of humanism and gain for it an ever-widening hearing” (vii). Because the purpose of the compilation of these essays was to provide a defense of humanism within the American culture at large, Babbitt’s contribution was again broad enough to be applicable to many realms, particularly regarding the curriculum struggles within American education.

As has already been mentioned, Babbitt’s ideas remained relatively stable throughout his life, so it is no surprise to find that the 1908 and 1930 essays defined humanism in a similar manner. What is revealing, though, is that Babbitt admonished his readers in both essays on the integral necessity of proper definition itself, before he even began his explanation of humanism. This seems to suggest, along with the belief that humanism needed a new delineation twenty-two years after his first attempt, that Babbitt



again perceived a profound confusion of the term “humanism” both within American culture and education. As he explained even in his 1908 essay,

To make a plea for humanism without explaining the word would give rise to endless misunderstanding. It is equally on the lips of the socialistic dreamer and the exponent of the latest philosophical fad. In an age of happy liberty like the present, when any one can employ almost any general term very much as he pleases, it is perhaps inevitable that the term humanism, which still has certain gracious associations lingering about it, should be appropriated by various theorists, in the hope, apparently, that the benefit of the associations may accrue to an entirely different order of ideas. (72)

Babbitt invoked Socrates and his continual quest for proper definition, as “The Socratic method is, indeed, in its very essence a process of right defining” (72). As we have seen from previous chapter concerning the curricular struggles, it is no surprise that Babbitt recognized the confusion that was besetting the current American educational scene. And from an outsider’s perspective, perhaps Babbitt was at an advantage of being able look at this uncertainty from a more neutral position. “If Socrates were here today,” he surmised,

we can picture to ourselves how he would go around ‘cross-examining’ those of us (there are some college presidents in the number) who repeat so glibly the current platitudes about liberty and progress, democracy, service, and the like; and he would no doubt get himself set down as a public nuisance for his pains, as he was by his fellow Athenians. (72)

Seemingly Babbitt perceived attacks on humanism from those outside of it, but, as has been detailed, he was most concerned with those who labeled themselves as humanists who then proceed to advance something quite philosophically different. His 1930 essay began with “The art of defining is so indispensable that one needs to define the limits of definition itself” (25). Over two decades had passed since Babbitt first articulated an extended definition of humanism, but “This Socratic emphasis would seem especially needed at a time like the present which has probably surpassed all previous epochs in its loose and irresponsible use of general terms” (25). It is indeed evident that by 1930 new and various curricular factions entered the educational fray, creating more confusion and divisiveness than in previous decades. And, again, Babbitt pointed to a usurpation of genuine humanism from the inside:

This growing debasement of the intellectual coinage may be illustrated from the word humanism itself. The boundaries of a genuine humanism are broad and flexible. It is plain, however, that the word is being appropriated for points of view that cannot be brought within these boundaries, however generously extended. (25)

Certainly Babbitt was not the only person recognizing the perplexity of the educational situation by 1930. Of course, Dewey spent a career examining and offering solutions to this puzzling situation; it is debatable how much success Dewey achieved in settling this problem on a large scale. As Kliebard relates, “Dewey’s ‘way out of educational confusion’ required too much by way of reconstruction of the traditional subjects to appeal to the humanists” (150). Dewey stood opposed to the humanists on a variety of philosophical ideas and set out to lead America away from its “educational confusion,”

but it must be acknowledged that Babbitt served this function for the New Humanists, though as “outsiders,” in a likewise manner.

After emphasizing the importance of proper definition in both essays, Babbitt then began to look at humanism from an historical perspective. His 1908 essay started in this regard with examining the Latin roots *humanus* and *humanitas* and the Roman ideal of a genuine humanism. Babbitt told of Aulus Gellius, “a late Latin writer,” who was chagrined that *humanitas* already “had been turned aside from its true meaning” (73). Gellius complained that it was “incorrectly used to denote a ‘promiscuous benevolence, what the Greeks call philanthropy,’ whereas the word really implies doctrine and discipline, and is applicable not to men in general but only to a select few, - it is, in short, aristocratic and not democratic in its implication” (73-4). Babbitt contended that, in terms of education, this change in meaning was precisely what “we need to be on guard against to-day” (74). The problem Babbitt detailed throughout his writings was that this perceived “Roman decadence was like our own age in that it tended to make love for one’s fellow men, or altruism, as we call it, do duty for most of the other virtues. It confused humanism with philanthropy” (74); for Babbitt, this philanthropic confusion only intensified with the newer notion of progress that was not yet born in the Classical era.

Herein lay the foundation of Babbitt’s complaint that education was symptomatic of such confusion: instead of first confronting “the civil war in the cave” within the individual, the “new” education first looked outward towards society and our fellow man. Social efficiency educators, to Babbitt’s thinking, were to be primarily concerned with how students were simply to become contributing, productive citizens while fulfilling a

certain role within society. And for those educators following the hallowed tenets of Rousseau, Babbitt believed that altruism in the form of “service” caused the neglect of the humanistic disciplining of the inner-check within individuals. Babbitt commented throughout his works on the promotion of a “service” ethic within education; he traced this tendency to Rousseau, as Rousseau’s fundamental thinking went that since we are born naturally good, then it follows that we would have a natural inclination to serve others. Babbitt disagreed with this assertion, as we see his modern example of the confusion between genuine humanism and philanthropy. We often ignore our own “civil war in the cave” in our exuberance to be of service to others. This confusion again takes the focus off the inner-life of the individual and moves it to an outer, social realm. As Babbitt remarked elsewhere, “there is something, we should remind the altruist, that the world needs even more than our service, and that is our example” (*Democracy and Leadership* 199). The inner-life of the individual was the central focus of Babbitt’s humanism; only after this inner-duality was properly mediated and balanced did one need to worry then about society at large. Much more will be discussed in later chapters concerning “service” learning and its place outside of Babbitt’s genuine humanism. But for now it is enough to stress Babbitt’s warning in 1908 about how easily humanism and philanthropy could be confused in his day, as Romans were already cognizant of the mistake in theirs.

As Babbitt contended that the inner-self consisted of various dualities, it is no surprise that the foundation of his genuine humanism contained a rather simple duality as well. He believed that a true humanism consisted of both sympathy and selection. But this duality needed to be founded upon “a disciplined and selective sympathy. Sympathy

without selection becomes flabby, and a selection which is unsympathetic tends to grow disdainful” (75). Babbitt’s conception was kept purposely vague so as to be “used” in a variety of arenas.

We can apply this duality to the educational scene he was a witness to in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. As we have seen in the beginning of this chapter, Babbitt’s disdain for the current humanist curriculum in place was due to its rigid formality. He was not contentious about the confined “selection” of the curriculum as such, but when this selection was pursued to the utter neglect of the imagination or an unsympathetic viewing of the child as a mere receptacle of information, it, in Babbitt’s own words, “tends to grow disdainful.” And, of course, this dissatisfaction with the humanist curriculum led to the curricular struggles in the first place. A too stringent focus on selection was brought about beginning in the Renaissance, as “this humanistic ideal became more and more conventionalized and associated with a hierarchy of rank and privilege. The sense of intellectual superiority was reinforced by the sense of social superiority” (77). Thus we have the portrait of the haughty Renaissance gentleman who felt himself “set above the ‘raskall many’” (76).

Undoubtedly this was the same sort of charge brought against the humanist curriculum of the time: an elitist education was provided for those affluent enough to be able to finish school and enter a university. Babbitt advocated the subject matter of the humanist curriculum was the proper kind of education for all. The subject matter contained “the wisdom of the ages,” the insight of which all individuals needed. He, though, recognized that the teaching of the classics had become too mechanized and rigid. Instruction in the classics required a certain vitality and imagination which were

sorely missing in classrooms. But unlike others, Babbitt refused to throw out the baby with the bath water. He did not refuse the selection of the subjects that formed the humanist curriculum, but he refused to implicate the curriculum with its methodology. Other educational leaders, though, dismissed the selective principle of the humanist curriculum along with its instructional methods. As a result, sympathy overshadowed selection in the American curriculum. One extreme replaced another in Babbitt's mind. Teachers were to be sympathetic to students' inclinations and idiosyncrasies; students were to be sympathetic to others within the society at large, without first mediating their own "civil war in the cave." This opposite extreme was what Babbitt was beginning to witness in American schools as the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed. This unchecked sympathy is "a justification for reading anything, from Plato to the Sunday supplement.

Cosmopolitan breadth of knowledge and sympathy do not by themselves suffice; to be humanized these qualities need to be tempered by discipline and selection" (75). This can certainly be taken as a commentary on the profusion of new and various subjects entering American schools throughout the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As discussed in the first chapter, the debunking of the notion of faculty psychology, or "the mind as a muscle," allowed more practical subjects to enter upon the scene. Under this new way of thinking no subject could be placed above another in terms of mental training. American schools could then strive to be all things to all students, different curricular tracks for different futures. For Babbitt, though, this expansive sympathy provided for a defective education, as the student received no center, no permanence, no One to contrast to the Many. This extreme seemed to be the way in which education was being directed, as Babbitt warned that "We moderns [...] tend to lay an undue stress on the element of

sympathy” (75). The key was finding the middle: “The true humanist,” he summarized, “maintains a just balance between sympathy and selection” (75). This meant a selective humanist curriculum coupled with sympathetic means of presenting it.

Babbitt did concede that “the word humanist was not used until the Renaissance and the word humanism not until still a later period” (77). So Babbitt chronicled how humanism was perceived in this epoch and how in what form it was handed down to the modern day. In an admittedly wide-sweeping argument, Babbitt pointed out that the Renaissance contained a sense of rebellion “against the starving and stunting of certain sides of man by mediaeval theology” from the Middle Ages (78). It “was a revolt from all discipline, a wild rebound from the medieval extreme into an opposite excess. What predominates in the first part of the Renaissance is a movement of emancipation – emancipation of the senses, of the intellect” (78). The new discovery of the ancient classics brought about a new type of learning. And as Babbitt explained, “The men of that time had what Emerson calls a canine appetite for knowledge” (78). But one extreme is usually followed by another, as the later Renaissance sought relief from this lust of new learning and turned “toward a humanism that was in the highest degree disciplinary and selective” (79). Here, then, we receive the picture of the true gentleman who was to contain an “element of aloofness and disdain” (79). He was celebrated “not like the man of today by the inclusiveness of his sympathies, but by the number of things he rejected” (80). This led into an artificiality that caused the Romantics to revolt; in fact, Rousseau spoke of the superficiality of the drawing room and implored us to return to our primitive nature.

Babbitt's historical account progressed from the early Renaissance in which a humanism that was too sympathetic and expansive was replaced later by one which was based solely on selection and discipline. The Romantics then rebelled against these neo-classicists, and this was where Babbitt found American education at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: a battle between a neo-classicism that is too rigid and disciplined to the neglect of imagination and sympathy, versus a Romanticism that is an ever-expansive sympathy that follows no disciplinary or selective principles. What Babbitt advocated was a judicious balance between the two, a genuine humanism. "The humanist, as we know him historically," he affirmed, "moved between an extreme of sympathy and an extreme of discipline and selection, and became humane in proportion as he mediated between these extremes" (82). Or, as he quoted French philosopher Blaise Pascal, "the true mark of excellence in a man is his power to harmonize in himself opposite virtues and to occupy all the space between them" (82). The question for Babbitt was whether American schools were providing guidance and instruction for this harmonizing.

In many respects, Babbitt witnessed extremes in numerous one-sided fashions; Russell Kirk explains that "Babbitt's revival of an understanding of true humanism was intended to remind his generation of the real aim of education, the study of the greatness and the limitations of human nature" ("The Enduring Influence of Irving Babbitt" 21). His law of measure worked in accordance with the classical curriculum he advocated. Babbitt closed by explaining that "For most practical purposes, the law of measure is the supreme law of life, because it bounds and includes all other laws" (83). This law of measure certainly was to be followed, for Babbitt, in schools in which no law of measure seemed to be followed. Educators were advocating a Latin-based college preparation



curriculum alongside those advocating a strictly vocational education. “The necessary basis, therefore, of an ethical type of State,” Babbitt argued, “is an ethical type of education. The disciplining of the expansive desires to the law of measure which constitutes this higher form of working must, to be effective, begin early and become habitual” (*Democracy and Leadership* 198). With no law of measure in place, the schools could provide students with no vision of any sort of inner-harmony: “The human mind,” Babbitt noted,

if it is to keep its sanity, must maintain the nicest balance between unity and plurality. There are moments when it should have the sense of communion with absolute being, and of the obligation to higher standards that this insight brings; other moments when it should see itself as but a passing phase of the everlasting flux and relativity of nature. (85)

Babbitt certainly questioned whether American schools were providing students with this harmony and balance. Though on different grounds, Dewey pointed to this unbalance as well. Babbitt unfortunately received little credit for such an insight at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Babbitt’s 1930 “Humanism: An Essay at Definition” traced the same general pattern regarding the history of humanism. For the Renaissance humanists, “Each faculty, they held, should be cultivated in due measure without one-sidedness or over-emphasis, whether that of the ascetic or that of the specialist. ‘Nothing too much’ is indeed the central maxim of all genuine humanists, ancient or modern” (26). But by 1930 Babbitt turned more of his attention to the society and culture at hand; he became more interested in the application of his genuine humanism at this time. At this point

Babbitt was well into his third decade of teaching at Harvard and well established as the spokesman of the New Humanism; after all, this essay was the focal point of Foerster's collection of essays. So it is certainly plausible that by 1930 Babbitt recognized that his battle for a new humanism was losing ground both in the culture and in the American schools. He was quick to point out in what manner genuine humanism was faltering in American society and its schools, which provided some concerns not formulated in his work from 22 years earlier. "The announcement," he proclaimed, "was made recently in the press that a Harvard astronomer had discovered the 'centre of the universe' (more strictly the centre of our galactic system). In the meanwhile the far more important question is being neglected whether human nature itself has any centre" (28). Of course, this sentiment went back to Babbitt's belief that students and adults were moving away from the training and refining of the inner-self to focusing on all matters outside of this realm. And as noted early, the various curricular factions, at least according to Babbitt's perspective, all emphasized the social and biological aspect of the student instead of his/her human nature. Arguably Babbitt perceived not only a chaotic nature to American education by 1930, but in the society at large as well. He explained:

The virtue that results from a right cultivation of one's humanity, in other words from moderate and decorous living, is poise. Perfect poise is no doubt impossible. [...] The difference is none the less marked between the man who is moving towards poise and the man who is moving away from it. (29)

He went on to add that "It would not be easy to argue with any plausibility that the typical modernist is greatly concerned with the law of measure. [...] The pursuit of

poise has tended to give way to that of uniqueness, spontaneity, and above all intensity” (29). As the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed, the “child-centered” education advocates sponsored a program which emphasized the “uniqueness” and “spontaneity” of each student, while the social-efficiency experts brought about a new level and type of intensity to the American schools. As Kliebard notes concerning the philosophical foundation of the social efficiency leaders, “People had to be controlled for their own good, but especially for the good of society as a whole. Theirs was an apocalyptic vision. Society, as we know it, was flying apart, and the school with a scientifically constructed curriculum at its core could forestall and even prevent that calamity” (24). Thus a certain level of foreboding intensity was induced as the whole of American culture, it was argued, was vulnerable to collapse if science was not properly implemented in the schools. Certainly within both factions Babbitt’s “poise” was pushed further and further aside. Instead of reflection or meditation upon the “wisdom of the ages,” schools became ever-increasingly negligent of the inner life of the student, both through promoting the student’s idiosyncrasies and through using a scientifically efficient curriculum to place him/her in a proper future role in society.

Babbitt’s list of philosophical obstacles to his genuine humanism in 1930 did not stop here. He cited Edmund Burke and his notion that the foundation of Western civilization was partially made up of “the spirit of a gentleman” (36). A truly humanistic and classical education allowed for this, but not from Babbitt’s perspective of the humanist curriculum of his time. He believed

As for the ‘spirit of a gentleman,’ its decline is so obvious as scarcely to admit of argument. It has even been maintained that in America, the

country in which the collapse of traditional standards has been most complete, the gentleman is at a positive disadvantage in the world of practical affairs; he is likely to get on more quickly if he assumes the ‘mucker pose.’ (36)

From Babbitt’s perspective this particular enemy of a genuine humanism, the desire above all else for economic success, arrived from the outside. Of course, at this time Babbitt had just witnessed a decade known for its unbridled materialism. As for the internal structure of his genuine humanism, Babbitt maintained that many people still did not have a proper grasp of the dualism of the One and the Many. He noted that “The chief enemies of the humanist are the pragmatists and other philosophers of the flux who [are] dismissing the One, which is actually a living intuition, as a metaphysical abstraction” (42-3). Babbitt, clearly targeting Dewey and his followers in this passage, remained adamant that a permanent reality existed (“a living intuition”), but that “pragmatists and other philosophers of the flux” rejected this notion of the “One” to succumb to the flux of everyday life.

Sounding quite similar to his earlier sentiments in defining his genuine humanism, Babbitt asserted that “In getting his standards the humanist of the best type is not content to acquiesce inertly in tradition. He is aware that there is always entering into life an element of vital novelty and that the wisdom of the past, invaluable though it is, cannot therefore be brought to bear too literally on the present” (42). It is therefore necessary for the true humanist to “make the most difficult of all mediations, that between the One and the Many” (42). What Babbitt perceived by 1930 was that the pendulum had swung regarding this attempted mediation. He warned earlier in the century that the humanist

curriculum which was well in place in American schools was focused solely on the One to the detriment of the Many. The well-established curriculum (the One) overshadowed the individuality of the students (the Many) - the purely rational nature of the humanist curriculum did not allow for any intricacies or for students to develop their intuition or imagination in interacting with the subject matter. But by 1930 the balance shifted purely in the other direction, as schools no longer, for Babbitt, gave students any sense of the abiding or the permanent; all education mirrored the flux.

Finally, Babbitt reasserted his contention that the “civil war in the cave” within each individual must be properly mediated (a constant task and one that needed continuous attention) before any grand societal schemes could be pursued. And by 1930, again, the priority of the education of the individual gave way to the focus of society as a whole. He said that “Our preoccupation, one is almost tempted to say our obsession, is, at least in our official philosophy, with society and its supposed interests” (48). Of course, this ire seemed to be directed towards both social-efficiency experts and those educators who championed the service aspect of education. Both advocated the social aspect of education first, the individual second. For Babbitt

The individual who is practicing humanistic control is really subordinating to the part of himself which he possesses in common with other men, that part of himself which is driving him apart from them. If several individuals submit to the same or a similar humanistic discipline, they will become psychically less separate, will, in short, move towards a communion. A group that is thus getting together on a sound ethical basis will be felt at once as an element of social order and stability. (49)

As we have already seen, Babbitt's new humanism reversed the order of educational focus. But in 1930 service and concern for the society at large Babbitt perceived as America's "obsession." Clearly he felt compelled to restate his conception of a proper hierarchy in light of such a trend. And Babbitt concluded his essay by imploring individuals who were advocates of his genuine humanism to work out a shared definition in order ultimately "to work out a convention" (50).<sup>18</sup> Once this is achieved, "Their next concern," Babbitt surmised,

would almost inevitably be with education. Education is, as Professor Gass has remarked, the one altruistic activity of the humanist. The reason is that if the humanistic goal is to be achieved, if the adult is to like and dislike the right things, he must be trained in the appropriate habits almost from infancy. The whole question should be of special interest to Americans. Economic and other conditions are more favourable in this country than elsewhere for the achievement of a truly liberal conception of education with the idea of leisure enshrined at its very centre. In the meanwhile, our educational policies, from the elementary grades to the university, are being controlled by humanitarians. They are busy at this very moment, almost to a man, proclaiming the gospel of service. It will be strange indeed if dissatisfaction with this situation is not felt by a growing minority, if a demand does not arise for at least a few institutions

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<sup>18</sup> The full passage: "Occasional humanists may appear under existing conditions, but if there is to be anything deserving to be called a humanistic movement, it will be necessary that a considerable number of persons get at least within hailing distance of one another as to the definition of the word humanism itself and the nature of the discipline that this definition entails. This preliminary understanding once established, they could then proceed, in the literal sense of that unjustly discredited term, to work out a convention" (50). Of course, this convention, or agreement, along with its implementation (i.e. "the nature of the discipline"), remained vague even in this late work of Babbitt's. At the very least, Babbitt certainly believed that such a humanistic convention could still be achieved in the 1930s.

of learning that are humanistic rather than humanitarian in their aims. One is at all events safe in affirming that the battle that is to determine the fate of American civilization will be fought out first of all in the field of education. (50-1)

Babbitt left with a dire warning for the fate of American civilization because its education was being operated by humanitarians instead of humanists. In both his 1908 and 1930 essays, Babbitt took great pains to define properly his genuine humanism. And in both essays, he spent much time in delineating the differences between humanists and humanitarians. It is now appropriate for us to explore this difference as well, as the humanitarians and their “gospel of service” were not only to Babbitt’s perspective fully in force in American schools in 1930, but they were also the most formidable enemies for Babbitt and the New Humanists on the educational front.

### Chapter 3: Babbitt and the American School Curriculum

“He [M. Mabileau] is a scientific humanitarian or sociologist, that is to say, a man without imagination, just as the sentimental humanitarian is usually a man of perverted imagination.”

--Babbitt, letter to Paul Elmer More, March 3, 1902

“This was to be the central article of his [Babbitt’s] teaching for the remaining twenty-six years of his life, - the exposure of the unholy alliance between the false optimism of the scientific determinist and the infantile over-confidence of the impulsivist.”

--Frank Jewett Mather, Jr. (*Irving Babbitt: Man and Teacher* 46)

“We evidently need a working definition not only of humanism,” Babbitt surmised, “but of the words with which it is related or confused, - humane, humanistic, humanitarian, humanitarianism” (*Literature and the American College* 73). Clarifying the distinctions between humanism and humanitarianism arguably constituted Babbitt’s primary focus in his writing, his classroom, and his life. As with many of Babbitt’s ideas, he framed the contrast between these terms in such a broad manner as to be applicable to various areas;<sup>19</sup> the foundation and perpetuation of these two terms, though, are found in

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<sup>19</sup>Brennan and Yarbrough argue “For Babbitt, education, cultural history, politics, and religion were too interrelated to treat separately. [...] In practice [...] Babbitt treated all these as psychological problems. He attributed social ills to a breakdown in the inner life, to the loss of an equivalent for grace, and sought to convince individual men and women to convert themselves to life under the law of measure. If enough individuals underwent conversion, directly experienced the psychological truths the humanist sages taught, America could again be a just republic. Above all, he believed, the country needed conversion of its leaders so they might serve as models setting the ethical tone of the state. Lacking an aristocracy from which to draw its leaders, America must create one by means of education for character and wisdom. Unless it could do so, it would be ruled by plutocrats and demagogues and someday might require a man on



education. The most dangerous threat to his genuine humanism was a humanitarianism that was often under the proposed guise of humanism. For what Babbitt perceived was an education infiltrated by a spirit of humanitarianism that came to replace the humanist curriculum and its aims. This spirit of humanitarianism moved the primary emphasis from the individual to society, leaving the struggle and resolution to Babbitt's "civil war in the cave" neglected. In the previous chapter Babbitt pointed to later Romans as already seeing a shift from this primary emphasis on the individual to discipline one's expansive desires to the emphasis on a "universal philanthropy" towards the whole of society. He went on to say

Two words were probably needed in [that] time; they are certainly needed today. A person who has sympathy for mankind in the lump, faith in its future progress, and desire to serve the great cause of this progress, should be called not a humanist, but a humanitarian, and his creed may be designated as humanitarianism. (*Literature and the American College* 74)

Of course, not many people, including Babbitt, would find fault with sympathizing with the whole of humanity or striving for progress. But for Babbitt these concerns needed to be secondary, after the humanizing of the inner life of the individual through education.

### **The Criticism of Service Learning**

Presumably Babbitt believed that he was witnessing the overtaking of a humanist framework by humanitarian principles, both in society and in schools. "From the present tendency to regard humanism as an abbreviated and convenient form for humanitarianism," Babbitt added,

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horseback to save it from the mob" (103). This quotation is found at the beginning of the chapter entitled "Humanism and the Psychology of Education and Politics." This chapter serves as a detailed analysis of Babbitt's thoughts on education, but the authors focus almost solely on Babbitt's views of higher education.

there must arise every manner of confusion. The humanitarian lays stress almost solely upon breadth of knowledge and sympathy. The poet Schiller, for instance, speaks as a humanitarian and not as a humanist when he would ‘clasp the millions to his bosom,’ and bestow ‘a kiss upon the whole world.’ The humanist is more selective in his caresses.

*(Literature and the American College 74)*

Edward A. Krug, in *The Shaping of the American High School* (1964), devotes much attention to the reform movements within the public schools at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In his chapter “Social Efficiency Triumphant,” Krug examines the tendency in schools to become much more humanitarian in their aims, including the elevation of the concept of “service” within the curriculum. As Babbitt remarked, “The humanitarian is not, I pointed out, primarily concerned, like the humanist, with the individual and his inner life, but with the welfare and progress of mankind in the lump. His favorite word is ‘service’” (*Democracy and Leadership* 8). Krug explains that the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly 1905 and beyond, witnessed a revolution in the curriculum of American schools. Vocational education gradually entered into the curriculum, as advocates sought to provide an education for students, most of whom were not university bound, which was much more practical than the classical curriculum of American schools preceding the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But as Krug explains,

Vocational education was not enough. The spirit of reform in American society demanded an explicit social mission for the school, and many sought to supply its definition. From this came supposedly new doctrines

of schooling, reflecting latter-day efforts to resolve the perennial dilemma of the individual and the group. (249)

Of course, those advocating a more practical and useful education could certainly look to improving society itself as a worthy and immediate goal of schooling. Krug points out that “One expression of this quest was education for social control; the other, education for social service. Soon they came together in one slogan, education for social efficiency. The new brands of enthusiasm involved schooling on all levels” (249). Babbitt though, took the opposite view, denouncing the “social service” aspect of the new education: “It goes without saying that those who have been lowering and confusing educational standards have been profuse in their professions of ‘service’” (*On Being Creative* 226). Babbitt further related an anecdote concerning the eminent educational leader of the time: “In an address on the occasion of his ninetieth birthday President Eliot warned his hearers against introspection, lest it divert them from a whole-hearted devotion to service” (*On Being Creative* 228).

What, then, comprised the attempt from schools to advocate “service” beginning in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century? On a structural level, the schools began to operate as “social centers,” in which the school entered society by providing services to both students and older community members that previously had never been offered. Krug notes that in this period schools began functioning as social centers by providing health services, baths, and vacation schools. Often those targeted to receive these services were newly arrived immigrants in larger, Eastern cities. He explains that “Social centers and social education were seen largely in the context of social service. Much the same idea of social service, possibly with overtones of social control, tended to appear in the

humanitarian aspects of general reform, particularly in settlement work for immigrants” (260). Within this institutional level, the school was able to enter society and actively serve community members. Of course, this shift was just an aspect of the general change from a purely “academic” emphasis of schooling to an education which offered more practicality. What is more practical, clearly, than helping with the immediate needs of the citizens surrounding the school? As Krug adds, “The impulse for humanitarian reform expressed itself partly in settlement houses and other varieties of social work. In addition, it involved two matters of great concern to school people, namely public health and child labor” (265-6). Compulsory school attendance laws both allowed for children to have the opportunity for education, as well as keeping them away from the exploitation of factory work. Schools worked diligently within this social realm to provide this “service”; the entrance into this social realm was part of the general move towards reform in the Progressive Era. “Humanitarian reform,” Krug continues, “in all its phases, including those of social work and service, was part of a protest against the harsh conditions of the laissez-faire way of life” (267). In fact, William J. Reese explores this function of schools in his *Power and the Promise of School Reform: Grassroots Movements during the Progressive Era* (1986). He explains that

As new social services and programs entered the public schools after the turn of the century, many reformers soon endorsed the establishment of ‘social centers’ in neighborhood schools. The simple notion that many innovations could be centered in the school encouraged the belief that the school could become the center of the community: the nucleus of varied social activities. (186)

But Krug chronicles two levels of the social efficiency movement within education. For Babbitt, seemingly, schools functioning as social centers would not be overly problematic. After all, even if Babbitt were to ignore the direct good that came about from schools functioning as social centers and examined the notion from a strictly academic perspective, it would be hard to disparage a circumstance in which an educational center actively sought engagement with the community at large. But it is when schools began to turn their focus internally to “social service” that Babbitt began to be wary. As Krug notes, “Social control was one aspect of the reform movement, but social service was another. The writings of Dewey and [Samuel T.] Dutton in this period presented the school much more as an agency of social service than as an agency of social control” (255). The foundation of social service within the schools was that advocates “concentrated on what would later be called ‘the climate of the classroom,’ aimed at the development of skills and attitudes needed for cooperative effort both in school and in society” (259).

Herein rested Babbitt’s fundamental qualm with service education, as the disciplining of the inner life of the student was given secondary consideration with the primary focus on serving others. By giving primacy to how students were to serve others and contribute to the overall progress of society, Babbitt believed that the ethical center of the student, the mediation of the central dualism of expansion and control, was largely ignored. What then resulted was a meeting within this society of humanitarians who had not resolved the struggle of this inner dualism and had no guidance from the wisdom and experience of the past in which to shape their actions. The ethical education of the individual gradually became ignored, as education became more attuned to how a student

was to interact with and serve others, as well as serving society as a whole. Krug explains that “Even in the service aspects of reform, however, so much emphasis was placed on the social side of life that the result was a massive shift away from individualistic school purposes” (274). In fact, Krug even relates that a superintendent, in 1913, gave “one of the most complete expressions of the idea” of social efficiency, by asserting that “the true purpose” of service education was “not individuality but social unity” (275). Arguably this shift towards procuring “social unity” and away from the education aimed at the individual gained rapid momentum; undoubtedly this movement at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is still holding strong at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>. Babbitt was well aware of the power and, for him, the danger, of such a change in educational focus, as he devoted much of his career distinguishing education based upon humanitarian principles from those of a genuine humanism.

Within Babbitt’s genuine humanism, the primary emphasis of education was the ethical balance (the mediation of the “civil war in the cave”) of the inner life of the student. Of course, his voice was rather lost within the curricular battles in light of the popularity of social efficiency education. But for him, the question of the primacy of education, the individual or society, was the foundation of all educational questions. He avowed that

Between the man who puts his main emphasis on the inner life of the individual and the man who puts this emphasis on something else – for example, the progress and service of humanity – the opposition is one of first principles. The question I raise, therefore, is not whether one should

be a moderate humanitarian, but whether one should be a humanitarian at all. (*Democracy and Leadership* 26)

Krug, perhaps, gives the best illustration of Babbitt's contention that the inner life of the individual took precedence over education for social efficiency, along with the opposition Babbitt faced in his stance. Krug tells of Lady Jane Grey, a character in Roger Ascham's *The Scholemaster*, a book written in the 1560s: she "had been found reading Plato while her friends were hunting in the park. When asked why she was not out with the hunt, Lady Jane had replied that all sport in the park was but a shadow to the pleasure she found in Plato." In 1911 Nellie Hattan Britan of Havover College in Indiana wrote in the journal *Education* that "If such a child were found to-day, I dare say she would be hurried off to a physician or a brain specialist." Krug's point is that "There was little room in the prevailing climate of American education after 1905 for those who preferred Plato to hunting in the park, especially for those who preferred Plato to working on projects for improving the community" (282). And this seems to serve as the epitome of Babbitt's belief. Krug admits that his anecdote is perhaps a bit too simple to stand by itself, but the general notion it expresses certainly elucidates well Babbitt's primary contention. For Babbitt, in this scenario, the reading of Plato ideally improves the inner life of the individual, who then consequently was able to enter society as a better person. Babbitt's concern was sending individuals into society without this proper training, in this case, without the reading of Plato:

A terrible danger thus lurks in the whole modern programme: it is a programme that makes for a formidable mechanical efficiency and so tends to bring into an ever closer material contact men who remain

ethically centrifugal. The reason why the humanitarian and other schemes of communion that have been set up during the last century have failed is that they do not, like the traditional schemes, set any bounds to mere expansiveness. (*Rousseau and Romanticism* 331)

Of course, in cities with many citizens facing a plethora of problems at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, reading Plato instead of “working of projects for improving the community” could certainly be classified by many as being a waste of time and, even worse, as self-centered. Babbitt was prepared for this charge, though, as

The altruist, indeed, would maintain that both the Platonic and Aristotelian definitions of justice, encouraging a man as they do to put his own work before the world’s work, are selfish and anti-social. A man should renounce self and give himself up to sympathy and service. But there is something, we should remind the altruist, that the world needs even more than our service, and that is our example. (*Democracy and Leadership* 199)

### **Babbitt’s Humanitarian Battle**

Babbitt, in fact, summarized Plato’s definition of liberty as simply “minding one’s business,” the sentiment Babbitt echoed in his own definition of genuine humanism (*Democracy and Leadership* 198). What then, according to Babbitt, led to the gradual abandonment of the mediation of the inner “civil war in the cave” to the emphasis upon the student’s role for social service? Babbitt traced historically the shift from humanism to humanitarianism to two figures: Sir Francis Bacon and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. He broke what he saw as the humanitarianism of his day into two parts: utilitarian and



sentimental humanitarianism, founded by Bacon and Rousseau respectively. These two forms of humanitarianism corresponded perfectly to the social efficiency and child-centered/child studies ideologies of Babbitt's time at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; both strands of humanitarianism promoted "service" and both, while fundamentally opposite at their core, initially, for Babbitt, worked together in the prevail of humanitarianism over a "genuine" humanism. The two strands of humanitarianism Babbitt examined both were rooted in their rejection of the "inner check" he proclaimed to be vital in originating and procuring a "genuine" humanism. What Bacon and Rousseau represented, then, was the complete adulation of "expansion" over the "inner check" provided by a genuine humanism. For Rousseau and his followers (both in Rousseau's time and in Babbitt's) this was a case of a "temperamental expansion," while for Bacon and his advocates Babbitt insisted that they "favored the utmost expansion of scientific knowledge" ("Humanism: An Essay of Definition" 31). Both strands ignored the mediation of Babbitt's "civil war in the cave" and completely disregarded his "inner check," both central tenets of his humanism. Babbitt explained that when he used the term "inner life,"

I mean the recognition in some form or other of a force in man that moves in an opposite direction from the outer impressions and expansive desires that together make up his ordinary or temperamental self. The decisive victories of both rationalistic and emotional ethics over the traditional dualism were won in the eighteenth century. (*Democracy and Leadership* 52)

Cremin, indeed, admits that it is impossible to define Progressive Education at the turn of the century correctly or even at all, but he does provide four doctrines of the movement. The first two tenets: “First it meant broadening the program and function of the school to include direct concern for health, vocation, and the quality of family and community life. Secondly, it meant applying in the classroom the pedagogical principles derived from new scientific research in psychology and the social sciences” (preface, viii). Even as early as 1908 Babbitt seemingly detected the two strands of humanitarianism within the Progressive movement in American schools. Yet, recognition of Babbitt’s critique concerning American schools has been largely neglected, even by Cremin himself. And as Babbitt further explained, “Bacon and Rousseau represent between them the main tendencies that are at present disintegrating the traditional disciplines, whether humanistic or religious” (*Literature and the American College* 90). Babbitt, then, spent much of his career and his writings in detailing how these two strands of humanitarianism had entered the curricular fray, replacing the genuine humanist education he advocated. Historically he traced this shift in emphasis back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a period that was “destined to explode toward the end of the century. The age was gradually growing less humanistic in temper, and becoming more interested, both scientifically and sentimentally, in outer nature” (*The New Laokoon* 31).

Babbitt proceeded to illuminate and warn of this new found interest in American schools at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was not alone or unique in his critique of the means and ends of the social efficiency experts and the child-centered developmentalists; it is plausible to argue that any and all educational reforms have their detractors, and in the battle for the curriculum at the turn of the century there was no

shortage of critics for each curricular faction. What made Babbitt and his warnings distinctive, though, was classifying these two seemingly antithetical ideologies within the same category. He argued that these two factions were really two sides of the same humanitarian coin. For Babbitt at least, it was no surprise that these adversative ideologies entered the curricular fray at the same time and continued to thrive alongside each other in schools, even though they are seemingly opposites on fundamental levels. He made a historical and philosophical argument about how these two ideologies actually worked together to reinforce each other, perhaps explaining how the respective factions continued dominating the curriculum throughout the century. With all of the ideas and individuals within this curricular struggle, it is important to understand and appreciate Babbitt's insight into this dynamic period, as his perspective served as a unique interpretation of a landmark era in our educational history. It is essential to recognize Babbitt's unique insight into this element of our educational past.<sup>20</sup>

A caveat, though, is required before delving into the heart of Babbitt's ideas on humanitarianism and education. In his chapter "The College and the Democratic Spirit" in *Literature and the American College*, Babbitt clearly asserted that "In the lower schools the humanitarian point of view should have a large place" (113). Babbitt's distinctive contribution to our understanding of the curricular struggle at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was his perspective on those he labeled educational "humanitarians." His definitions of both scientific and sentimental humanitarians fit perfectly with the two of curricular factions who vied for control of the public school curriculum of this period. As for his advocating for the large role of humanitarianism in the lower schools, two points

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<sup>20</sup> All book length studies of Babbitt focus on his views on education almost solely on his critique of higher education.

need to be considered. First, his sentiment was included within a section of his chapter in which Babbitt discussed the relative roles of the university and the college. His general stance was that the attempts to make higher education more democratic, both through leveling the stature of all subjects and degree programs (i.e. as through the elective system) and through the lowering of admission standards in order to serve more students, should be approached with the utmost apprehension. He believed both of these measures lowered the quality of higher education throughout the country. As such, I believe that Babbitt called for a more humanitarian position for the lower schools because all children were to be educated there, regardless of future aspirations. Because, too, many students would never attend a higher education institution, it would make sense to expose these students to more diverse subjects, a clearly humanitarian aim according to Babbitt.

Second, Babbitt's sentiment was written in 1908 in his first published work. As Babbitt kept publishing, he maintained his attacks on educational humanitarianism, including specific mention of Charles W. Eliot and John Dewey especially in his later works.

Based upon this, I maintain that as Babbitt continued to write and witness the direction of American education as the century progressed, he perceived that his self-defined factions of humanitarianism became even more prominent in the lower schools, making his initial claim less applicable. It is certainly plausible, based on the consistency of his definition of and continuous disdain for educational humanitarianism, coupled with his critiques of Eliot, Dewey, and their humanitarian principles, that Babbitt's initial diagnosis in 1908 gradually became, for him, outdated.

### **The Scientific Humanitarians (The Baconians)**

Babbitt expounded that with Bacon “We already have in the sixteenth century a perfect example of the scientific naturalist and humanitarian” (*Literature and the American College* 90). In fact, Babbitt gave Bacon “the glory of having been more than any one else of his time the prophet of the kingdom of man” (*Literature and the American College* 91); Bacon’s use of induction as a universal method promised Progress in all realms of humanity. Science within the inductive method could serve humans in all aspects of life, as careful observations of all human processes would be able to discover truths that would lead us closer to a social utopia. But as Babbitt proclaimed, “Men have always dreamed of the Golden Age, but it is only with the triumphs of modern science that they have begun to put the Golden Age in the future instead of in the past” (*Literature and the American College* 89). This sentiment certainly pointed to the fundamental problem Babbitt saw with a society and its educational system partially based upon a scientific and utilitarian humanitarianism: all knowledge of the past was frivolous, as the Golden Age would be achieved once science was able to put the proper organizational mechanism in place in both society and subsequently its schools. Loren Eiseley describes Bacon’s approach as his “‘great machine,’ his system of induction applied to the natural world about us” (35). And as Eiseley continues, “Our entire school system is predicated upon Bacon’s faith in the transmission of learning and the continuing expansion of research” (13). The key term here, for Babbitt, was of course “continuous expansion.” He believed that the “inner check” of the individual came under siege from Bacon’s call for the unrestrained pursuit of knowledge and progress. Bacon made a plea for followers along this pursuit:

But any man whose care and concern is not merely to be content with what has been discovered and make use of it, but to penetrate further; and not to defeat an opponent in argument but to conquer nature by action; and not to have nice, plausible opinions about things for sure, demonstrative knowledge; let such men (if they please), as true sons of the sciences, join with me. (*The New Organon* 30)

Bacon's insistence on inductive logic – “the process of inferring a general law or principle from the observation of particular instances” (Eiseley 10) – then created a mechanism in which the smallest details of the object of study had to be observed and collected in order to induce a theory.<sup>21</sup>

Babbitt's former student Norman Foerster, in his *Toward Standards* (1930), explained, obviously echoing his mentor, that the Baconian strives to create “an exercise in the application of scientific method to the human soul” (80). In his 1908 *Literature and the American College*, Babbitt explained that when he spoke of current “Baconians” he means that “these men are prefigured if not actually anticipated in their outlook on life” by Bacon (90). Undoubtedly, Babbitt warned of numerous Baconians breeding their scientific and utilitarian strand of humanitarianism in American schools. More specifically Babbitt perceived that the Baconians immersed in education neglected the mediation of the inner “civil war in the cave” and focused solely on an outer working founded and perpetuated by the efficiency experts within the curricular battles. He said that “The Baconian has inclined from the outset to substitute an outer for an inner

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<sup>21</sup> For an educational illustration, Kliebard explains that “The leaders of the [child study] movement were also convinced that, from that mountain of data, direct inferences could be drawn (through what they sometimes called the Baconian method) as to how a child should be educated” (38). Note the cooperation between Babbitt's categories of Baconian and Rousseauist.

working – the effort of the individual upon himself” (“Humanism: An Essay of Definition” 34). For Babbitt, then, the scientific humanitarian misplaced the location of this working, and ignoring the workings of the inner life “is simply, under existing conditions, to discredit the inner life in favor of a mere outer working. Work when conceived in this one-sided fashion degenerates into mere efficiency” (*Democracy and Leadership* 211). Of course, achieving “efficiency” was the goal of the efficiency experts in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but for Babbitt it stood as an avoidance of the humanizing of the inner life of the individual, the ignoring of the mediation of the “civil war in the cave,” a degeneration of a humanist education.

Of course, much has been studied and written concerning the efficiency experts within schools at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Two different strands of efficiency advocates prospered at this time in education: those concerned with the administration of the school and those concerned with the social function the school was to provide. Raymond E. Callahan’s *Education and the Cult of Efficiency* (1962) is the definitive study of the administrative efficiency experts, as he methodically chronicles the influence the new industrial age had upon public schooling. Science ruled the day; educational experts came in demand to create and maintain a smooth and efficient school in which time and space were utilized without the least trace of waste. He asserts that

In the years between 1911 and 1925 educational administrators responded in a variety of ways to demands for more efficient operation of the schools. Before the mania ran its course various ‘efficiency’ procedures were applied to classroom learning and to teachers, to the program of studies, to the organization of the schools, to administrative functions, and

to entire school systems. Most of these actions before 1916 were connected in some way by educators to the magic words ‘scientific management.’ (95)

Cremin points out, further, that “there was a heightening sense after 1908 that educational measurement had ushered in a new era in which the promise of efficiency could at last be scientifically fulfilled” (193). Amidst an era in which specific programs, such as intelligence testing and the Gary Plan, were initiated in order to model industry in the pursuit of perfectly utilizing time and space, Babbitt’s pleas against the self-termed Baconians stood not entirely alone of course, but credit for his stand is usually lacking. He observed, for example, that

As a result of the confusion between moral and material progress the modern man has developed an inordinate confidence in organization and efficiency and in general in machinery as a means for the attainment of ethical ends. If he is told that civilization is in danger, his first instinct is to appoint a committee to save civilization. (*Democracy and Leadership* 215)

Following the scathing reports of Joseph Mayer Rice concerning the vast wasteful nature on American education at the turn of the century, the answer seemed to come in the form of scientific efficiency. The elimination of waste would greatly improve educational results. Meanwhile, for Babbitt, the mediation of “the civil war in the cave” within the minds of students was anything but resolved.

Besides administrating the everyday operation of schools, efficiency experts also looked beyond the walls of the school to society as a whole. Schools were seen as a



means of creating an efficiently running society, a kind of efficient school writ large. By training and educating students to fill certain prescribed roles in society, the society itself would function much more efficiently and effectively. David Snedden, with degrees from both Stanford and Columbia, along with two teaching stints at Teachers College (1905-9 and 1916-35), became the nation's foremost authority on social efficiency within education. In 1898, ten years before Babbitt's first major work on education, Snedden published *Social Phases of Education in the School and Home*; as his biographer Walter Drost (1967) points out, this work "set forth his social service point of view" (48-9).<sup>22</sup> Drost defines Snedden's idea of social efficiency as "the position in education that calls for the direct teaching of knowledge, attributes, and skills needed to shape the individual to predetermined social characteristics. It presumes to improve society by making its members more vocationally useful and socially responsible" (3). Snedden and his followers presumably viewed an ever-changing society at the turn of the century and decided the best course of action was to map first an efficiently operating society and workforce, and secondly to begin placing students early in their schooling within specific tracks to fulfill these roles (mainly in the form of careers) in the future. Efficiency thus worked on two levels within Snedden's social education: the curriculum itself worked efficiently as no students were to "waste" time in courses that had no bearing on their future roles, and the society itself was able to function much more capably as all

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<sup>22</sup> *David Snedden and Education for Social Efficiency*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1967. Drost's biography is the definitive work on Snedden. Of particular interest is Drost's coverage of Snedden's education at Columbia under Samuel T. Dutton: "Dutton said that man's chief function was as a social being and that education was for social ends, its ultimate aim being social service. The school existed to create a better society, and its mission was closely related to other forms of social work" (48). Snedden is often paired with the University of Chicago's John Franklin Bobbitt as the foremost social efficiency experts of the period. Kliebard explains Bobbitt's rationale: "People, after all, should not be taught what they would never use. That would be a waste. In order to reduce waste, educators had to institute a process of scientific measurement leading to a prediction as to one's future in life. That prediction would then become the basis of a differentiated curriculum" (84).

members were well-trained for their specific position in the society. As Drost explains, “Snedden went a step further than many in the social efficiency tradition by proposing that a concerted effort be made to determine the probable destination of each individual in society and to prescribe a curriculum especially suited to promote his ultimate efficiency” (4). Drost goes on to suggest that

As Snedden grew closer to retirement, in the early thirties, he became even more prescriptive in his demand for an educational program to produce social efficiency. It was at this time he offered as his ideal planned society the mythical Province of Zond, a place where each person was specifically trained for his particular niche in life and found satisfaction and security there. In moving America toward this ideal he envisioned a department of domestic police having as its function to force people to the kind of education predetermined for their special needs. (187)

Of course, Snedden’s utopian vision never came to fruition, but his aim and influence thrived nevertheless. This type of education Snedden envisioned and advocated was, according to Babbitt, a disastrous transfer of emphasis upon the individual’s ethical training to the individual’s role in the greater society. Transplanting this focus played into Babbitt’s belief that this utilitarian and scientific strand of humanitarianism adamantly denied the humanistic training of the student’s inner life. Instead of mediating between the dualism of expansion and control in the minds of students, the emphasis on social efficiency only required students to be trained in skills needed in a particular profession. This form of social engineering required basically no effort within the student in mediating “the war in the cave” within their minds. Babbitt’s idea of “minding one’s

business” played no part within social efficiency education, as all effort went into finding and training for a role in the workforce that would benefit the society at large. As Babbitt warned, “To work outwardly and in the utilitarian sense, without the inner working that can alone save from ethical anarchy is to stimulate rather than repress the most urgent of all lusts – the lust of power” (*Rousseau and Romanticism* 331). This, then, was Babbitt’s ultimate fear: an education that ignored the ethical center of the inner life of a student more easily allowed for the expansion of undesirable characteristics to take root. For Babbitt at the beginning of the century, his main concern was the lust for money and power. To enter into a profession within a society without the proper training of the inner check within the inner life of a student only advocated an unrestrained desire for money and power, with ethical considerations solely in the background.<sup>23</sup>

### **The Baconian Influence**

Babbitt elucidated his contempt of the scientific and utilitarian humanitarian (i.e. the Baconian) within education by looking at Bacon himself: “In the main drift of his life Bacon tends toward a scientific positivism, with its setting up of purely quantitative and dynamic standards” (*Literature and the American College* 92). Babbitt found “how mean Bacon was as a man” (made famous in Macaulay’s essay<sup>24</sup>) to have

the same origins as his idea of progress. He was led to neglect the human law through a too subservient pursuit of the natural law; in seeking to gain dominion over things he lost dominion over himself; he is a notable

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<sup>23</sup> In his translation of the *Dhammapada* (published in 1936, three years after his death), Babbitt wrote in the essay that followed the translation: “The lust of domination which is almost the ultimate fact of human nature, has been so armed in the Occident with the machinery of scientific efficiency that the Orient seems to have no alternative save to become efficient in the same way or be reduced to economic and political vassalage” (68). NY: New Directions Books, 1965.

<sup>24</sup> Baron Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-1859). Macaulay wrote a collection of biographical essays on prominent thinkers in history. His biography on Bacon consists of two parts: first, a scathing account of his personal life; second, the importance and brilliance of Bacon’s contribution to science.

example of how a man may be ‘unkinged,’ as Emerson phrases it,<sup>25</sup> when overmastered by the naturalistic temper and unduly fascinated by power and success. (*Literature and the American College* 91, 92)

The Baconian, then, for Babbitt lost all sense of humanity, all sense of the need to mediate the dualism between expansion and restraint that Babbitt delineated throughout his works. In neglecting this constant struggle for mediation within this dualism of the inner life, education at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century propelled students into society only with experience in an outer working – students were prepared for careers within society with no formation of their inner life Babbitt thought vital in a genuine humanistic education. Once students entered this society with no practice in ethical restraint, expansion was then able to run unfettered. For Babbitt’s society at the turn of the century, this unregulated expansion often manifested itself in business and industry. Babbitt reflected that

We are reminded irresistibly of the scandalous disclosures about our own leaders of industry and finance. Like Bacon these men have fallen away from the ‘law for man’ and been ‘unkinged,’ not so much through a sordid love of gain as through the fascination of power and success. The one-sided anxiety to ‘get results’ has led to the excesses that we see, and these excesses are now bringing down on their perpetrators, as they did on Bacon, the inevitable nemesis. (*Literature and the American College* 92)<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The lyrical poem by Ralph Waldo Emerson: “There are two laws discrete/ Not reconciled,-/ Law for man, and law for thing;/ The last builds town and fleet,/ But it runs wild,/ And doth the man unking.” Babbitt used it as the epigraph for *Literature and the American College* and quoted it again in his introduction to *Rousseau and Romanticism*. Arguably it served as the definitive statement of his explanation of and concern about scientific and utilitarian humanitarianism.

<sup>26</sup>Published in 1908, Babbitt seemingly had an inkling that the present economic success of the nation portended problems in the future. In a note he placed at the beginning of his essay “The Critic and

Babbitt often invoked Nemesis as the counter to an expansion without regards to the inner check within each individual. He said that “Nemesis, or divine judgment, or whatever one may term it, that sooner or later overtakes those who transgress the moral law, is not something that one has to take on authority, either Greek or Hebraic; it is a matter of keen observation” (*Democracy and Leadership* 40). One example of this observation for Babbitt was the economy of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The business values of an unregulated expansion for profit served the country well until 1929, when the resulting Nemesis brought the market crashing swiftly down. Apparently any sort of inner check or notion of restraint, both central features of Babbitt’s genuine humanism, were ignored within the business community at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The only result for such a “transgression of the moral law” was the punishment for such neglect, in the tangible form of the stock market crash and the following decade of economic depression.

Babbitt was easily able to trace this “transgression of the moral law” and the resulting Nemesis at least partially to education. An education that neglected any sort of training for wisdom or character, which focused primarily on social service in terms of fulfilling a professional role in the society, would only lead to a quickening of this Nemesis. Presumably, Babbitt considered and labeled the efficiency experts within the schools as scientific and utilitarian humanitarians; their goal was progress for the society as a whole without any regard for the wisdom of the ages that the curriculum of the American schools in the previous generation promised to supply. Without this

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American Life,” published in *On Being Creative and Other Essays* (1932), Babbitt explained that “This was written before the collapse of the great common stock bubble in the autumn of 1929. It then became evident that what the financial leaders of the ‘boom’ period lacked was not so much expertness in their own field as general critical intelligence – especially some working knowledge of the ways of Nemesis” (201). Cambridge, MA: The Riverside P., 1932.

foundation of the knowledge being passed down for centuries, students, according to Babbitt, were then let loose into society without any sense of economic or moral restraint. The social efficiency experts were perhaps adept at engineering students entering the society, but they provided for no inner check of individual impulses, such as the knowledge of a form of moral Nemesis.

Babbitt took aim in explaining the reasoning of the Baconian within education in this period:

When a man finds that it is impossible to know everything and know it well, it might be supposed that he would seek to apply to the enormous and ever-increasing mass of things to be known some humane principle of selection, and in the search for this principle to fortify his individual insight by the wisdom and experience of the race. But such is not the reasoning of the Baconian. (*Literature and the American College* 94)

With the plethora of changes occurring with American society at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, efficiency experts seemingly felt the need to equip students in dealing with this new era of complexity. One way to simplify the entrance into this new and ever-changing culture was to educate for a specific type of position.<sup>27</sup> The classical curriculum was found to be useless because it did not provide a tangible means in which to circumnavigate this society, one presently influenced by new technology and an

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<sup>27</sup> Kliebard notes that George S. Counts conducted a study of the 1923-4 school year, in which he found “the wide acceptance of different curricula for different segments of the high school population” (96). Kliebard summarizes that “One of the main missions that social efficiency reformers set for themselves was that of replacing what was useless and merely symbolic in the curriculum with what was directly useful,” meaning that schools should “not provide the same education to a prospective doctor as to a prospective engineer” (100-1). Babbitt proclaimed in *Rousseau and Romanticism* that the “educational radical” assures “the young acquire the habits that make for material efficiency.” Interestingly, Babbitt went on to connect this idea, again, to the Rousseauists, in that “This, however, does not go beyond Rousseau who came out very strongly for what we should call nowadays vocational training,” as he trained Emile to become a cabinet-maker (388).

unprecedented pace of immigration. As such, the social efficiency experts could promise a practical education which would allow for a students not only to thrive themselves within this new complexity, but to make the society better itself through their service. Babbitt disagreed. In taking the voice of the efficiency expert/Baconian, he asked rhetorically,

What does it matter, he would seem to argue, if a man in himself is but a poor lop-sided fragment, if only this fragment is serviceable, if only it can be built into the very walls of the Temple of Progress? He is satisfied if he can attain to the highest efficiency, and then contribute by this efficiency to human advancement. His entire aim, as he is wont to tell us with so much unction, is training for service and training for power.<sup>28</sup> (*Literature and the American College* 94-5)

Of course, efficiency and progress were demanded by Americans in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the pressure on schools to provide students who would efficiently contribute to the progress of society was put forth by the public itself. Callahan proclaims in his Preface that “I am convinced that very much of what has happened in American education since 1900 can be explained on the basis of the extreme vulnerability of our schoolmen to public criticism and pressure.”<sup>29</sup> This pressure came from “the rise of business and industry to a position of prestige and influence, and America’s subsequent saturation with business-industrial values and practices” (2). For Babbitt’s

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<sup>28</sup>Babbitt gave a specific example of the Baconian in the form of the university professor: “The full ambition of a scholar of this type is first to absorb an encyclopedia and then to make a contribution to knowledge that will deserve a place in some future encyclopedia” (93). Babbitt spent much of this book railing against the new German influence upon American universities: “The uncritical adoption of German methods is one of the chief obstacles to a humanistic revival” (143). All scholars studying Babbitt and his views on higher education explore his disdain for the current trend to turn American colleges into research institutions based on the German model.

<sup>29</sup> Callahan’s Preface does not contain page numbers.

scientific and utilitarian humanitarian, this simply meant an education to aid the society as a whole. Babbitt did not deny this pressure and demand; he simply warned the public of the over-hanging threat of Nemesis. Indeed, he even targeted the unquestioned business leaders of his day:

One could recently read in the paper of the philanthropies of the richest man in America, and in another column of the same issue of the prosecution of this man for violation of the law. No one need doubt the genuineness of Mr. Rockefeller's desire for service, and there can, of course be no question of the success of his training for power.<sup>30</sup>

*(Literature and the American College 107)*

This, then, was the ultimate downfall of an education based solely upon social efficiency for Babbitt. Its success lied in the ability to train students to enter a niche within society so as to make it run as smoothly and efficiently as possible. Babbitt's interpretation of the aims of training for service and for power proposed by the social efficiency experts seemingly masked this type of education's fatal flaw. Of course, an education that was able to produce a Rockefeller and numerous other business leaders to lead an ever-growing economy at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was what many demanded. Callahan explains that

The procedure for bringing about a more businesslike organization and operation of the schools was fairly well standardized from 1900 to 1925.

It consisted of making unfavorable comparisons between the schools and the business enterprise, of applying business-industrial criteria (e.g.

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<sup>30</sup>Babbitt immediately followed with another example: "Mr. Harriman, again, has shown amazing efficiency in managing the Southern Pacific and Union Pacific Railroads, and is also in some respects a sincere helper of his fellow men. Yet a few more Harrimans and we are undone."



economy and efficiency) to education, and of suggesting that business and industrial practices be adopted by educators. (6)

This type of education, for Babbitt, resulted in the unquestioned financial prowess and success of a Rockefeller and the American captains of industry in general, but it neglected the ethical working of the inner life, so that within the single mind of an individual was both a supreme faculty for fulfilling a certain profession but also a supreme absence of an ethical center because of the lack of a truly humanistic education. The social efficiency experts fulfilled their promise of creating a successful and smoothly running society (especially in terms of business and industry), but they left the ethical struggle of the individual unattended. Of course, Babbitt's qualm with the Baconian was the insistence only on an outer working (i.e. role in society) with no inner working, especially if the outer working involved the expansion of material gain that the mediation of the inner life would help check and restrain. He was quick to note "that material progress, so far from assuring moral progress, may actually imperil man's higher nature"<sup>31</sup> (*Literature and the American College* 92).

Finally, then, what was Babbitt's solution to counteract the deficiencies of a society engineered by the social efficiency experts?

Our real hope of safety lies in our being able to induce our future Harrimans and Rockefellers to liberalize their own souls, in other words to get themselves rightly educated. Men of heroic capacity such as Messrs. Rockefeller and Harriman have in some respects shown themselves to be are, of course, born, not made; but when once born it will depend largely

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<sup>31</sup>Babbitt admitted that Bacon himself foresaw the problems that were potentially created when attention for 'law for thing' completely dominated attention upon 'law for man.'

on the humaneness of their education whether they are to become heroes of good or heroes of evil. We are told that the aim of Socrates in his training of the young was not to make them efficient, but to inspire in them reverence and restraint; for to make them efficient, said Socrates, without reverence and restraint, was simply to equip them with ampler means for harm.<sup>32</sup> (*Literature and the American College* 108)

For Babbitt a philanthropic donation did not erase the problems created with an unceasing expansion towards material success, wealth, and power. A society whose leaders had been “unkinged” by an outward expansion towards profit suffered from a lack of vision, a lack of reverence for higher things, and a lack of restraint. If America’s leaders suffered from such a defect, it is only plausible that many Americans would follow their lead. This lack of restraint and inner check on material impulses ran amuck in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and as Babbitt pointed out in 1932, a year before his death, this lack of the cultivation of the inner life brought about a calamitous Nemesis a few years earlier. Of course, Babbitt was not the only critic to sound an alarm concerning the invasion of business and industrial efficiency ideals entering the schools. Callahan calls cries against the immersion of an efficiency-based curriculum into the schools as “unavailing,” because

although voices were raised in protest against each of the various efficiency procedures which were introduced into education as well as against the inappropriate application of the business philosophy generally, in the total picture the dissenters were such a small minority that their voices were barely audible, and they were unable to stem the tide. (120)

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<sup>32</sup>He cited the story concerning Socrates and education from Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, Bk. iv, ch. iii.

Callahan does explain that “The most insightful criticisms, however, of the efficiency devices were made by two outstanding educators, William C. Bagley and John Dewey. Both men opposed the inappropriate application of business and industrial values and procedures to the schools”<sup>33</sup> (124). Babbitt has no mention in Callahan’s study. Callahan states that these “dissenting voices were raised – strong, intelligent, prophetic voices – but, as it turned out, voices lost in the wilderness” (125). Callahan’s focus is of course on the lower schools, while Babbitt raised his voice from the Romance languages department at Harvard. But it seems that recognition of Babbitt’s perspective into the efficiency experts and their plans for the curriculum of American schools, especially as his role of an educational “outsider,” is long overdue. The historical and philosophical critique he brought forth against this curricular faction is a “voice lost in the wilderness” that has been lost for much too long.

### **The Sentimental Humanitarians (The Rousseauists)**

Babbitt not only provided a unique perspective on his self-termed “Baconians,” but he poignantly tied this curricular bloc’s ideology with the seemingly opposite faction of the child developmentalists (whom Babbitt termed “sentimental humanitarians” or “Rousseauists”<sup>34</sup>). Interestingly enough, Kliebard proclaims that “the social efficiency educators and the developmentalists, ultimately, were as far apart from one another as they were from their common enemy [the humanists]” (20-1). Babbitt argued throughout

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<sup>33</sup>Callahan goes on to explain that “both criticized the oversimplified and superficial activity being engaged in, often in the name of science. Bagley believed that the scientific movement held great promise for education but warned educators not to expect miracles. [...] And Dewey wrote and spoke repeatedly on the same theme.” Callahan also states that in 1918 Bagley, “one of the most able and vocal leaders in education, termed the administrative arrangement a ‘factory plan’ and a few years later voiced his opposition again” (220). At the conclusion of his work, Callahan argues “the record shows that Dewey, along with Bagley and few others, stood almost alone in opposing the watering down of the curriculum” (263).

<sup>34</sup> Babbitt labeled Rousseau “the humanitarian Messiah” (*Democracy and Leadership* 132).

his life and writing that the Baconians and the Rousseauists actually correspond to and reinforce each other at a most fundamental level, but first it is necessary to gauge Babbitt's reaction to the sentimental form of humanitarianism running amok, according to him, in the schools. Kliebard bestows the title "developmentalists" on G. Stanley Hall and his followers, "who proceeded basically from the assumption that the natural order of development in the child was the most significant and scientifically defensible basis for determining what should be taught" (11). Hall and his followers were also often referred to as the "child study experts," as they advocated "research that involved the careful observation and recording of children's behavior at various stages of development" (11). Kliebard posits that "the new status accorded science in the latter part of the nineteenth century (11)" provided the rationale for such observations and recordings: if researchers could document what activities and mental capacities comprised the child in a natural environment, then schools would be better equipped to teach both the scope and sequence of a curriculum in a more naturally appropriate way.

In reflecting on Hall's influence on education and the consequent change of focus to the child, Cremin asserts that "The shift was truly Copernican, its effects, legion"<sup>35</sup> (103). Of course, much like the curriculum of the social efficiency experts, the scientific method played a foundational role in the curriculum promoted by the developmentalists. Using science as the means to a different type of curricular end as the social efficiency experts, Hall and the child study experts believed that a curriculum could be designed to aid students in a complementary fashion with their natural development, as opposed to a curriculum (such as the status quo curriculum of the humanists) that encroached upon

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<sup>35</sup>Compare this notion with Babbitt's belief that Rousseau's influence puts him on the same level as founders of religions (*Literature and the American College* 90).

natural development. As Kliebard mentions, the scathing reports written by Joseph Mayer Rice on the mindless and artificial operations of the schools provided Hall and the developmentalists with a boost in public opinion (17-20). Accordingly, this unhealthy “uniformity, according to Hall, was at variance with the natural spontaneity that adolescents presumably exude: “The pupil is in the age of spontaneous variation which at no period of life is so great. He does not want a standardized, overpeptonized mental diet. It palls on his appetite”<sup>36</sup> (12).

Kliebard adamantly points out that the developmentalists always used science as a foundation of their curricular argument, so that we are not to suppose incorrectly that Hall and his supporters had no basis for their argument except for letting the child alone to decide what, if any, education he/she wished to pursue. It is crucial, then, to separate properly the means and ends of the child study curriculum. Babbitt focused on the ends of education of the sentimental humanitarian; Kliebard explains that “From such knowledge [obtained by observation] a curriculum in harmony with the child’s real interests, needs, and learning patterns could be derived. The curriculum could then become the means by which the natural power within the child could be unharnessed” (24). Kliebard goes on to assert that the child study movement “did not really achieve national prominence until the latter part of the nineteenth century,” though Hall and his followers could historically trace the foundations of their movement to “Comenius, Froebel, Pestalozzi, and Rousseau” (36). It is with this relationship to Rousseau and the idea that the “natural power within the child could be unharnessed” that Babbitt entered the philosophical scene. Rousseau and his followers, who brought forth the romantic

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<sup>36</sup>Hall is quoted from *Adolescence: Its psychology and its relations to physiology, anthropology, sociology, sex, crime, religion and education*, Vol. 2. New York: D. Appleton. 1904. p. 509.

spirit and temper to the world, arguably constituted Babbitt's biggest targets in his entire teaching and writing career. In fact, Paul Elmer More, the co-founder of the New Humanism, once melancholically wondered, "What might have happened if he had spent his energies on expounding a literature to which he could have given his positive allegiance instead of one which he studied chiefly to annihilate?"<sup>37</sup> Rousseau and his brand of romanticism constituted the main objects of Babbitt's philosophic ire throughout his career, beginning with the publication of *Literature and the American College* in 1908. But it was his approximate 300-page *Rousseau and Romanticism*, published in 1919, that set the clearest foundation for most of Babbitt's ideas. One critic thus argues that this book "forms the best introduction and comprises the most central statement" of Babbitt's works (Levin xii), while another asserts that Babbitt's own critics railed against his "attacks on the character of his opponents, notably Rousseau"<sup>38</sup> (Kirk, "Introduction," *Democracy and Leadership*, 13). For Babbitt, the education and, consequently, the world were slowly and unfortunately becoming ever-increasingly under the influence of the sentimental humanitarians, or, as he labeled the scientific humanitarians after their figurehead Bacon, the Rousseauists.

It is important to examine first Babbitt's initial words concerning Rousseau and sentimental humanitarianism. In his 1908 *Literature and the American College*, Babbitt outlines the two strands of humanitarianism he believed to be infecting education, and we receive our first definition of sentimental humanitarianism and the Rousseauist. Two of the pillars of Babbitt's humanism were the beliefs in moderation and restraint, but in

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<sup>37</sup> This quotation is from More's essay in *Irving Babbitt: Man and Teacher* (329). Elsewhere in the book, G.R. Elliott told of the joke going around Harvard that Babbitt looked under his bed each night searching for Rousseau before going to sleep (159).

<sup>38</sup> Kirk explains: "Peter Gay, with more forthrightness than elegance, has declared that Babbitt's 'essential vulgarity' was displayed by Babbitt's attacks on the character of his opponents, notably Rousseau."

dealing with Rousseau's influence, he did not mince words: "The direct and demonstrable influence of Rousseau, is however, enormous; his influence so far transcends that of the mere man of letters as to put him almost on a level with the founders of religions" (90). Babbitt held the unaltered belief that Rousseau and his brands of romanticism and sentimental humanitarianism ushered in an expansive era of feeling from which America and its education was suffering debilitating effects. Babbitt first built his case against Rousseau and his sentimental humanitarianism in the same manner as he began his case against Bacon and his scientific humanitarianism, by attacking the character of Rousseau himself. Babbitt proclaimed, citing Rousseau's infamy in abandoning his five children, that "Rousseau was an 'execrable wretch,'<sup>39</sup> who was at the same time a glorious apostle of liberty. Yet nothing is easier to prove than that if Rousseau was an execrable wretch, it was directly because of his idea of liberty; just as Bacon failed morally, not in spite of his idea of progress, but as a result of it" (97). Babbitt's primary qualm too with Rousseau and the current influence of sentimental humanitarianism was its neglect of the inner life. In examining the foundation of the Rousseauists' beliefs, Babbitt reflected that "It has been said that a system of philosophy is often only a gigantic scaffolding that a man erects to hide from himself his own favorite sin. Rousseau's whole system sometimes strikes one as intended to justify his own horror of every form of discipline and constraint" (97). This was the basis of Babbitt's attack. Any sort of attempt in the mediation of the "civil war in the cave" is interpreted as an unnatural interference by the sentimental humanitarian. Any form of

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<sup>39</sup> This term is quoted by Babbitt from a speech given by Charles W. Eliot at the National Educational Association meeting in 1900 (96-7).

discipline or constraint within the inner life of the individual was seen by the Rousseauist as a hindrance in the development of the natural self.

As Babbitt asserted elsewhere, the neglect of the mediation of the inner life that the Rousseauist espoused was the foundational issue between a genuine humanism and a sentimental humanitarianism: “Quite apart from tradition and purely as a matter of psychological analysis the underlying opposition in all this clash of tendencies is that between those who affirm in some form the inner life and those who corrupt or deny it” (*On Being Creative* 260). The inner check on our impulses was, according to Babbitt, one of the central features of our inner life; any such aversion to this check caused an expansion of emotions and feelings with no inner check to guide properly this sentiment. Thus for Hall and the child study movement, the observation of a child’s thoughts and actions were recorded and studied objectively, with the rationale that whatever interests the child presented were to be complemented with the curriculum. Any sort of employment of Babbitt’s humanist discipline and restraint were thought to unnaturally harness the child.<sup>40</sup> Babbitt traced this revolt of the humanist check to Rousseau, as

Virtue is no longer to be the veto power of the personality, a bit and bridle to be applied to one’s impulses, and so imposing a difficult to struggle. These impulses, Rousseau asserts, are good, and so a man has only to let himself go. Instead of the still small voice that is heard in solitude and urges to self-discipline, virtue is to become a form of enthusiasm. (97)

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<sup>40</sup> In Babbitt’s archives at Harvard, the March 26, 1908, *Journal of Education* offered that “It would be interesting to have a joint debate between Stanley Hall and Irving Babbitt with Elbert Hubbard as umpire. This would draw a larger crowd than any attraction that has been on the boards for several years. Each is so sure he is right, and no two of the three would agree upon a single principle, or have a common prejudice.” “Reviews of *Literature and the American College*,” 1908, Box 2. Hubbard (1856-1915) was a writer and publisher.



Babbitt believed that the conviction held by the Rousseauist that all impulses were natural and, therefore, good, transferred the inner working within the mind of the individual to a pure outer working. This reasoning provided no “veto power” within the individual when the ever-expansive impulses materialized. The general thesis from Rousseau in his *Emilie, or On Education* (1762) was to intercede as little as possible in the life of the child, so as to allow the child to grow emotionally and intellectually most naturally. Of course, Babbitt believed this propensity for following the inclinations of the child completely ignored any sort of attempt of resolving the “civil war in the cave.” Thus, for Babbitt, sentimental humanitarianism made “clear the relation between Rousseau’s idea of liberty and his refusal to accept his duties as a father” (98).

### **The Rousseauists of the Curriculum**

What, then, was the impact of the Rousseauist/sentimental humanitarian on American education and the battle for the curriculum at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century according to Babbitt? Babbitt’s most popular target, the target covered prominently by those studying Babbitt,<sup>41</sup> was Harvard’s President, Charles W. Eliot. Babbitt considered Eliot’s introduction and his advocating of the elective system at Harvard as the classical example of the sentimental humanitarian’s foray into the contemporary educational scene. Babbitt began as a student at Harvard in 1885 and graduated in 1889, only to return in 1892 to start his M.A. degree. He was awarded the M.A. in 1893, began teaching at Harvard in 1894, and stayed as a professor until his death in 1933. Babbitt,

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<sup>41</sup> See Russell Kirk’s Introduction to *Literature and the American College*, pp. 2, 16, 19; Milton Hindus’s *Irving Babbitt, Literature, and the Democratic Culture*, pp. 53-61; George A. Panichas’s *The Critical Legacy of Irving Babbitt*, pp. 39, 137, 203; Stephen C. Brennan and Stephen R. Yarbrough’s *Irving Babbitt*, pp. 13, 20-2, 103-8, 112; Eds. George A. Panichas and Claes G. Ryn’s *Irving Babbitt in Our Time*, pp. 23, 179, 203, 211, 230; Thomas R. Nevin’s *Irving Babbitt: An Intellectual Study*, pp. 12-3, 20-1, 23, 84; and J. David Hoeveler, Jr.’s *The New Humanism: A Critique of Modern America, 1900-1940*, pp. 111-2.

therefore, spent almost half a century as both a student and teacher at Harvard, and his exposure to Eliot's elective system (begun in 1869 when the 35-year old Eliot became president of Harvard) left him deploring his perceived destruction of Harvard's immaculate standards. As early as 1908 Babbitt attacked Eliot's elective system and cited it as a definitive statement of the Rousseauist's educational ideals. Babbitt was careful not to label Eliot personally as a Rousseauist, but only his educational ideas, especially in the form of the elective system. He claimed

President Eliot speaks as a pure Rousseauist in a passage like the following: 'A well-instructed youth of eighteen can select for himself a better course of study than any college faculty, or any wise man who does not know his ancestors and his previous life, can possibly select for him. ... Every youth of eighteen is an infinitely complex organization, the duplicate of which neither does nor ever will exist.' (96)<sup>42</sup>

For Babbitt, Eliot's elective system completely disregarded any sort of reverence to the "wisdom of the ages." No restraint was required for a student at Harvard to pick his own course of study, regardless of whatever set of skills and knowledge had been deemed worthy of knowing in the course of Western civilization. As Babbitt sarcastically surmised, "There is then no general norm, no law for man, as the humanist believed, with reference to which the individual should select; he should make his selection entirely with reference to his own temperament and its (supposedly) unique requirements. The wisdom of all the ages is to be as naught compared with the inclination of a sophomore" (96). Of course, Babbitt's vehement disdain of Eliot's elective system fell on deaf ears as

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<sup>42</sup>Babbitt cited Eliot's words from *Educational Reform*, pp. 132, 133. Much more concerning Babbitt's philosophical differences with Eliot can be found in the following chapter.

well; any check of a course catalog at a university today would provide concrete evidence of this. But the argument itself went beyond the specific circumstances at Harvard. In delineating the weaknesses of a sentimental humanitarianism, Babbitt used Eliot's elective system as the prime example of the "new" education gone wrong. Babbitt's attack on Eliot and his Rousseauistic educational tendencies, however, go much further and deeper beyond the course of study at Harvard.

Kliebard makes the important point that during Eliot's reign as the educational leader of America education proper, he made, in 1908, a "startling, almost inexplicable, repudiation of his long-standing position [and] declared that 'teachers of the elementary schools ought to sort the pupils and sort them by their evident or probably destinies.' There was, he emphasized, 'no function more important'"<sup>43</sup> (105). Seemingly Babbitt perceived the influx of sentimental humanitarianism to have taken place in the lower schools, as Eliot's position on the national scene went from the leader of the humanists to an open advocate of offering separate tracks and curricula for students. Thus, by the time of Babbitt's first publication of his educational beliefs, the country's educational scene was habituated by G. Stanley Hall and the developmentalists' child study movement, Eliot's revolutionary elective system at Harvard, and Eliot's transformation from the humanist defender of the traditional curriculum to a leader who espoused differentiated curricula. Babbitt's illustration of the sentimental humanitarianism that founded Eliot's

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<sup>43</sup>The full quotation: "It was perhaps because he sensed the danger of a massive transformation of the traditional school subjects that Eliot (1908), in a startling, almost inexplicable, repudiation of his long-standing position declared that 'teachers of the elementary schools ought to sort the pupils and sort them by their evident or probably destinies' (pp. 12-13). There was, he emphasized, 'no function more important'" (p. 12). Kliebard quotes from *Bulletin No. 5 of the National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education*. This change in Eliot's philosophical position was also examined in chapter 1.

elective system is well publicized, but his warnings of Rousseauism in the lower schools have been given scant attention.

Babbitt began by declaring that “The sentimental humanitarian opposes to a definite curriculum which aims at some humanistic or religious discipline the right of the individual to develop freely his bent or temperamental proclivity” (*Democracy and Leadership* 303). The modes of a classical education, Babbitt conceded, too often were mechanistic and overly rigid, so he did not advocate a return to such a mechanical education. However, as a “genuine” humanist, he sought a mediation between extremes; therefore, the Rousseauist’s attempt of excluding any sort of humanistic discipline from a child’s education struck Babbitt as an extremity in and of itself. An education which provided little to no directive, which prompted students to choose their own “paths,” along with the allowance to develop “unharnessed” in their natural environments, was for Babbitt an education neglecting the “truths of the inner life” (*Democracy and Leadership* 26). Babbitt challenged Rousseau’s fundamental belief that humans were naturally good, but that their institutions forced a sort of artificiality upon them, making their natural goodness consequently impure.<sup>44</sup> In terms of education, this belief completely ignored the dualism of the conflicting check and expansion in the mind of each individual. “What evidently underlines the mythology that Rousseau is thus creating,” Babbitt explained,

is a new dualism. The old dualism put the conflict between good and evil in the breast of the individual, with evil so predominant since the Fall that it behooves man to be humble; with Rousseau this conflict is transferred from the individual to society. [...] The guiding principle of his writings, he says, is to show that vice and error, strangers to man’s constitution, are

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<sup>44</sup> “Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains.” Beginning lines of *The Social Contract*. 1762.

introduced from without, that they are due in short to his institutions.

*(Democracy and Leadership 76)*

For the educator, then, the manner in which to mediate this new dualism is simply let the student develop with little or no interference from the outside. No guidance is required in attempting to settle this new dualism, as any sort of intrusion from an authority is actually one of the components of the dualism itself, a component the sentimental humanitarian is seeking to eradicate. As with the education, according to Babbitt, that the scientific humanitarian was proposing, all ethical development of the inner life is disregarded within a student, as only the student was trained according to an outer working. For the Rousseauist, promoting what is the natural development of the student was paramount to any sort of discipline or the requirement of learning any sort of cultural heritage. Babbitt found this proposition to be ominous for civilization, as individuals taught under the tenets of sentimental humanitarianism had no training in an ethical restraint, and this became especially problematic when these individuals come into social contact with others who believed in the superiority of their respective natural inclinations. Rousseau accounted for this with his belief that humans naturally feel sympathy for others; transferred into education this meant that the child was to be allowed to develop naturally inclinations for sympathy and service.

Of course, Rousseau spelled out his educational philosophies, including the natural inclination for service the child exudes, in *Emile*, “the Bible of the modern educator” according to Babbitt (“President Eliot and American Education” 201). Herein nested one of Babbitt’s fundamental battles with the sentimental humanitarian. He took issue with the impending results of allowing a child to develop his/her own interest in

serving others; of course, Babbitt recognized that Rousseauism had infiltrated the schools, so his qualm was whether the ends of such an education were realistic or even desirable. Rousseau would, “so far as possible,” Babbitt explained

turn his ideal pupil over to ‘nature.’ One must recognize that there are many excellent ideas in *Emile*, for example, most of the ideas on the hygiene of infancy. One should also admit the excessive formalism of the older discipline Rousseau attacks. His constructive program, which is passing over more and more into modern education, may be summed up in the words: self-expression, vocational training, service. One’s doubts about this program converge upon the idea of service. Is there a spontaneous overflow of altruistic impulse in the natural man sufficiently strong to serve as a counterpoise to his egoism? (*Reading with a Purpose: French Literature* 38-9)

First, it is important to note Babbitt’s accordance with Rousseau’s rejection of the extreme formalism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century; a tenet of Babbitt’s “genuine” humanism was a moderation between extremes, and the excessive disciplinary nature of education at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (so well documented by Joseph Mayer Rice) caused Babbitt to consider the classical curriculum of denying its true classical roots. But Babbitt went back on the attack with his questioning of Rousseau’s foundational belief that the altruism students were allowed to develop in their schooling would transfer to the society at large. Babbitt’s unwavering belief in a dualism between restraint and expansion was consequently ignored by Rousseau and the sentimental humanitarians. In an education that allowed for the child to develop in an “unharnessed” fashion, Babbitt feared that an

expansive egoism would develop alongside his/her natural inclination for sympathy. After all, if the student was told that all his/her feelings and thoughts are natural, and therefore naturally correct, then it is safe to assume that some sense of egoism might enter into the student's psyche. If a student is being educated under the philosophical premise that the individual in his/her natural environment is only harmed and hindered by social institutions, then it is safe to assume the ego, for Babbitt, might run out of control. Babbitt's main question, then, was whether the service ethic promoted in schools provided enough of a check on the egoism that is being reinforced by a sentimental humanitarian education. As Babbitt summarized, "The popularity of the gospel of service is due to the fact that it is flattering to unregenerate human nature. It is pleasant to think that one may dispense with awe and reverence and the inner obeisance of the spirit to standards, provided one be eager to do something for humanity" (*Democracy and Leadership* 310-1).

Interestingly enough, he used Eliot as the example of a Rousseauist in higher education, and he invoked the other prominent educational philosopher of the era in attempting to debunk this notion, John Dewey. In speaking of the entrance of the sentimental humanitarian upon the educational scene, Babbitt remarked that "One might view this idealistic development with more equanimity if one were convinced with Professor John Dewey that the growing child exudes spontaneously a will to service." Babbitt provided a footnote to his claim: "See his *Moral Principles in Education*, p. 22: 'The child is born with a *natural* desire to give out, to do, to *serve*'" [Babbitt's italics].<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Democracy and Leadership* (312-3). Babbitt provided the same quotation in his "President Eliot and American Education" (211). As Babbitt jeeringly continued: "Let anyone who has growing children observe them closely and decide for himself whether they exude spontaneously this eagerness for service. Let him then supplement this observation by a survey of the working of the theory on the larger scale for

Contrarily, Babbitt continued, “If we look, however, on this form of spontaneity as a romantic myth, we shall be forced to conclude that we have been permitting Professor Dewey and his kind to have an influence on our education that amounts in the aggregate to a national calamity” (*Democracy and Leadership* 313). Babbitt devoted most of his writing and career attempting to demystify the romantic notion of a child’s spontaneous and natural desire for service, whereby he contended American education suffered mightily from the transfer of the emphasis of an inner working and mediation of the dualism found in each individual to an outer working manifested in social service. “We need educational leaders,” Babbitt summarized, “who will have less to say of service and more to say of culture and civilization, and who will so use these words as to show that they have some inkling of their true meaning” (*Democracy and Leadership* 313).

Dewey, then, for Babbitt, acted as a Rousseauist by his insistence on the child’s natural inclination to be altruistic and to promote this altruism in the form of social service.

Babbitt considered this rejection of the genuine humanist’s inner dualism an ominous feature of the “new” education, an education that was gradually abandoning its cultural examples as a guide in attempting the mediation of this dualism. Babbitt’s use of Dewey as an exemplar of the sentimental thread of humanitarianism infiltrating the American schools was not the sole confrontation Babbitt challenged Dewey with in writing. But it is nonetheless one important to note, as Babbitt seemingly had not only an astute knowledge of the curricular battles taking place in the lower schools, but he also was unafraid to challenge the educational leaders in their own realm.

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several generations past.” More consideration of Babbitt’s philosophical attacks on Dewey is provided in chapter 5.



Besides the service aspect of sentimental humanitarianism that Babbitt relentlessly attacked and warned against, he also cautioned against the Rousseauist's desire of celebrating the spontaneity and freedom from restraint with which the student was to be instilled. In his *Rousseau and Romanticism*, Babbitt spent hundreds of pages philosophically denouncing the brand of sentimental humanitarianism Rousseau ushered in during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In such chapters as "Romantic Genius," "Romantic Melancholy," and "Romantic Morality: The Ideal," Babbitt set out the Rousseauist's views and then attempted to question and shatter them with his humanistic viewpoint. But in his last chapter, "The Present Outlook," Babbitt switched from his more philosophical and historical arguments to examine the current educational scene influenced by sentimental humanitarianism. In his usual fashion, Babbitt began by citing Aristotle (Babbitt's classical example of the genuine humanist<sup>46</sup>) and his insistence on the proper use of habit in educating the young. Babbitt then went on the offensive: "The only habit the child should be allowed to form,' says Rousseau, 'is that of forming no habit (*Rousseau and Romanticism* 387). Babbitt then sarcastically asked "How else is the child to follow his bent or genius and so arrive at full expression?" Babbitt soberly answered:

The point I am bringing up is of the utmost gravity, for Rousseau is by common consent the father of modern education. To eliminate from education the idea of a progressive adjustment to a human law, quite apart from temperament, may be to imperil civilization itself. For civilization (another word that is sadly in need of Socratic defining) may be found to

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<sup>46</sup> Babbitt: "Any one who wishes to learn how to become moderate and sensible and decent can do no better even at this late day than to steep himself in the 'Nicomachean Ethics'" (*Rousseau and Romanticism* 386).

consist above all in an orderly transmission of right habits; and the chief agency for securing such a transmission must always be education.

*(Rousseau and Romanticism 387)*

Babbitt considered Rousseau's "repudiation of habit" to be "perfectly chimerical." In what is seemingly a response to Hall's child study movement, in which the educator stepped back and was passive in examining the natural interests of the child, Babbitt called for the right use of habit in a child's education. The obvious question, then, is what specifically Babbitt calls for. But as is typical for Babbitt and the New Humanists, no specific program was offered. Instead, it must be remembered that Babbitt was adamantly against a neo-classicism in education that made formalism and discipline ends in themselves. But the Rousseauist's complete neglect of habit did not suit Babbitt either. He offered, in what was perhaps his most specific advice to teachers in all of his writings, the suggestion that

The trait of the child to which the sensible educator will give chief attention is not his spontaneity, but his proneness to imitate. In the absence of good models the child will imitate bad ones, and so, long before the age of intelligent choice and self-determination, become the prisoner of bad habits. Men, therefore, who aim at being civilized must come together, work out a convention in short, regarding the habits they wish transmitted to the young. A great civilization is in a sense only a great convention. *(Rousseau and Romanticism 387)*

Of course, in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, conceiving and agreeing on a convention, of what knowledge was of most worth, was what the great curricular struggle

was fought about. Babbitt apparently sensed the contention, but warned that failure to create a convention, especially one in which students could learn from “good models,” would hasten a deterioration of American civilization. He forcefully argued that a sentimental humanitarianism, brought into schools by the child study movement and the developmentalists, simply did not provide this proper modeling and habituation:

The notion that in spite of the enormous mass of experience that has been accumulated in both East and West we are still without light as to the habits that make for moderation and good sense and decency, and that education is therefore still purely a matter of exploration and experiment is one that may be left to those who are suffering from an advanced stage of naturalistic intoxication – for example, to Professor John Dewey and his followers. (*Rousseau and Romanticism* 388 )

This, then, along with his qualm of the misplaced dualism, was the central argument Babbitt made against the Rousseauist and sentimental humanitarianism. The developmentalists, led by Hall and comprised of the child study advocates, ushered in a new curriculum that promised an education based upon the student’s natural inclinations and interests. With little to no interference from any sort of outside influence, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century child, much like the ideal child being educated in Rousseau’s *Emile*, could have his/her “natural power” “unharnessed.” Babbitt pointed to the leading educational experts of the time, Charles W. Eliot, and arguably his “successor” to the American educational throne, John Dewey, as the classical examples of the sentimental humanitarians piloting in a new era of educational Rousseauism.

## **The Cooperation of Scientific and Sentimental Humanitarians: Baconians and Rousseauists Aligned in the Struggle for the Curriculum**

Even though Kliebard posits that the social efficiency experts and the developmentalists could be no more different than their common enemy, the humanists, it seems apparent that Babbitt's major contribution to the curricular battles of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and therefore our interpretation of this era of educational history, was his poignant argument that these two groups were actually identical on their foundational levels. Though their means within the curriculum were exceptionally different, the ends both factions sought were the same; in fact, Babbitt argued that both groups actually reinforced each other collectively in their respective attempts to become *the* curriculum makers. As usual, it is wise to begin the examination of Babbitt's argument in his *Literature and the American College*. After defining and explaining, singularly, Baconians and Rousseauists, Babbitt surmised "the Baconian, after all, would have been comparatively ineffective in undermining humane standards if he had not been reinforced by the Rousseauist. The scientific and sentimental naturalists are sharply at variance on many points, but in their views on education they often coincide curiously" (95).<sup>47</sup> What Babbitt argued was that the "Baconian idea of progress has been supplemented" by the "idea of liberty" promoted by the Rousseauist. (95)

In terms of the curriculum, these two ideologies were able to reinforce and cooperate with each on a fundamental level. The social efficiency experts argued that society was hindered by requiring all students to follow the same humanistic and classical course of study, and that by efficiently differentiating the curriculum to train students for

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<sup>47</sup>Babbitt went on to explain that "This coincidence will be plain if one compares, for example, the book on Education, by Herbert Spencer, a scientific humanitarian of the purest water, with Rousseau's 'Emile.'"

specific societal roles, the society as a whole would benefit. Although this curricular faction relied on a certain scientific precision, a sense of liberty came into play, as no longer was the classical curriculum to be taught to all students. Of course, the developmentalists' entire objective was to provide the student this liberty so that he/she could develop naturally and without outside interference. Additionally, besides sharing the notion of "liberty" in breaking away from the humanist curriculum that was strongly entrenched in schools, both groups could point to a scientifically-based rationale for their ideas. The social efficiency experts used a scientific basis for not only operating the schools themselves, but also in engineering the society of the future by providing a differentiated curriculum for students; the child study experts pointed to their copious observations and reports on children's knowledge and interests.

But as was Babbitt's habit, he delineated the historical and philosophical partnership of the Baconian and Rousseauist in terms of what this meant for American education, including their scientific claims and their respective denial of the "genuine" humanist's inner dualism. "This transformation of the Arcadian dreamer into the Utopist is due in part," Babbitt explained,

to the intoxication produced in the human spirit by the conquests of science. One can discern the cooperation of Baconian and Rousseauist from a very early stage of the great humanitarian movement in the midst of which we are still living. Both Baconian and Rousseauist are interested not in the struggle between good and evil in the breast of the individual, but in the progress of mankind as a whole. If the Rousseauist hopes to promote the progress of society by diffusing the spirit of brotherhood, the

Baconian or utilitarian hopes to achieve the same end by perfecting its machinery. It is scarcely necessary to add that these two main types of humanitarianism may be contained in almost any proportion in any particular person. By his worship of man in his future material advance, the Baconian betrays no less surely than the Rousseauist his faith in man's natural goodness. (*Rousseau and Romanticism* 137-8)

By the denial of any sort of dualism within the mind of the individual, both the Baconian and the Rousseauist were free then to promote the progress of society without regard to the inner life the "genuine" humanist finds integral. Because the Rousseauist promoted the idea that the child was naturally inclined for service and altruism (i.e. the child had a natural sense for doing good), then it reinforced the Baconian's belief that the "machinery" of scientific efficiency ensured a smoothly running society without having to worry about any sort of ethical teaching.

In other words, the social efficiency expert was free to engineer an educational system which only focused on placing students into specific social and vocational roles once they entered society; no concern was necessary involving any sort of ethical training, as the developmentalist had assured that the ethical training of the student would take care of itself, in that the child would naturally exude a desire for service and altruism. Babbitt specifically argued that "The general human discipline embodied in the fixed curriculum is to be discarded in order that the individual may be free to work along the lines of his bent or 'genius.' In a somewhat similar way scientific naturalism encourages the individual to sacrifice the general human discipline to a specialty" (*Rousseau and Romanticism* 66, n. 1). In both cases the inward working in mediating the

“civil war in the cave,” for Babbitt, was ignored and an outer working was only emphasized, both in serving others either through a natural inclination or “bent” and in fulfilling a specific role in society to promote its efficiency. In short, Babbitt summarized, “Every youth, it is assumed, has some innate gift – a gift which is treated with almost religious seriousness, and is therefore to suffer no contradiction. The effort he puts forth along the lines of his temperamental bias will make for his own happiness and finally be pressed into the service of humanity” (“President Eliot and American Education” 210).

This reinforcement between the Baconian and Rousseauist provided Babbitt cause for concern when the inner check (or restraint) is no longer to be developed within a student. Without this training, Babbitt feared that the students would then be unable to restrain expansion on either the spiritual or material level – the student would have no inner check for refraining. He argued that

The older education was based on the belief that men need to be disciplined to some ethical center. The sentimental humanitarian opposes to a definite curriculum which aims at some such humanistic or religious discipline the right of the individual to develop freely his bent or temperamental proclivity. (*Democracy and Leadership* 303)

To tie this to the social efficiency experts, he again asserted that

The older education aimed to produce leaders and, as it perceived, the basis of leadership is not commercial or industrial efficiency, but wisdom. Those who have been substituting the cult of efficiency<sup>48</sup> for the older

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<sup>48</sup> Babbitt used this term in 1924, suggesting the term was prominently used by this time.

liberal training are, of course, profuse in their professions of service either to country or to mankind at large. (*Democracy and Leadership* 304)

Both strands of humanitarianism promised, of course, benefits to the student and the society at large. In the combination Babbitt warned against, the developmentalists and the social efficiency experts allowed for students to develop naturally their inclinations to serve, as they entered a position in society to ensure its efficient maintenance. Though these forces promised unquestioned benefits, Babbitt sounded the alarm of what this combination left out in terms of the child's education: the mediation of the child's dualistic nature. He asked, throughout his works,

whether anything so purely expansive as service, in the humanitarian sense, can supply an adequate counterpoise to the pursuit of unethical power, whether the proper counterpoise to the pursuit is not to be sought rather in the principle of vital control, first of all in the individual and finally in the State? (*Democracy and Literature* 304)

The humanistic curriculum provided by schools before the battles began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, despite its well-publicized defects (even from Babbitt himself), seemingly provided an ethical basis and a sense of an inner check, helping to train the student to restrain from an ever-increasing expansion within different realms. In terms of mediating this dualism, he simply believed that "it is to be accomplished rather by the gradual formation from childhood of right habits. In all its forms, however, conversion implies an opposition in the heart of the individual between the expansive desires and a principle of control" ("President Eliot and American Education" 203). For Babbitt, these two curricular factions worked together by first denying a central dualism within the mind of



the individual student and, secondly, by encouraging this incessant expansion through service and material efficiency.

Babbitt, however, foresaw the nearly insurmountable odds of a genuine humanist curriculum successfully entering the American education scene. He seemed resigned to this by his lament that

Little seems likely to survive of the idea of liberal culture if it is left on the one hand to the Baconian, who neglects the ‘law for man’ entirely, and on the other to the Rousseauist, who confounds this law with his own temperament. What is important in man in the eyes of the humanist is not his power to act on the world, but his power to act upon himself. This is at once the highest and most difficult task he can set himself. (*Literature and the American College* 100)

Babbitt obviously understood the chances of his “genuine” humanism winning the day, or even receiving scant attention, in a country going through tremendous technological, economic, and scientific transformations. Babbitt admitted, obviously aware of the temper of his day, that

Scientific discovery has given a tremendous stimulus to wonder and curiosity, has encouraged a purely exploratory attitude towards life and raised an overwhelming prepossession in favor of the new as compared with the old. Baconian and Rousseauist evidently come together by their primary emphasis on novelty. [...] It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the havoc that has been wrought by the transfer of the belief that the latest thing is the best – a belief that is approximately true of automobiles – from

the material order to an entirely different realm. (*Rousseau and Romanticism* 64)

Perhaps, though, Babbitt understood that his “antiquated” brand of humanism would never seriously vie for a place within the curricular struggle of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Quite obviously, too, his “genuine” humanism never gained any sort of influence upon the American schools. Even though Babbitt and his ideas gained no footing or place within the classroom walls, his unique perspective and dire warnings of the direction of the curriculum should surely be given at least a hearing now. As Cremin explains, “Proponents of virtually every progressive cause from the 1890’s through World War I had their program for the school. Humanitarians of every stripe saw education at the heart of their effort toward social alleviation” (85). If the voices of “humanitarians of every stripe” were given a forum in Babbitt’s time, then it is only appropriate and valuable to listen to his voice of dissent and warning likewise. He ended his *Rousseau and Romanticism* with these words of caution:

Self-expression and vocational training combined in various proportions and tempered by the spirit of ‘service’ are nearly the whole of the new education. But [...] it is not possible to extract from any such compounding of utilitarian and romantic elements, with the resulting material efficiency and ethical inefficiency, a civilized view of life. It is right here indeed in the educational field that concerted opposition to the naturalistic conspiracy against civilization is most likely to be fruitful. If the present generation – and I have in mind especially American conditions – cannot come to a working agreement about the ethical

training it wishes given the young, if it allows the drift towards anarchy on the human level to continue, it will show itself, however ecstatic it may be over its own progressiveness and idealism, both cowardly and degenerate. (388-9)

Though Babbitt foresaw the long odds of American educators heeding his warnings concerning these two strands of humanitarianism in the school, he did not hesitate to challenge the two chief educational leaders of his time, Eliot and Dewey. It is now to these philosophical clashes to which we turn.

## Chapter 4: Babbitt and Eliot

“I wonder how long Harvard will continue its present policy of giving me first rate responsibility with second rate recognition.”

--Babbitt, letter to Paul Elmer More, October 9, 1910

“His [Charles W. Eliot’s] slogan, Education for Power and Service, matched well the materialistic and sentimental spirit of the times.”

--Norman Foerster (*The Future of the Liberal College 2*)

Irving Babbitt’s voice in the curricular battles of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century came from his “outsider” position in the Romance languages department at Harvard. During his 39-year tenure at Harvard, Babbitt came to be a co-founder of the New Humanist movement which originated during the first part of the century. The New Humanists defended cultural, religious, and philosophical ideas they thought under attack from the new Modern movement. Of course, all these realms were inextricably linked with education; the New Humanists, however, focused almost solely on higher education, as universities were more closely associated with (and seen by some as the defenders of) the cultural, religious, and philosophical tenors of society. As discussed in chapter one, the vast majority of the defenders of the humanist curriculum in the public schools were found in positions in universities. As such, it was only natural, then, for these guardians of the humanist curriculum to put much emphasis on issues within higher education. Babbitt was no exception. His 1908 *Literature and the American College: Essays in Defense of*

*the Humanities*, “which included several of his previously published essays, was not only the first full statement of the humanist creed but a devastating attack<sup>49</sup> on trends in higher education” (Brennen and Yarbrough 22). Much of Babbitt’s specific criticism of education involved what he perceived to be deficiencies of American universities at the turn of the century. But Babbitt’s philosophical stances, as I have been arguing, can easily be applied to the realm of the public schools. Sometimes, in fact, Babbitt did specifically address his philosophical qualms with certain aspects and directions of public education and its curriculum. And to show that Babbitt was indeed in tune with the curricular battles of his day, he did also take issue in many of his published works with the two major educational figures of the time: Charles W. Eliot and John Dewey.

Both Babbitt and Eliot spent the vast majority of their careers at Harvard. Eliot served as president of the university when Babbitt obtained both his Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees, and Eliot was still presiding over Harvard when Babbitt returned to teach in the Romance languages department in 1894 until Eliot retired in 1908. This was also the year in which Babbitt decided to publish his *Literature and the American College: Essays in Defense of the Humanities*; included in it was Babbitt’s attack on Eliot’s elective system, as the prime example of Rousseauism/sentimental humanitarianism gone awry. Of course, this particular argument pointed to Eliot’s role at Harvard and not his position as the educational leader of the public schools. But within Babbitt’s criticisms of Eliot, in *Literature and the American College* and sprinkled throughout his other works, most notably his 1929 essay “President Eliot and American Education,” was a philosophical analysis developed by Babbitt concerning education on a

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<sup>49</sup> The use of the term “devastating” is questionable. Though Babbitt’s attack forcefully denounced certain trends he perceived in higher education, it seems that no major changes in the functions of higher education resulted from his pronouncements.

more general scale, including the public schools. Unlike Babbitt and Eliot's multi-decade connection at Harvard, Babbitt and John Dewey probably never crossed paths, and this is perhaps a reason Babbitt referred to Dewey, his followers, and his ideas more sparsely. But Babbitt's differences with Dewey provided an interesting "outside" perspective on the ideas of the unquestioned philosophical leader of American education in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Babbitt's major misgiving with Dewey was centralized simply around one idea: experience and its application in the classroom. Babbitt in no form disparaged Dewey's notion that a student should complement their education with their own experiences, in addition to going through similar types of experiences in school. But Babbitt asked why Dewey refused to take the idea of experience even further. Why cannot, Babbitt inquired, students utilize the experiences of the past, the "wisdom of the ages," in this quest for knowledge as well? The classical authors, Babbitt argued, reiterating his humanist position, could teach students certain truths that have stood the test of time; therefore, students had no need in trying to find their own infinitely unique experiences, as the past could often stand in their places as a type of vicarious experience. The philosophical arguments brought about by Babbitt in confronting the two leaders of American education in his lifetime and for the duration of the great curricular struggle, show Babbitt's perspicuity in a time of great upheaval in our educational history.

### **Babbitt and Eliot's Harvard Ties**

Any consideration of Babbitt's published philosophical misgivings towards Charles W. Eliot must begin with their professional relationship. Scholars have explained the conditions of Babbitt's entry into teaching at Harvard, including the account found in Stephen C. Brennan and Stephen R. Yarbrough's *Irving Babbitt*. They

examine in great detail Babbitt's biography, including especially his often contentious relationship with Eliot while teaching at Harvard. Babbitt entered Harvard as an undergraduate in 1885, a time when

Harvard was in the middle of tremendous reforms instituted by President Charles William Eliot, who had emulated German universities dominated by *strengwissen-schaftliche* and *Lehrfreiheit* – rigorous scientific method applied freely in all areas of research. By 1891, Eliot would proclaim that scientific method ‘characterizes the true university, and partly justifies the name.’<sup>50</sup> (13-4)

Seemingly this charge led by Eliot to transform Harvard into a world renowned research institution planted the seed for Babbitt's notion (and disdain) of the Baconian/scientific humanitarian beginning as an undergraduate. Harvard, according to Babbitt, was betraying its heritage of training leaders (all men at this time, of course) on the principles of wisdom and character. In its place, the research institute based on the German model called for an expansion of inquiry and the use of scientific methods, especially within the humanities. Presumably, as an undergraduate, Babbitt encountered specialists within their respective fields, instead of the balanced humanist he would later call for in his writings.<sup>51</sup> Of course, besides leading Harvard (and consequently many universities

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<sup>50</sup> Brennen and Yarbrough go on to explain that “Here was a comitatus united by a shared heroic discipline practiced with almost religious zeal. As the renowned psychologist G. Stanley Hall put it, ‘Wherever this real university spirit of research breaks out, there is life; the Holy Ghost speaks in modern accents; the old oracles find new voices, and who would ... not listen?’ Well, at least one Harvard student would not, or if he did, did not like what he heard.”

<sup>51</sup> Brennen and Yarbrough quote from Babbitt's undergraduate notes (found in his archives at Harvard) from his Shakespeare instructor George Lyman Kittredge. They relate that “When Kittredge discussed [...] the ‘eternal blazon’ (or image of hell) King Hamlet's ghost finds too terrible for mortals to bear – he described, according to Babbitt's notes, only a curious linguistic construction in which the ‘Adj. takes function of first part of compound i.e. adj. and noun used together where we should expect two nouns with a prep.’” (14-5).

following its lead) into its function as a research institution, Eliot was best known for his conception and implementation of the elective system. This revolutionary curricular transformation expanded class selection, so that students had more choices for courses and emphases within certain fields, instead of the prescribed older curriculum all students shared. Babbitt experienced the elective system as both an undergraduate and as an instructor and professor; Eliot's system expanded to include more choices the longer it was in place at Harvard. So by the time Babbitt was established as a teacher at Harvard, the elective system was well established. Eliot's elective system, consequently, served as Babbitt's primary example of an educational apparatus put forth by the Rousseauist/sentimental humanitarian. It seems, then, that Babbitt's experience as an undergraduate during Eliot's innovations of both guiding Harvard into prominence as a research university along with implementing the elective system, allowed Babbitt to begin formulating his ideas concerning both scientific and sentimental humanitarianism and their mutual reinforcement that would dictate his thought for the remainder of his life.

But it was not until Babbitt became established as a teacher at Harvard that his ideas came fully to fruition and subsequently presented to the public. And, of course, Babbitt taught under Eliot at Harvard when he arrived in 1894. Brennen and Yarbrough detail Babbitt's early career as an instructor at Harvard, which began as a French instructor. After years of teaching elementary French to hundreds of students a year, Eliot granted Babbitt the title of Assistant Professor in 1902 (20-2). This, then, is the paradox of Babbitt's philosophical attacks on Eliot. In *The Critical Legacy of Irving Babbitt*, George A. Panichas, who provides a detailed and easily accessible timeline of



Babbitt's biography, argues that "Probably through the intervention of President Eliot, Babbitt [was] relieved of teaching elementary French in the first semester of 1896-1897" (198). This allowed for Babbitt to begin teaching "upperclassmen and graduate students." Thus Panichas points out that

Babbitt's relationship to President Eliot, although most advantageous to his career, at this point [1902], in that Babbitt could receive a sympathetic audience from Eliot for his point of view, is steeped in ambiguity, especially with respect to Babbitt's attitude toward the Elective System in effect at Harvard. (198)

On the professional surface, Babbitt benefited from Eliot's decision, but inwardly Babbitt battled the humanitarianism he believed ran rampant at Harvard under Eliot. Brennen and Yarbrough examine Babbitt's inner turmoil during his early years on the faculty at Harvard, especially concerning his disdain of the "philological syndicate" within the French department (20-4).<sup>52</sup> Babbitt began, apparently, formulating and writing his ideas by the turn of the century, and decided to publish his first work in 1908: "Eliot's retirement that year made the timing seem right even though Babbitt still worried about the philologists. This was a very critical moment for his career and his ideas" (22). The book, however, was not received by the public very well at all, as Brennen and Yarbrough explain that "the book sold so poorly that he had to borrow five hundred dollars [...] to get his next one in print" (23).

**"... the time is ripe for an attack"**

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<sup>52</sup> Brennen and Yarbrough expound on this notion in a section called "Harvard and the Philological Syndicate." Of course, Babbitt believed that these professors were classical examples of scientific and utilitarian humanitarians, as they ignored any sort of concern for "law for man" and instead focused solely on "law for thing" through their research.

Earlier, in an April 1, 1906, letter to his fellow co-founder of the New Humanism, Princeton professor Paul Elmer More, Babbitt declared that “I believe the time is ripe for an attack not only on what the philologists stand for but on what men like President Eliot stand for if anything is to remain of the American college and of all that it has traditionally represented.”<sup>53</sup> With Eliot’s impending retirement looming, Babbitt seemingly felt confident enough to make his criticism of Eliot’s “humanitarian” policies at Harvard made known publicly. This attack came within Babbitt’s lone book specifically concerning education. Babbitt named Eliot seven different times, with his most severe criticism directed towards Eliot’s elective system at Harvard. In his chapter “Bacon and Rousseau,” Babbitt argued that Eliot perfectly encapsulated both strands of humanitarianism working together and reinforcing each other within an individual- but, of course, this was not just any individual, but the leading educational expert of the time. In this criticism, though, Babbitt focused solely on Eliot’s role as Harvard president, leaving his attacks of Eliot’s influence upon American education for later years.

This initial foray provided the foundation of Babbitt’s contentious disdain of Eliot’s educational humanitarianism. Babbitt first examined Eliot’s place as a “good Baconian” in his particular “conception of progress. [...] Only the Baconian idea of progress has been supplemented in his case by an idea of liberty that justifies a well-known French writer on education, M. Compayre, in claiming him as a disciple of Rousseau” (*Literature and the American College* 95-6). Eliot’s “Baconian idea of progress,” for Babbitt, seemingly mirrored Harvard’s transformation from a college with

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<sup>53</sup> Harvard Archives. Box 9, “Babbitt-More and More-Babbitt Correspondence, 1895-1934.” P.3. Accessed August 3, 2009. Earlier in the same letter, Babbitt proclaimed that “under present conditions victory belongs in the long run to those who have ideas and power of expression, and the philologues have neither.” All letters cited from Babbitt are found in his archives at Harvard.

its traditional curriculum followed by all students, towards the modern-day university's offering of a wide array of courses of study and its specialized research elements.

Of course, this was the trend pursued by many American colleges at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so Eliot was hardly alone as Babbitt's target. But it is interesting to note, on a more general scale, how his subsequent switch from promoting the same humanistic education for all students to his advocating an education tailored for certain students on certain tracks, so clearly and ardently covered by Kliebard, mirrored closely the transformation of Harvard under his presidency. From Babbitt's perspective Eliot's educational ideals both on the university level and within the American schools provided clear evidence of Eliot's suffering from an excess of Baconian expansionism. In other words, Eliot disregarded the law for man (Babbitt's quick definition of humanism) and replaced it with solely the law for thing (specialized training). Within Harvard and American universities in general, this meant that Eliot advocated that students choose a particular field or subject of study and to pursue it through use of extensive research in the hopes of becoming a specialist in a given field. This, of course, according to Babbitt, was the converse of the type of education a genuine humanism was to provide. For American schools in general, Eliot suddenly rejected his allegiance to the belief that all students should follow the same humanistic curriculum to asserting that education needed to sort students, through different curricula, into specific professions and roles in society.

### **Eliot and Rousseau**

But what Babbitt found so disconcerting was Eliot's adherence to the other side of the same humanitarian coin: his mirroring of a Rousseauistic expansion within both educational spheres. In the previous quotation Babbitt cited Compayre and his claim of

Eliot's being a disciple of Rousseau's. Gabriel Compayre, a French educationalist, published his *Jean Jacques Rousseau and Education from Nature* in 1907, in part of a French series entitled "Pioneers in Education." Compayre focused almost solely on explicating *Emile* on its profound influence on modern education, a work that "deserves to remain the eternal object of the educator's meditation" (5). Babbitt cited in his book the two references Compayre made concerning Eliot. After spending approximately one-hundred pages in praise of Rousseau's educational beliefs, Compayre turned toward the present state of Rousseauism in European and American education. He lauded the European acceptance of Rousseau's educational ideals, but Compayre mocked the reluctance of American educators to follow fully Rousseau's ideas: this is not surprising, Compayre mused, as "How could this dreamer, this indolent idler, this heroic representative of the sensibility of the Latin races, be gifted with the power of pleasing the virile, rugged minds and busy, practical temperaments of the citizens of the New World?" (108). He did concede, though, that slowly American educators were accepting and putting into practice Rousseau's ideas. The one figure to whom Compayre pointed was Eliot:

One of the leaders of American education, Dr. Charles W. Eliot, the revered president of Harvard University, summarizing the progress accomplished in his country during the nineteenth century, draws attention of the two essential things into the school curriculum: nature study and manual training. The American child is no longer a logical phantom, stuffed with words and abstractions, but a living creature, working with hands as well as mind. (108-9)

Compayre immediately and rhetorically asked, “But is not all of this Rousseau?” (109).

He went on to assert that

Similarly, Dr. Eliot points out that an improvement has come about in discipline. [...] people have come to think that the modern and more accurate conception of a good government for a nation’s citizens held lessons for us on the subject of a good government for children, who also should be freed, as far as possible, from the yoke of the old tutelage, and trained in self-government. (109)

Babbitt’s first published criticism came a year after Compayre’s work, and undoubtedly Babbitt felt obligated to state a vastly different case concerning Rousseau, Eliot, and American education. Incidentally, too, Babbitt’s citation of Compayre’s book should demonstrate that Babbitt certainly kept abreast of the educational trends taking place in American schools, even while embedded in the Romance languages department at Harvard.

Babbitt strongly tied Eliot’s Rousseauism with his elective system. He proclaimed that

President Eliot speaks as a pure Rousseauist in a passage like the following: ‘A well-instructed youth of eighteen can select for himself a better course of study than any college faculty, or any wise man who does not know his ancestors and his previous life, can possibly select for him.... Every youth of eighteen is an infinitely complex organization, the

duplicate of which neither does nor ever will exist.”’ (*Literature and the American College* 96)<sup>54</sup>

Babbitt pointed to an inextricable bond between Rousseau’s educational ideals and Eliot’s revolutionary elective system. Of course, this system wipes out Babbitt’s idea of the inner check on the outward impulses of the individual,<sup>55</sup> instead of disciplining oneself to studying and following the tenets of the wisdom of the ages, the Harvard student was allowed (and encouraged) to follow any course of study, whether that included a humanistic education or not. The elective system emphatically announced that studying the classics of Western civilization was something not important or relevant enough to be required but only chosen. The humanities were consequently placed on the same academic plane as any and all other subjects. Babbitt’s subsequent observation was

There is then no general norm, no law for man, as the humanist believed, with reference to which the individual should select; he should make his selection entirely with reference to his own temperament and its (supposedly) unique requirements. The wisdom of all the ages is to be naught compared with the inclination of a sophomore. Any check that is put on this inclination is an unjustifiable constraint, not to say an intolerable tyranny. (*Literature and the American College* 96)

This was Babbitt’s definitive statement against Eliot’s Rousseauism. Babbitt went on to describe how “the impressions of the moment,” the constant flux of life, complemented the elective system in creating an “educational impressionism” (*Literature and the American College* 96). The temperament of a student may dictate what he/she would

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<sup>54</sup> Babbitt’s citation of Eliot’s words was from *Educational Reform*, pp.132, 133.

<sup>55</sup> Babbitt defined, in the simplest terms, his idea of the dualism within in the individual in *On Being Creative and Other Essays* as “a higher self that acts restrictively on his ordinary and impulsive self” (206).

study each day; the fear for Babbitt was that both the student and his/her interests would change continuously, leaving no room for any course of study to be abiding. Even though Babbitt attacked the elective system which had been in place for decades, he cited a speech Eliot gave at the National Educational Association in 1900 concerning Rousseau. The selection contained Eliot's recognition of Rousseau's personal flaws, which were mixed with his quest for universal human freedom: "The main work of that man's life tended and still tends toward human liberty, and that one fact has almost sanctified an execrable wretch."<sup>56</sup> The selection ends with Eliot's imploring the audience to become an advocate of "freedom and liberty" with "no sins to cover" (*Literature and the American College* 97). But Babbitt countered that Eliot's implication was part of his philosophical error: "Rousseau was an 'execrable wretch,' who was at the same time a glorious apostle of liberty. Yet nothing is easier to prove than that if Rousseau was an execrable wretch, it was directly because of his idea of liberty."<sup>57</sup> Babbitt attempted to argue that Eliot could not have his cake and eat it too; an external liberty that went unchecked and unfettered tended to create the same flux within the inner life of the individual. To give free reign to a student's choosing the course of his/her studies naturally, for Babbitt, promoted the expansive tendencies of the student; the "civil war in the cave" remained unmediated.

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<sup>56</sup> Eliot's quotation continues: "Do you know what Rousseau did with five of his wife's babies, one after the other, in spite of her prayers and tears? He put every one of them in succession into the public *crèche*, knowing that in the then condition of foundling hospitals that destination meant all but certain death. Yet we sit here and listen to the praise of that mean and cruel creature. How shall we account for these two judgments of one man, both just? We can only say that he tied the main work of his intellectual life to the great doctrine of human liberty. Verily, to have served liberty will cover a multitude of sins. May you serve freedom and humanity in all your labors, and then have no sins to cover." Babbitt cited Eliot's quotation from *Proceedings National Educational Association*, 1900, p. 199 (96-7).

<sup>57</sup> Babbitt made the same comparison to Bacon and his philosophy in this section as well: "...just as Bacon failed morally, not in spite of his idea of progress, but as a result of it" (97).

Eliot's Rousseauism, according to Babbitt, manifested itself at Harvard by being reinforced by the Baconian strand of humanitarianism. He claimed that "President Eliot has adopted and applied to education only one half" of Rousseau's idea of liberty as a "majestic indolence" (*Literature and the American College* 100). In reference to Eliot, Babbitt continued that "Like Rousseau, he would release the student from all outward constraint; like Rousseau, he denies that there is a general norm, a 'law for man,' the discipline of which the individual should receive" (*Literature and the American College* 98).<sup>58</sup> Having granted this freedom to his Harvard students, Eliot assumed that they would "use this liberty in a Baconian spirit; he is not to profit by his emancipation, as Rousseau himself would do, to enjoy a 'delicious indolence,' but he is to work with great energy with reference to his personal interests and aptitudes. Unfortunately many of our undergraduates are more thoroughgoing Rousseauists in this respect than President Eliot" (*Literature and the American College* 98).

### **Rousseau and Bacon: Eliot's Vision of Harvard**

Babbitt conceded that Eliot was "one of the most strenuous of men," not only through his role of President of Harvard but also through his leadership within the entire American educational system, but that he clearly underestimated the level of intellectual strenuousness in human nature, and especially within undergraduates. After the elective system had been in place for decades, Babbitt surmised that

President Eliot must be somewhat disappointed to see how nearly all these youths insist on flocking into a few large courses; and especially

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<sup>58</sup> Babbitt argued that "In praising the liberty of Rousseau, President Eliot is in reality praising the liberty of the anarchist, not because he is himself an anarchist, but because he belongs to a generation which saw so keenly the benefits of liberty that it was unable to see the benefits of restraint" (106).



disappointed that many of them should take advantage of the elective system not to work strenuously along the line of their special interests, but rather to lounge through their college course along the line of least resistance. (*Literature and the American College* 99)<sup>59</sup>

This complaint of Babbitt's was at the heart of his attack of Eliot's sentimental humanitarian tendencies, primarily through his elective system. But Babbitt went on to conclude that Eliot's Rousseauism also complemented and reinforced his Baconianism; after all, Babbitt argued, "The fullness of knowledge," for the true Baconian,

he abandons as something impossible for the individual, and by a sort of fiction transfers it to humanity in the mass. He does not have the humanist's passion for wholeness, for the harmonious rounding out of all the faculties. He is willing to sacrifice this ideal symmetry if only he is allowed to cultivate some special faculty or subject to the utmost.

(*Literature and the American College* 94)

Because the individual cannot master all subjects or knowledge, he/she was forced into a specialty, the Baconian ideal. The Rousseauistic aspect of this dualism entered at this point, as the individual could justifiably choose any specialty or course of study, no matter how esoteric or remote, as an individual's educational tastes were to be prized above all else. All subjects and inquiries were on the same level plane of importance. At Harvard under Eliot, then, this reinforcement was working on both the undergraduate and graduate levels. With the elective system, undergraduates had the choice of a variety of subjects and courses of study; of course, these could only be offered by a faculty

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<sup>59</sup> Babbitt went on to assert that "A popular philosopher has said that every man is as lazy as he dares to be. If he had said that nine men in ten are as lazy as they dare to be, he would have come near hitting a great truth."

specially prepared and qualified to teach them. With Harvard's transformation into a research university, such specialists were easily had. Babbitt's first major work was devoted to critiquing and warning about the humanitarian alliance in such an education.

### **Two Decades Later: "President Eliot and American Education"**

Babbitt went on to refer to Eliot briefly in both his *Democracy and Leadership* (1924) and *On Being Creative and Other Essays* (1932).<sup>60</sup> But he saved his most complete attack on Eliot's ideas in his essay "President Eliot and American Education," published in *The Forum* in January 1929, three years after Eliot's death. Later the essay was republished in a collection of essays in 1940 entitled *Spanish Character and Other Essays*. Babbitt began his 1929 essay by echoing a sentiment found in his *Literature and the American College*: his attack was solely philosophical, as he held Eliot's character in the highest regard.<sup>61</sup> When discussing and deriding the elective system in *Literature and the American College*, Babbitt pointed out that Harvard's undergraduates did not

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<sup>60</sup> In *Democracy and Leadership* Babbitt argued that "no one has been more successful in breaking down American educational tradition in favor of humanitarian conceptions than President Eliot, who is himself an unusually fine product of Puritan discipline. He has owed his great influence largely to the fact that many men are sensitive to a dignified and impressive personality, whereas very few men are capable of weighing the ultimate tendencies of ideas. One might have more confidence in the elective system if it could be counted on to produce President Eliots" (290). Later, Babbitt surmised that "The old education was, in intention at least, a training for wisdom and character. The new education has been summed up by President Eliot in the phrase: training for service and power. We are all coming together more and more in this idea of service. But, though service is supplying us in a way with a convention, it is not, in either the humanistic or the religious sense, supplying us with standards" (303). In *On Being Creative and Other Essays*, Babbitt pleaded, concerning Eliot, that "A legitimate admiration for his personal qualities should not interfere with the keenest critical scrutiny of his views about education, for the two things stand in no necessary connection. Practically this means to scrutinize the humanitarian idealism that he probably did more than any other man of his generation to promote. In this respect most of the heads of our institutions of learning have been and still are understudies of President Eliot. In an address on the occasion of his ninetieth birthday President Eliot warned his hearers against introspection, lest it divert them from a wholehearted devotion to service. Between this attitude and a religious or humanistic attitude there is a clash of first principles. Both humanism and religion require introspection as a prerequisite of the inner life and its appropriate activity. With the disappearance of this activity what is left is the outer activity of the utilitarian, and this leads straight to the one-sided cult of material efficiency and finally to the standardization that is, according to nearly all foreign critics and many of our own, a chief American danger" (227-8). Note well again Babbitt's insistence upon separating the criticism of Eliot's ideas from his character.

<sup>61</sup> Babbitt believed any attack on Eliot and his educational ideas should be "discussed in a way worthy of him, be lifted above the petty and the personal into the region of ideas." (199).

generally mirror Eliot's academic and intellectual "strenuousness." In "President Eliot and American Education," Babbitt began by proclaiming that

It would be reassuring if one could establish a connection between President Eliot's educational theory and his character and personality. His character and personality would seem, however, to derive from the Puritan tradition at its best, whereas his theory at the essential point marks an extreme recoil from Puritanism. (198)

Babbitt conceived his dualism within each individual of a perpetual battle between expansion versus control (i.e. "the civil war in the cave"). The tendency, for Babbitt, was that the individual naturally exudes an unwavering expansionism: an individual may possess a Baconian hunger for knowledge that lead into further and further into a one-sided specialty and/or a Rousseauistic expansion of emotions and freedom that lead to relativism. Babbitt even transferred this natural tendency towards expansion from the individual to entire nations, as writing at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he argued that an unchecked expansion on individual level eventually led to international imperialism.<sup>62</sup>

But as Babbitt pointed out, Eliot's own Puritanism, the mediation of this inner-dualism and the check on our natural expansiveness, was "the result of generations of religious or humanistic discipline. The illusion of a President Eliot is that of a man who himself born to great riches, deems it 'natural' that everyone should have cash in the bank" (198-9). Both Eliot's own religious and humanistic training provided for the proper check on his expansive intellectual tendencies; for Babbitt, though, Eliot's development of the elective system and the following of the German model of the

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<sup>62</sup> In his *Democracy and Leadership*, Babbitt devoted a chapter to this idea entitled "Democracy and Imperialism."

research university at Harvard, along with his advocating of dismissing a liberal education for all American students in favor of a specific vocational training, demonstrated Eliot's philosophical oversight. Eliot apparently did not perceive how his own humanistic and religious discipline and training led him to his own prominent character and ability. He therefore ignored his own training while serving as the leader of American education at the turn of the century.

In looking back at Eliot's legacy in American education in the decades preceding and following the turn of the century, Babbitt argued that he "did little more than reflect the time in its main tendency. For forty years he pushed American education in the direction in which it was already leaning. His whole career, indeed, illustrates the advantages of going with one's age quite apart from the question whither it is going" (199). For Babbitt, American culture, strongly reinforced by its education of this era, was becoming more and more sentimental and utilitarian-based, moving away from its religious and humanistic discipline found in earlier times. Though Eliot was trained within the "old education," he seemed to disregard this in order to lead American education towards the "new education." For Babbitt, Eliot's ideas forced critics "practically to consider the value of the naturalistic philosophy that he and other leaders of the nineteenth century espoused so heartily" (199). Babbitt's simple argument with "naturalism," subsequently, was that

This philosophy culminates in a doctrine of progress that would seem to be in serious conflict with the wisdom of the ages; for it is plain that there can be no such wisdom without the assumption in some form of a core of normal human experience that is set above the shifting tides of

circumstance. The progress proclaimed by the naturalists, on the contrary, is to be achieved not by transcending the phenomenal flux but by a surrender to it. (*Literature and the American College* 199-200)

Babbitt seemingly perceived (and fought against) an American educational system that was becoming ever more progressive in the sense of becoming ever more concerned with the circumstances of the present. On the one hand, child-study advocates were promoting an education that both encouraged and allowed for the shifting interests and pursuits of the student; and, on the other hand, social efficiency experts were adamantly preparing students for roles within the present society and for careers in the future. Babbitt's problem was with the disregard of the naturalists for the past, for "the wisdom of the ages" instead of the "wisdom of the age."<sup>63</sup> Babbitt went on to assert that "The belief in progress in its most naïve form is still held by multitudes, especially in America," but that the confidence in this type of progress "has been receiving the most formidable of refutations – that of the facts. The contrast between the whole conception of a 'far-off divine event' and incidents like the Great War is too flagrant" (200).<sup>64</sup> What Babbitt's genuine humanism called for was a moral progress of the inner-life, whereas he argued that the progress promoted by the progressives in education was solely concerned with the outer working of a student – in terms of attaining an individual sentimental expressionism or through vocational training. Writing after the horrors of World War I,

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<sup>63</sup> In discussing Eliot, Babbitt surmised "If, however, one is finally to be accounted a great and wise leader, it is not enough thus to be the faithful servant of the wisdom of an age; one must also be true to the wisdom of the ages" (199).

<sup>64</sup> Babbitt argued that "It may be doubted, however, whether in the future anyone of a distinction comparable with that of President Eliot will be able to hold it [the adamant belief in progress] with the same bland confidence" (200).

Babbitt simply pointed to it as his evidence of the failure of focusing solely on an outer working.

As Babbitt perpetually spelled out in his prior works, he argued in this essay that Eliot's

humanitarian idealism based in the faith in progress will be found in analysis to be either utilitarian or sentimental. Practically, in education as elsewhere, a utilitarian and sentimental movement has been displacing traditions that are either religious or humanistic. President Eliot deserves to rank as our chief humanitarian idealist in the educational field, not because of any novelty in his views, but because of the consistency and unwavering conviction with which he applied them. (200)

As the face of the revolutionary changes in American education beginning in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Eliot simply personified for Babbitt the influx of sentimental and utilitarian humanitarianism he warned as taking over the educational landscape. Eliot led the charge of both sentimental and utilitarian humanitarianism into American schools in the forms of the child-study movement and the efficiency experts. Of course, for Babbitt, these two factions basically represented different sides of the same humanitarian coin and actually worked in concordance in reinforcing each other. Babbitt pointed out that Eliot was historically in a long line of educational humanitarians, founded by Locke and Rousseau. But Babbitt went on to assert that "Superficially, at least, humanitarianism is even more triumphant today than it was during the lifetime of President Eliot.

Humanitarians are at present shaping our educational policy from the elementary grades

to the university” (201).<sup>65</sup> At the very least it is evident that Babbitt certainly concerned himself with American education on all levels, and not just within higher education as most scholars have examined. Babbitt’s most intense criticism of Eliot’s ideas, it is true, did come from his role as the president of Harvard; even in this essay concerning Eliot’s general role in leading American education, Babbitt still managed to denounce his implemented elective system at Harvard, using it as the prime example of the “clash between a familiar type of naturalistic philosophy and the wisdom of the ages; for nothing is more certain than that this wisdom has been neither utilitarian nor sentimental, but either religious or humanistic” (201). The humanitarianism Babbitt warned about was taking over a genuine humanism in American education on two fronts, delineated by him through the model of Eliot’s elective system at Harvard, spread beyond the university. In typical fashion, Babbitt illustrated the particular in order to point out the general.

### **“The Wisdom of the Ages”**

The universal dispute, then, that Babbitt held with Eliot centered on whether or not there was a body of permanent knowledge which stood above the ever-changing flux of time, whether “there is no permanent core of human experience set above mere historical processes” (202). Babbitt proceeded to argue his case that a body of permanent knowledge did exist no matter the present time, that “groups of men have at various times and various places got together on certain fundamentals – have, in short, worked out conventions” (202). It is this set of knowledge, this human convention, that Babbitt felt

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<sup>65</sup> Babbitt immediately and critically continued: “One should, however, note in passing a curious circumstance: the most thoroughgoing humanitarians – for example, our professors of pedagogy and sociology – are held in almost universal suspicion in academic circles, and are not infrequently looked upon by their colleagues as downright charlatans.”

was being neglected within education because of the invasion of sentimental and utilitarian strands of humanitarianism. Eliot's disbelief in this "permanent core of human experience" led to his promotion of both strands, thereby ignoring the knowledge Babbitt felt constituted a genuine humanistic education. As evidence that this convention existed now and in the past, Babbitt cited two of the major religions of both the East and the West. In pointing to Buddhism and Christianity, Babbitt believed that both religions featured as their central tenets the same basic features: "Love, joy, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, mildness, self-control." Babbitt used these words of St. Paul's to assert that they plainly echoed the teachings of the great Buddhist leader Asoka. Babbitt further connected the ideas and teachings of Confucius and Aristotle to show that the idea of a "permanent core of human experience" radiated no matter the time or place (202-3). For education specifically, this meant for Babbitt that there existed a body of knowledge that was of the most worth. What Eliot and other humanitarians proposed in education was the neglect of this convention in favor of both the student's inclination and training for his/her role in the future society.

Babbitt subsequently set out what constituted a genuine humanistic education, an education he believed was being attacked on these two humanitarian fronts. He explained: "What I have termed 'the wisdom of the ages' is, in short, primarily concerned with the problems of the inner life, and in its attitude toward these problems it is dualistic" (203-4). This, then, was the dualism with which Babbitt primarily concerned himself during his career. He was most concerned with the ability of the individual to control the ever-charging expansion he/she was naturally inclined towards. Babbitt believed that every individual possessed a natural tendency towards expansion, whether



this expansionism was concerned with emotions, drives, knowledge, or almost any desires conceived and developed within the mind of the individual. American education at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for Babbitt, not only ignored the principle of control within the mind of the student, but in fact it actually promoted an unregulated expansion through the two currently prevailing forms of humanitarianism. The child-study movement advocated the unfettered expansion of a student's emotions and interests, while the efficiency experts called for the narrow and constant pursuit of knowledge to fill a dutiful role in the workplace. As Babbitt proclaimed in another essay,

Our modern theory seems to be that one should be an enthusiastic specialist and at the same time escape from narrowness by sympathizing with others, each one of whom is likewise to be free to pursue enthusiastically his specialty. One form of expansive emotion, in short, is to be corrected by another (“Humanist and Specialist” 188)

Through the proper channels of a genuine humanistic education, Babbitt believed the student was to be “satisfied with imposing on these desires a law of measure or decorum. His programme may be summed up in the word mediation” (204). Students in this era, from Babbitt's point of view, received no training in controlling their expansive desires and inclinations, in whatever forms they may have manifested themselves.

### **The “Work” of Eliot and Babbitt**

Babbitt's principle criticism of Eliot's ignoring the need to teach and develop an inner-control over the perpetual tendency towards expansion ultimately revolved around their respective notions of “work.” Babbitt did lavish praise on Eliot's intellectual “strenuousness” in contrasting it to the attitude of many students involved in Harvard's

elective system. But Babbitt's praise ended there, as his crusade against Eliot's idea of work began. Referring to his model humanist, Babbitt cited three statements from Aristotle:<sup>66</sup> "The end is the chief thing of all; The end of ends is happiness; Happiness is a kind of working" (205-6). Babbitt began with the concession that "no concern" can be more important to us than our happiness. And, Babbitt continued, "Aristotle's treatment of happiness is especially relevant to our present topic because of the close connection he establishes between it and his scheme of education." A genuinely humanistic, or liberal, education for Aristotle centered on leisure. For Babbitt, this "requires that all partial aims and special disciplines should be subordinated to the specifically human form of effort or 'energy'- the source of true felicity- that is put forth in mediation and finally in the contemplative life or life of vision." Following Aristotle's conception, Babbitt seemingly considered the two self-labeled humanitarian curricular factions as taking away this "energy" from the attempted mediation of our inner-dualism. Energy was expended outwardly instead of inwardly: unchecked self-expression and the training for specific careers focused a student's efforts outside instead of firstly mediating Babbitt's inner-dualism. Babbitt then directed his criticism directly towards Eliot:

With this background in mind one should be able to grasp the nature of the conflict between the wisdom of the ages and the humanitarian 'idealism' of President Eliot. Like the religious and humanistic teachers of the past, President Eliot was very much and rightly preoccupied with the problem

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<sup>66</sup> Babbitt argued that Aristotle was "a thinker who will be found to be more completely experimental than many moderns who profess to found their whole philosophy on experiment" (205). Later Babbitt added that "Aristotle has himself admonished us to give heed to the sayings of the wise men of old only in so far as they are found to coincide with the facts. If, therefore, we attach any weight to Aristotle, it should not be primarily because of his traditional authority, but because Aristotle turns out to be only another name for inspired good sense" (206). In exploring the same notion of Aristotle's conception of work in "Humanism: An Essay of Definition," Babbitt labeled Aristotle "a true humanist" in this regard (41).

of happiness. Like these teachers, again, he held that to be happy one needs to be active and energetic. But in his notion of the kind of activity that tends to happiness he plainly diverged from these teachers widely.  
(206-7)

It seems, then, Babbitt insisted that a student's engagement with the classics provided him/her numerous models of right behavior and examples to be imitated. The "wisdom of the ages" provided this means of more closely attaining an inner-control over the naturally expansive tendencies of students. Babbitt conceived that students who meditated upon and contemplated the classics primarily in their education would be much better equipped in developing character, much better trained in controlling their expansive tendencies. The classics, according to Babbitt, once afforded students models and examples in which to imitate, before the strands of both sentimental and utilitarian humanitarianism began exerting their profound influence upon the world through the respective leadership of Rousseau and Bacon. After this epoch, expansion through both sentimental and utilitarian means began negating the discipline needed in order to follow and develop a genuine humanism.

Thus, Eliot was under the delusion that happiness was to be found outside of the inner life of the individual.<sup>67</sup> "In the address given on the occasion of his ninetieth birthday," Babbitt explained, "he advised his hearers to avoid introspection, to 'look out and not in' (one gathers from the context that he identified introspection with the morbid

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<sup>67</sup> Babbitt related that "According to a French authority, 'happiness is not an easy matter: it is difficult to find it in ourselves and impossible to find it elsewhere.' President Eliot must be numbered among those who hoped to find it 'elsewhere'" (207).

brooding of the introvert)” (207).<sup>68</sup> In what Babbitt called a “highly representative” way of thinking, “The effort that President Eliot recommends [...] is outer effort – effort of the utilitarian type,” and that “The main effort of the Occident was in his day, and still remains in ours, utilitarian” (207). Instead of promoting introspection, meditation, or the mediation of the dualism within the mind of the student, both humanitarian curricular factions focused solely on the outer workings of the student.<sup>69</sup> Babbitt railed against Eliot’s elective system because of its promotion of the student’s passing and transitory inclinations and whims, thereby ignoring any sort of attempt of controlling a student’s natural expansiveness. What this meant for the public schools was that, through the influence of the child-study experts, a student’s natural tendencies and interests were to be unquestionably celebrated and pursued. Any such attempt of putting a check upon this emotional expansiveness was considered a hindrance to a student’s natural growth. The utilitarian branch of humanitarianism made a much clearer attempt at a solely outer working for Babbitt. Through the social efficiency experts, this outer working led directly to working itself: students were to be trained to enter a specific role in society, thus producing an efficiently running society based on the preparation done in the schools.

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<sup>68</sup> Babbitt shared the same anecdote in *On Being Creative and Other Essays*: “In an address on the occasion of his ninetieth birthday President Eliot warned his hearers against introspection, lest it divert them from a whole-hearted devotion to service. Between this attitude and a religious or humanistic attitude there is a clash of first principles. Both humanism and religion require introspection as a prerequisite of the inner life and its appropriate activity. With the disappearance of this activity what is left is the outer activity of the utilitarian, and this leads straight to the one-sided cult of material efficiency and finally to the standardization that is, according to nearly all foreign critics and many of our own, a chief American danger” (228).

<sup>69</sup> Babbitt concluded: “If one is convinced of the essential rightness of President Eliot’s idea of effort, one may continue to believe that we are now moving in America toward some glorious consummation of the kind postulated by the nineteenth-century doctrine of progress. Otherwise one may rather incline to believe that we are ripening for Nemesis; for Nemesis is the penalty visited upon spiritual blindness. Blindness to the need of a form of effort radically different from that of the utilitarian would seem to be rather serious” (207-8).

### **The Problem of Eliot's "Service"**

Babbitt's chief complaint of the outer effort promoted by both strands of humanitarianism, and the resulting disregard of the mediation of the inner dualism, was that nothing guaranteed that the student would use the proficiency of this outer working for humane ends. Eliot, of course, was the chief advocate of such a frame of mind. "The crucial assumption of President Eliot," Babbitt opined,

appears to be that the material efficiency promoted by utilitarian effort will be used altruistically. For the traditional attempt to train for culture and character he sought to substitute, in his own phrase, 'training for service and power.' Power is in itself desirable provided it be employed to some adequate end. The whole issue is whether service in the humanitarian sense can supply this end. Most Americans are convinced that it not only can but does. (208)<sup>70</sup>

Babbitt's primary concern was focused on the fallacy that without training students in "culture and character," students would be both capable and willing to serve humanity altruistically. But for Babbitt, this refusal of attempting to mediate the inner dualism coupled with the complete surrender in education to both strands of humanitarianism foreboded problems. In the sentimental humanitarian's quest for serving mankind and in the utilitarian humanitarian's quest for efficiency and material power, Babbitt looked around his world and argued that "we are altruistic in our feelings about ourselves and imperialistic in our practice" (209). The unchecked expansiveness allowed and

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<sup>70</sup> Babbitt followed by pointing out that "Service has been made the basis of the gospel of Rotary and may therefore be termed our Rotarian convention."

encouraged within both curricular factions provided no guidance or guarantee, according to Babbitt, in serving humane and altruistic ends.

As mentioned previously, Babbitt was perplexed with Eliot's own religious and humanistic education and his subsequent abandonment of those principles as president of Harvard and as a leader of American education at the turn of the century. Babbitt aimed his argument at the new definition of "service," in that it

has changed its meaning in the transition from Christianity to humanitarianism. In general, the representatives of the utilitarian-sentimental movement have tended [...] to dissimulate from others and perhaps from themselves the wideness of the gap between the new dispensation and the old. (209)

Though Babbitt celebrated Eliot's own traditional education, his desire to dismiss such an education for present students took away exposure to the "wisdom of the ages" in order "to encourage an extraordinarily complacent materialism" (209).<sup>71</sup> Babbitt argued that Puritanism at its finest asserted that the inner dualism of the individual did exist and needed to be mediated, but he certainly did not call for a return to Puritanism at large. Babbitt followed the traditional Puritan conception of the individual's inner-duality, but the vehement emphasis of control over expansion made a return to a Puritanical mindset, best represented by the ideas of Jonathan Edwards, was "no doubt highly objectionable" (210). In the ever-present quest for the balance of inner-control and outward expansion, the Puritans egregiously overemphasized the aspect of control. Unquestionably Babbitt

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<sup>71</sup> It is interesting to note Babbitt's echoing of the social meliorists of the time.

felt the “old education” followed suit.<sup>72</sup> But Babbitt also believed that advocates of the “new education” made the same mistake in the other direction:

Unfortunately, President Eliot and the humanitarians have, in their rejection of the [overly controlling Puritan] dogma, laid themselves open to the suspicion of pouring out the baby with the bath. Not merely Puritanism but every doctrine that asserts the dual nature of man must be felt, in its relation to man’s natural self, as more or less repressive. (210)

Eliot’s remedy, of course, for this repression was to implement the elective system at Harvard, thereby advocating a variety of curricular tracks within American schools. Babbitt publicly took issue with Eliot’s elective system over two decades before in his *Literature and the American College*, but in critiquing Eliot’s ideas for American education as a whole, he examined what this meant for the student in American public schools. Babbitt illustrated that theoretically “The effort that he [the student] puts forth along the lines of his temperamental bias will make for his own happiness and finally be

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<sup>72</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2, Babbitt lamented generally the ideas and applications of the neo-classicists as being too rigid, dry, and mechanical. Babbitt thought in the same manner towards the “old education” specifically: “Our educators, in their anxiety not to thwart native aptitudes, encourage the individual in an in-breeding of his own temperament, which, beginning in the kindergarten, is carried upward through the college by the elective system, and receives its final consecration in his specialty. We are all invited to abound in our own sense, and to fall in the direction in which we lean. Have we escaped from the pedantry of authority and prescription, which was the bane of the old education, only to lapse into the pedantry of individualism? One is sometimes tempted to acquiesce in Luther’s comparison of mankind to a drunken peasant on horseback, who, if propped up on one side, slips over on the other” (*Literature and the American College* 121). Babbitt further argued that “To set up pure restraint, as was the tendency of the mediaeval educator, is easy. To set up pure liberty, as our modern radical tends to do, is likewise easy. But to temper liberty with restraint in education requires ‘a sagacious, powerful and combining mind’” (*Literature and the American College* 109). Babbitt quoted this last phrase from Edmund Burke. In *Rousseau and Romanticism*, Babbitt proclaimed that “There is also a formalistic taint in the educational system worked out by the Jesuits – a system in all respects so ingenious and in some respects so admirable. The Greek and especially the Latin classics are taught in such a way as to become literary playthings rather than the basis of a philosophy of life; a humanism is thus encouraged that is external and rhetorical rather than vital, and this humanism is combined with a religion that tends to stress submission to outer authority at the expense of inwardness and individuality. The reproach has been brought against this system that it is equally unfitted to form a pagan hero or a Christian saint. The reply to it was Rousseau’s educational naturalism – his exaltation of the spontaneity and genius of the child” (118-9).

pressed into the service of humanity” (210). In what sounds precisely like the cooperation and reinforcement of the two major curricular factions in his day, Babbitt added his voice to their critique. The question Babbitt posed to Eliot ultimately persisted: “What proof is there, after all, that so purely temperamental a person as President Eliot’s theory tends to produce will be altruistic? The humanitarian is finally forced to fall back on some theory of man’s natural goodness of the kind that is commonly associated with Rousseau” (211). Babbitt quickly discredited this notion of “man’s natural goodness” by asking his readers to observe both young children presently and those generations of the past, in order to see if such a notion could actually be observed (211).<sup>73</sup> He concluded that his reader “may fail to find evidence that a human nature that is neither meditative nor again mediatory, that has in short dispensed with humility and decorum, is likely to prove idyllic” (212). The meditation and mediation of a genuine humanistic education Babbitt set up against Eliot’s education that promoted an unchecked expansion on both sentimental and utilitarian grounds with no guarantee of producing altruism.

### **The Imagination**

Besides questioning the foundation of the service ethic in Eliot’s educational principles, Babbitt also criticized the training of the student’s imagination under the new education. The relationship between the idea that the student would naturally serve altruistic ends and the training of his/her imagination was for Babbitt quite strong. “The unduly idyllic hopes of the humanitarians,” he began, “throw light on the quality of his

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<sup>73</sup> Babbitt makes his closest connection between Eliot, Dewey, and their respective stances as sentimental humanitarians on this point: “For example, Professor John Dewey, who has probably had more influence than any other living American on education, not merely in this country but in the new China, writes that ‘the child is born with a *natural* desire to give out, to do, to *serve*’ (my [Babbitt’s] italics). Let anyone who has growing children observe them closely and decide for himself whether they exude spontaneously this eagerness for service. Let him then supplement this observation by a survey of the working of the theory on the larger scale for several generations past. He may conclude that the amount of instinctive goodness related by the decline of religious and humanistic control has been somewhat exaggerated” (211-2).



imagination – an important point to determine in anyone’s outlook on life. President Eliot was much preoccupied with the whole question” (212). Babbitt believed that Eliot’s conception of the ideal form of imagination in particular founded his ideas on American education in general. Babbitt himself contended the imagination could be trained and manifested in two forms: the idyllic and the ethical. Simply put, the idyllic imagination resulted from the tenets of sentimental humanitarianism, in which the imagination was to thrive without checks or constraint. The ethical imagination, which Babbitt’s genuine humanism desired to achieve, “works concentric with the human law” (*Rousseau and Romanticism* 48). That is, the ethical imagination reflected “the element of oneness in man, the element which is opposed to expansive impulse”; it is “the imagination that has accepted the veto power” (*Rousseau and Romanticism* 49, 369), which the idyllic imagination, supported by Rousseau and the sentimental humanitarians, unequivocally ignored.<sup>74</sup> Both types of imagination aspired toward creativity; the only difference occurred in the notion of an unchecked expansion based on the individual’s whim versus a sense of constraint based upon the “wisdom of the ages.” Babbitt, of course, labeled Eliot’s idea of the imagination as idyllic, which was illustrated clearly in his denial of the inner-duality of the individual and his/her desire for constant expansion

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<sup>74</sup> With his extensive background in literature and languages, Babbitt wrote much about the historical conceptions of the imagination. He specifically targeted the notion of the idyllic imagination put forth by Rousseau and followed by the current sentimental humanitarians in his *Rousseau and Romanticism*, particularly in his chapters “Romantic Imagination” and “The Present Outlook.” He also, consequently, examined his notion of the classical/ethical imagination he believed a genuine humanism could procure: the classical imagination “is not free thus to fly off at a tangent, to wander wild in some empire of chimeras. It has a centre, it is work in the service of reality. With reference to this real centre, it is seeking to disengage what is normal and representative from the welter of the actual. It does not evade the actual, but does select from it and seek to impose upon it something of the proportion and symmetry of the model to which it is looking up and which it is imitating. To say that the classicist (and I am speaking of the classicist at his best) gets at his reality with the aid of the imagination is but another way of saying that he perceives his reality only through a veil of illusion. The creator of this type achieves work in which illusion and reality are inseparably blended, work which gives the ‘illusion of a higher reality’” (*Rousseau and Romanticism* 102). Babbitt expounded on the idea of the classical/ethical imagination and how to achieve its fruition in literature in his *On Being Creative* and in both literature and art in his *The New Laokoon*.

on both sentimental and utilitarian grounds. Babbitt took the liberty of deconstructing further Eliot's notion of the imagination in critiquing his views on education. He explained that Eliot's conception of the imagination was divided into two categories as well: the constructive and the receptive. Babbitt provided Eliot's own specific examples of his ideal use of the imagination within both categories. For the constructive imagination, Eliot used "a modern power plant, where everything is accurate, orderly, and beneficent" (212). As for the receptive imagination, Eliot illustrated a "young woman who spends her time observing 'two robins who have established their home and family in a notch of a maple near her window' and learning from their ways with their young lessons of unselfishness and affection" (213). Of course, both simple examples exemplified the respective schools of thought of scientific and sentimental humanitarianism – the very elements Babbitt believed to be balanced in Eliot's educational ideals. The student was to be trained in school for optimal efficiency complemented and reinforced by a sentimental and altruistic notion of human nature. Of course, this manner of classifying and training the student's imagination represented the two major curricular factions of the time, but it neglected Babbitt's call for a genuine humanistic education. The ultimate question for Babbitt still remained:

What becomes of the beneficence of the control over the forces of nature that has been secured with the aid of the scientific imagination, should it turn out that in the unconverted man [the man not educated humanistically] – the man whose impulses are free to overflow – the will to power overflows even more freely than the will to service?

He, though, immediately answered: “The Great War has enlightened us on this point” (213-4).

Both forms of imagination promoted by Eliot neglected the inner working Babbitt believed to be the foundation of a genuine humanism (and Aristotle’s foundation of happiness). But Babbitt proclaimed that “President Eliot’s whole treatment of the imagination – for example, his assertion that Darwin and Pasteur have by their imaginative activity done as much to satisfy the ‘spiritual needs’ of man as Dante, Goethe, or Shakespeare – is already dated” (213).<sup>75</sup> Babbitt already warned against the notion venerated by Eliot and the humanitarians of the natural goodness possessed by individuals by citing the Great War. In attacking the longing of an endless expansion perpetuated by Eliot and the humanitarians, Babbitt pointed to another contemporary example as a caution. Babbitt specifically criticized Eliot’s “putting of political economy on a level with the traditional humanities” within education” (214). Of course, Babbitt had a much closer view of such a structural change at Harvard and higher education in general, but it is reasonable to believe that Babbitt certainly observed the newly voiced belief of the equality of subjects in the public schools. Babbitt witnessed the promotion of political economy as a symbol of the humanitarian movement in education in general. On one level, Eliot’s beliefs in the equality of subjects within the new education and his support of vocational education constituted a rebellion from the humanist curriculum of the old education. But on another level, Babbitt perceived the advancement of political economy within the curriculum as symbolic of the relationship between American

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<sup>75</sup> Babbitt immediately added that “As the nineteenth century, with its own special atmosphere, recedes still further into the background, the ‘idealism’ that he and other men of his time sought to erect on naturalistic foundations is likely to appear positively fantastic.”

education and society in the 1920s, a relationship he felt was damaged within both realms by efficiency and materialism. Babbitt explained that

Political economy, for its part, will be found in all its forms – orthodox and unorthodox – to have accepted the humanitarian substitutes for the principle of control. [...] The political economist looks askance at any limitation of desires on the part of the individual, envisaged primarily as a consumer, lest such a limitation should lead to a slowing-down of production. (214)

Here, again, was Babbitt's assertion that the sentimental and utilitarian humanitarian curricular factions complement and reinforce one another within the schools and then ultimately within society. Advocates of both curricula ignored any sort of principle of control on the student's natural expansiveness, as the utilitarian expansion promoted by efficiency was founded upon the notion of the natural goodness of the student. Writing in the late 1920s, Babbitt observed that

Production is apparently to expand indefinitely – a programme that has been summed up in the formula: 'Pigs for more pigs for more pigs.' One is reminded of this programme by the articles Henry Ford recently contributed to the *Forum*. One may be sure that he would not have set forth his philosophy of industry so confidently – one is tempted to add so naively – were it not for the presence in the background of really dignified figures like President Eliot who are at one with him on certain underlying postulates. (214-5)

Babbitt ended his essay by reiterating his attack of Eliot first brought forth in 1908 in his *Literature and the American College*; that is, Babbitt once more argued against Eliot's elective system and his support of specialization at Harvard (215-24).<sup>76</sup> But in a more general sense, he concluded that "The discrediting of the principle of control in favor of a sheer expansiveness is in general dubious. In the educational field it is not only dubious, but, so far as it leads to a primary emphasis on innate gifts and their supposed right to expand freely, it is also Utopian" (215). Of course, Babbitt placed Eliot at the head of this philosophical charge and admitted to the enormity of his influence, as "Most of the heads of our institutions of learning, great and small, have been content for a generation and more to follow in the wake of President Eliot" (223). As such, Babbitt readily recognized the challenge he and his genuine humanism faced in staking a claim in the American curriculum. He conceded that "Comparatively few Americans are likely to share the doubts I have been expressing about the humanitarian revolution in the theory and practice of education. The idea of service proclaimed by President Eliot and put at the basis of our Rotarian convention has not as yet been seriously shaken" (218).<sup>77</sup> Yet,

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<sup>76</sup> Babbitt used the same arguments found in his 1908 publication, which seemingly implies that he felt Harvard and higher education in general were still headed in the wrong philosophical directions. Babbitt, though, did supply two additional items of note: first, he surmised that "If the average student today is more interested in football than in things of the mind, one reason may be that football, unlike the college as it has become under the new education, has a definite goal and is frankly competitive with reference to it" (216). Secondly, he argued that "The new education requires an enormously elaborate and expensive apparatus. This elaborateness is encouraged by the prime emphasis of the utilitarian on the progress of humanity through the co-operation of a multitude of specialists, as well as by the prime emphasis of the sentimentalist on innate gifts and their right to gratification. The small college that accepts the department-store conception of education, is at once put at a hopeless disadvantage. The humanistic college, on the other hand, [...] may hope to flourish with a much more modest equipment" (222). Much more study can and should be done on these principles of Babbitt's, especially regarding the state of today's higher education.

<sup>77</sup> Babbitt, however, immediately followed: "Nevertheless there are signs that the utilitarian-sentimental movement has passed its crest even in America. An increasing number of persons are feeling disquiet at the supping of the sense of moral responsibility by the sentimentalists. Others still more numerous are beginning to see that the utilitarian idea of effort is one-sided and that, as a result of this one-sidedness, modern life is in danger of degenerating into a wild rush one knows not whither." Note well again in this

Babbitt ended by sounding his warning that a curriculum in American schools must “insist on the specifically human elements in man that have been eliminated by the naturalists” (219). Babbitt certainly considered Eliot as the leader of the gradual rejection of the humanist curriculum:

At the bottom of the whole educational debate, as I have been trying to show, is the opposition between a religious-humanistic and a utilitarian-sentimental philosophy. This opposition, involving as it does first principles, is not subject to compromise or mediation. Those who attempt such mediation are not humanists but Laodiceans. Many persons who deem themselves moderate are in fact only muddled. (223)

Babbitt pointed to Eliot as the leader of those who oppose a genuine humanism, but in targeting those who seek a compromise between the two philosophies, between these dualities, we can begin to turn our attention to Babbitt’s attacks on the next great American educational leader, John Dewey.

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passage Babbitt’s pulse on the social meliorists and their arguments of the time. In fact, in this respect, Babbitt seems to fit into this category rather well.

## Chapter 5: Babbitt and Dewey

“I have just received a letter from Bruce. He approves apparently of *Rousseau and Romanticism*. He believes, however, that the devil has at present a strangle grip upon this country, especially in the form of Deweyism, and so does not look, I gather, for much practical effect from my admonitions.”

--Babbitt, letter to Paul Elmer More, July 10, 1919

Babbitt wrote and published a significant amount of material assailing the educational ideals of Eliot while both were at Harvard and after Eliot's retirement and death. Quite obviously, Babbitt recognized the enormous influence Eliot maintained for decades upon American education on all levels. As Eliot passed the proverbial torch to John Dewey as figurehead of American education in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Babbitt did not neglect to comment upon Dewey's ideals and influence as well. In fact, in his 1929 essay concerning Eliot, Babbitt conceded that Dewey “has probably had more influence than any other living American on education, not merely in this country but in the new China” (211). Whereas, though, Babbitt devoted a significant amount of writing deriding Eliot's educational ideas, he targeted Dewey rather sparsely. Babbitt mentioned Dewey six times, all briefly, in his major works; indeed, Babbitt ignored Dewey altogether in his earliest book and his only book devoted solely to education, *Literature and the American College: Essays in Defense of the Humanities*. This 1908 work attacked Eliot's ideas throughout, which is not surprising considering Eliot's grand status in American education at the time and Babbitt's direct contact with him at Harvard. It

was not until 1919, in Babbitt's third book *Rousseau and Romanticism*, that Babbitt first mentioned Dewey in print.

Babbitt's *Rousseau and Romanticism*, arguably his most famous work,<sup>78</sup> was his definitive attack of Rousseau and the sentimental humanitarianism he believed Rousseau set loose upon the world. Babbitt pointed to Rousseau not as the first sentimental humanitarian in history, but as the founder of its significant influence upon culture beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Babbitt delineated the history of emotional and sentimental expansionism brought forth by Rousseau and the consequent influence his ideas had upon philosophy, religion, literature, art, philosophy, and education. Interestingly, Babbitt mentioned Dewey at the very beginning of his book and at the very end; furthermore, his two references also exemplified the two strands of his critique of Dewey's educational ideas. Both Dewey's conception of experience and his belief in the natural altruism of individuals (like Eliot's) drew forth Babbitt's ire and brought forth his warnings.

### **To Be Modern**

In his Introduction, Babbitt defended his reasoning for writing such a book: the leaders of the modern movement, Babbitt felt, were not modern enough in their thinking, including those in education. As was usual for Babbitt, he began with attempting to define properly the term "modern." For him, to be truly modern did not simply mean accepting the most recent ideas and innovations; instead, "the modern spirit is the positive and critical spirit, the spirit that refuses to take things on authority" (xi). Under this definition, Babbitt surmised that "the true difficulty with our young radicals is not that they are too modern but that they are not modern enough" (xi). Of course, science

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<sup>78</sup> This sentiment is put forth by Claes G. Ryn in his introduction to *Character and Culture: Essays on East and West* (xix). Anecdotally, most, if not all, people with whom I talk about my dissertation and who know of Babbitt know of him through this work.



continued to lead the way at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in promoting both a critical spirit and in not simply accepting traditional notions. What Babbitt desired was that the true modern should be a “person who is seeking to be critical according to both the human and the natural law” (*Democracy and Leadership* 145). His humanist curriculum was surpassed in prominence by those curricula which could cite scientific methods as their guiding principles. Babbitt simply desired using the same methods in defending his humanism, and he certainly took this view strongly. In a February 13, 1916, letter to Paul Elmer More, Babbitt pleaded to

Insist that the scientist put the ‘law for thing’ on a purely positive and critical basis (for example do not allow him atoms except as a more or less useful ‘fiction’): and then emulate him in regard to the ‘law for man.’ One should plant himself first of all here on the naked *fact* of a power of control in human nature and then bring in if he wishes all the experience of the past as collateral testimony.<sup>79</sup>

Although Dewey was sixty years old at the time of Babbitt’s book, it is safe to presume that Babbitt placed Dewey within this category of modernism as well, while Babbitt himself proclaimed to be striving “to be thoroughly modern” in the aforementioned sense (xi). He explained:

I hold that one should not only welcome the efforts of the man of science at his best to put the natural law on a positive and critical basis, but that one should strive to emulate him in one’s dealings with the human law; and so become a complete positivist. My main objection to the movement I am studying is that it has failed to produce complete positivists. Instead

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<sup>79</sup> Babbitt-More Correspondence, May 1914-April 1921, pp. 168-307 [typescript]. P. 208, 13 Feb. 1916.

of facing honestly the emergency created by its break with the past the leaders of this movement have inclined to deny the duality of human nature, and then sought to dissimulate this mutilation of man under a mass of intellectual and emotional sophistry. (xi)

Babbitt's solution echoed one of the foundations of his thought both concerning education and religion: "The proper procedure in refuting those incomplete positivists is not to appeal to some dogma or outer authority but rather to turn against them their own principles" (xi). In Babbitt's works detailing his educational ideals, he never once argued for an education involving any sort of religious or parochial aspects. As for his own religious preference, his stance was murky at best.<sup>80</sup> It is therefore erroneous to believe that Babbitt longed for any sort of education based on religious dogma or authority; after all, he strove to "out modern" the modernists by being critical and experimental in delineating his idea of "the civil war in the cave" and basing his insights upon the facts. As such, Babbitt immediately focused his argument on the ideas of experiment and experience held by those of the modern movement. He pointed to the general notion held by the modernists that "everything is experimental in man" and interpreted it as meaning that "everything in man is a matter of experience" (xi, xii). Babbitt concurred with this idea, but he believed that the "incomplete positivists" refused to "plant [themselves] firmly on the facts of experience" (xii). Thus Babbitt argued that the "man who plants

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<sup>80</sup> The easiest religious label to place upon Babbitt is as a Buddhist, as many of his works promote the ideas of the Buddha and his last major work was the translation of the Buddhist treatise *The Dhammapada*. In fact, Babbitt was rather disparaging of Protestantism in many of his works, arguing, like education, religion too was susceptible to humanitarian influences. For example, in his 1930 essay "What I Believe: Rousseau and Religion," Babbitt argued that "Rousseauism not only dominates our education but has been eating into the very vitals of the Protestant religion. Practically, this means that Protestantism is ceasing to be a religion of the inner life and is becoming more and more a religion of 'uplift'" (245). Paul Elmer More, in his essay in *Irving Babbitt: Man and Teacher*, reminisced that "I can remember him in the early days stopping before a church in North Avenue, and, with a gesture of bitter contempt, exclaiming: 'There is the enemy! there is the thing I hate!'" (332).

himself, not on outer authority but on experience, is an individualist” and the “establishment of a sound type of individualism is indeed the specifically modern problem” (xii).

Clearly, then, Babbitt sustained his belief in the humanist curriculum by refusing to invoke any sort of “dogma or outer authority.” At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Babbitt sought to avoid defending the humanist curriculum on purely traditional grounds; instead, he decided to justify his position on the same experimental grounds as the modernists in education, including, especially, Dewey. In this period of great upheaval in American society and culture, any sort of appeal to tradition or dogma was beginning to fall on deaf ears. Sensing this shift, Babbitt’s humanism was unique in its own defense on modern grounds. He obviously witnessed the gradual demise of the humanist curriculum within the schools and asserted that it could no longer be saved by relying on the same traditional justification. Thus, he presented his desire to “out modern” the modernists in his distinctive defense of the humanist curriculum.

### **The Abiding versus the Flux**

“It is right here,” Babbitt continued,

that the failure of the incomplete positivist, the man who is positive only according to the natural law, is most conspicuous. What prevails in the region of the natural law is endless change and relativity; therefore the naturalistic positivist attacks all the traditional creeds and dogmas for the very reason that they aspire to fixity. Now all the ethical values of civilization have been associated with these fixed beliefs; and so it has

come to pass that with their undermining by naturalism the ethical values themselves are in danger of being swept away in the everlasting flux. (xii)

This surrender to the “everlasting flux” Babbitt railed against in his defense of a humanistic curriculum. Even with the faults Babbitt decried within the humanist curriculum (i.e. too dry and mechanical), the set of knowledge and ethical principles conveyed by it Babbitt found to be vital. The “new education” did away with any notion of a fixed set of knowledge to be presented to all students; instead, the new and various curricula adamantly promoted and celebrated the notion of constant change both with society and within the individual student. This, then, was Babbitt’s major qualm with Dewey. Babbitt believed that Dewey (and alike thinkers) “refuses to recognize any such element of oneness” (xii) found in life and consequently in education. “His own private and personal self,” Babbitt continued, “is to be the measure of all things and this measure itself, he adds, is constantly changing. But to stop at this stage is to be satisfied with the most dangerous of half-truths” (xii). As detailed in Chapter 2, Babbitt’s genuine humanism was founded on the belief that a set of permanent knowledge (i.e. “the wisdom of the ages”) existed and therefore needed to be taught within the curriculum. Dewey and other modern educational theorists, on the other hand, claimed that an “everlasting flux” managed the whole of life and based their belief scientifically on “observation and experience.” But Babbitt countered that “The constant element in life is, no less than the element of novelty and change, a matter of observation and experience. As the French have it, the more life changes the more it is the same thing” (xii).

Babbitt specifically labeled Dewey as an incomplete positivist in this matter:

Those who put exclusive emphasis on the element of change in things are in no less obvious danger of falling away from the positive and critical attitude into a metaphysic of the Many. This, for example, is the error one finds in the contemporary thinkers who seem to have the cry, thinkers like James and Bergson and Dewey and Croce.<sup>81</sup> They are very far from satisfying the requirements of a complete positivism; they are seeking rather to build up their own intoxication with the element of change into a complete view of life, and so are turning their backs on one whole side of experience in a way that often reminds one of the ancient Greek sophists.

(xiii)

Babbitt's remedy remained consistent and certainly reflected the curricular battles of the time: a proper mediation had to be achieved between the overly rigid humanist curriculum and the overly humanitarian and expansive new curricula. He surmised that "If, then, one is to be a sound individualist, an individualist with human standards – and in an age like this that has cut loose from its traditional moorings, the very survival of civilization would seem to hinge on its power to produce such a type of individualist – one must grapple with what Plato terms the problem of the One and the Many" (xiii). Plato defined the One as those permanent elements in life that remained constant, while the Many represented the infinite variety of everyday life. For Babbitt, those advocates of the humanist curriculum who detrimentally focused solely on the One "fall away from a positive and critical" attitude in choosing what was taught; in other words, humanist leaders relied too heavily upon tradition and dogma (i.e. the mind as a muscle) in

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<sup>81</sup> William James (1842-1910) is considered one of the most ardent supporters of philosophical pragmatism. Henri Bergson (1859-1941), a French born philosopher, banded with James in advocating pragmatism. Benedetto Croce (1866-1952) was an Italian philosopher.

choosing the curriculum and its methodology. But as has been discussed, Babbitt also denounced Dewey and the naturalists' complete devotion to the Many and its "everlasting flux." Babbitt argued that "Life does not give here an element of oneness and there an element of change. It gives a *oneness that is always changing*. The oneness and the change are inseparable" (xiii). In terms of Babbitt's argument with Dewey and the naturalists' primary focus on change, he chiefly focused his ire on the conception of experience within Dewey's educational ideas.

### **The "Experience" of Dewey and Babbitt**

Babbitt pointed out that

experience is of many degrees: first of all one's purely personal experience, and infinitesimal fragment; and then the experience of one's immediate circle, of one's time and country, of the near past and so on in widening circles. The past which as dogma the ethical positivist rejects, as experience he not only admits but welcomes. He can no more dispense with it indeed than the naturalistic positivist can dispense with his laboratory. (xviii)

For Babbitt, Dewey's emphasis on the present experience of the student and the complementary curriculum which provided experiences, simply did not go far enough. Elsewhere he pleaded that individuals, such as those advocating for certain educational principles, "will find it necessary to give a much wider meaning to the word experiment than has of late been usual: it should be extended to cover not merely the kind of experimenting that goes on in a laboratory, but also the experimenting with various philosophies of life that has gone on in the remote as well as in the near past"

(*Democracy and Leadership* 145). Like Dewey, Babbitt did not rely upon dogma or authority in choosing the subjects of the curriculum. He conceded, instead, to be, along with Dewey, positive, critical, and a keen observer of the world. Under these precepts, Babbitt came to the conclusion that the “wisdom of the ages” certainly existed and needed its central place in the American curriculum. Dewey, on the other hand, was incomplete in his thinking: he saw quite clearly the “everlasting flux” of our “purely personal experience,” yet he did not follow through on his critical observations to acknowledge the element of life that remains constant, what Babbitt termed “the wisdom of the ages.” Babbitt came to his conclusion on the same grounds promoted by Dewey, through observation and the rejection of dogma, authority, and tradition, but Dewey did not take his own methods full circle. If it did occur, according to Babbitt, Dewey would have perceived a form of knowledge that has withstood the test of time – not based upon dogma or authority, but because it has been part of our collective experience through the ages.

Babbitt continued by once again citing his favorite humanist, Aristotle. Babbitt followed Aristotle’s maxim that truth “is judged from facts and actual life” (xxi). Therefore, Babbitt wanted Dewey and other modernists to adhere to the same standard. Aristotle did not rely on dogma or authority in making his observations and founding his ideas, exactly the same method denoted by Babbitt of the modernist movement. But because Aristotle’s ideas were a central tenet of classical education, his methods were consequently ignored in the process of rejecting dogma and authority. Babbitt pointed to this irony:

It was no doubt natural enough that the champions of the modern spirit should have rejected Aristotle along with the traditional order of which he had been made a support. Yet if they had been more modern they might have seen in him rather a chief precursor. They might have learned from him how to have standards and at the same time not be immured in dogma. As it is, those who call themselves modern have come to adopt a purely exploratory attitude towards life. 'On desperate seas long wont to roam,' they have lost more and more the sense of what is normal and central in human experience. But to get away from what is normal and central is to get away from wisdom. (xxii)

Babbitt desired a curriculum based upon "facts and actual life," a curriculum which conveyed the "wisdom of the ages" based not upon tradition but upon observation. He simply wanted his modernist adversaries to do the same. He confronted them by stating his argument

will be to those for whom the symbols through which the past has received its wisdom have become incredible, and who, seeing at the same time that the break with the past that took place in the eighteenth century was on unsound lines, hold that the remedy for the partial positivism that is the source of this unsoundness, is a more complete positivism. Nothing is more perilous than to be only half critical. This is to risk being the wrong type of individualist – the individualist who has repudiated outer control without achieving inner control. (xxii-xxiii)



In defending his humanist curriculum on modern principles, Babbitt cannot be charged with holding on to the past through dogma or tradition; he simply wanted his opponents to follow too their own principles. “The whole modern experiment,” Babbitt concluded, is threatened with breakdown because it has not been sufficiently modern. One should therefore not rest content until one has, with the aid of the secular experience of both the East and the West, worked out a point of view so modern that, compared with it, that of our smart young radicals will seem antediluvian. (xxiii)

### **Experience in the Curriculum**

What Babbitt demanded from Dewey and like-minded thinkers was the full adherence to their positivistic principles. Of course, both Dewey’s publications and the subsequent historical and philosophical study of them are voluminous. James Campbell, in his 1995 *Understanding John Dewey: Nature and Cooperative Intelligence*, breaks down Dewey’s thought into seven general categories. He then uses the whole of Dewey’s works in explaining Dewey’s philosophical stances; one such category Campbell creates is “Experience, Nature, and the Role of Philosophy.” He begins by asserting “The role that Dewey thus sets for philosophy is to participate in the construction of a new society by turning from issues of merely historical import to focus upon contemporary problems” (67). Of course Babbitt found this reasoning a nefarious surrender to the everlasting flux of the present, without adhering to the “wisdom of the ages.” Beyond this, though, was Dewey’s insistence that experience was ““a matter of *simultaneous* doings and sufferings,”” what Campbell describes as the “cumulative process of interactions between a living organism and its environment, a process that

finds the organism undergoing change and striving for control” (70, 71). This notion of Dewey’s reflected his belief that a student should go through continual processes and changes; experience only “worked” when a student actively engaged with his/her environment. For Campbell, Dewey’s “continued emphasis is on the need to return from the calm distillation of reflective experience to the rushing fullness of primary experience” (74). As mentioned previously, Babbitt was no advocate of the rigid and formalistic structures within humanist education, but Babbitt certainly advocated a reflective and meditative study of the past to guide a student’s actions in the present. Dewey stated “The world as we experience it is a real world. But it is not in its primary phases a world that is known, a world that is understood, and is intellectually coherent and secure.” Campbell concludes that “Such a world is a goal, not a given” (75).<sup>82</sup> This founding philosophical belief of Dewey’s vehemently ignored Babbitt’s founding belief in the “wisdom of the ages,” the rejection of which Babbitt could not reconcile.

Babbitt simply asked to use the collective experience of the past in concordance with an individual’s infinite personal experiences, what the child constantly experienced with his/her environment. As Dewey concerned himself with providing a variety of experiences for students, Babbitt wondered why the next logical step was not taken: why could students not be exposed vicariously to the experiences of the ages through the humanist curriculum? Through simple observation and adherence to the facts, Babbitt believed both that a “wisdom of the ages” existed and that this collective experience could be passed on to students through the humanist curriculum. Dewey believed

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<sup>82</sup> The first direct quotation is cited from Dewey’s 1917 essay “The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy.” The second is from his 1929 *The Quest for Certainty*, a book containing a collection of his lectures. Incidentally, Gordon Keith Chalmers, one of Babbitt’s students, wrote in *Irving Babbitt: Man and Teacher* that “Mr. Dewey’s diffuse and tumid style annoyed Babbitt: ‘My idea of castigation of the flesh,’ he said, ‘is to go for a vacation in the country with a volume of John Dewey’s’” (289).

students needed to go through active experiences in order to promote change and growth within them, but Babbitt questioned why the experience found in the classics could not be used vicariously as well. Instead, Dewey's program fell in line with the adoration of the "everlasting flux" Babbitt believed defined the naturalists. In his only other direct reference to Dewey in *Rousseau and Romanticism*, Babbitt wrote in his last chapter, entitled "The Present Outlook," that

The notion that in spite of the enormous mass of experience that has been accumulated in both East and West we are still without light as to the habits that make for moderation and good sense and decency, and that education is therefore still purely a matter of exploration and experiment is one that may be left to those who are suffering from an advanced stage of naturalistic intoxication – for example, to Professor John Dewey and his followers. From an ethical point of view a child has the right to be born into a cosmos, and not, as is coming to be more and more the case under such influences, pitchforked into chaos. (388)

Babbitt adamantly believed that such a cosmos had already been created through the collective experience of the past, and it was integral to use this experience in leading new students out of the chaos of the "everlasting flux."

Babbitt subsequently referred to Dewey and his conception of experience in a 1932 address that was later published as "The Problem of Style in a Democracy," a year before his death. While serving his position at Harvard in the Romance languages department, Babbitt used this speech to critique the current state of literature and poetry in America, arguing that their quality was gradually being hampered by overly

sentimental and utilitarian influences. Of course, he ultimately traced these humanitarian influences to education. Maintaining his philosophical consistency in defining and deprecating the Baconians and Rousseauists in this address, Babbitt proclaimed that

The utilitarians and sentimentalists have prevailed especially in the field of education, above all in this country. Let us reflect on what this means in the case of the most renowned of living American philosophers, Professor John Dewey, whose influence is all-pervasive in our education and extends even to China and Bolshevist Russia. Professor Dewey does not hesitate to identify experience with scientific experiment. It follows that immense areas of what the past had taken to be genuine experience, either religious or humanistic, experience that has been transmitted to us in consecrated masterpieces, must, inasmuch as it is not subject to test in a laboratory, be dismissed as mere moonshine. (178-9)<sup>83</sup>

Using Dewey and other scientifically inclined educational experts as guides, Babbitt examined the “wisdom of the ages” in a like scientific manner. What set of experiments and array of experiences were more critically and positively tested than those ideas and texts conveyed in a humanistic curriculum? Babbitt thought this to be self-evident; yet, Dewey’s ideas for the curriculum called for primary emphasis on current social experiences, what Babbitt considered adherence to the “everlasting flux.” Babbitt certainly acknowledged the opposition against using classical texts within the humanist curriculum as being both elitist and irrelevant for the current time and atmosphere. He answered the charges by arguing that “Experience after all has other

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<sup>83</sup> Babbitt immediately added: “A utilitarian philosophy like that of Professor Dewey will be found to lead as a rule to the enthronement of the specialist,” a trend Babbitt railed against throughout his works.

uses than to supply furnishings for the tower of ivory; it should control the judgment and guide the will; it is in short the necessary basis of conduct” (*Rousseau and Romanticism* 236-7). He envisioned students reading and subsequently following the experiences of models from the past, those models which contained the “wisdom of the ages.” Once this knowledge was gained through vicarious experience, ideally students would then conduct their lives accordingly. As seen in Chapter 2, Babbitt was often appalled at the purely analytic and rigid tenets of the humanist curriculum many of its supporters espoused. In considering the role of experience within the curriculum, he remained consistent: “The basis for right conduct is not reasoning but experience, and experience much wider than that of the individual, the secure possession of which can result only from the early acquisition of right habits” (*Democracy and Leadership* 106).

### **Experience and Imagination**

Additionally, Babbitt called for the marriage between experience and imagination, the combination of which he found sorely lacking in both the humanist curriculum and the newer humanitarian curricula of the time. Invoking one of his favorite humanists, Edmund Burke, Babbitt explained how Burke saw

much of the wisdom of life consists in an imaginative assumption of the experience of the past in such fashion as to bring it to bear as a living force upon the present. The very model that one looks up to and imitates is an imaginative creation. A man’s imagination may realize in his ancestors a standard of virtue and wisdom beyond the vulgar practice of the hour; so that he may be enabled to rise with the example to whose imitation he has aspired. (*Democracy and Leadership* 103-4)

Instead of providing students only experiences that mirrored the current time, Babbitt asked for experiences provided from the past for students to experience vicariously and subsequently imitate. Lest the curriculum become too receptive and mechanical, though, Babbitt demanded students use these examples and experiences imaginatively in tying them to the present. In other words, the heroic deeds and actions of a figure such as Perseus or Theseus could receptively be read by students, but the task of imitating such a model could only be accomplished creatively and imaginatively by students in entering the “everlasting flux” of their current world and time.<sup>84</sup>

Ultimately Babbitt desired for this experience of the ages to be promoted within the American curriculum. He remarked that “a general nature, a core of normal human experience, is affirmed by all classicists” (*Rousseau and Romanticism* 17). Babbitt certainly considered himself a classicist in terms of his belief in and adherence to “a core of normal experience” without the rigidity and dryness associated with this particular curriculum. The principle matter was for students to use this collective experience vicariously. On a general level, Babbitt argued that “Wisdom is finally a matter of insight; but the individual needs to assimilate the best of the teaching of the past lest what he takes to be his insight may turn out to be only conceit or vain imagining” (*On Being Creative* xxxvii). In other words, Babbitt believed a student’s personal insight was certainly worth nurturing and developing, like many advocates of the “new education.” He additionally demanded, though, that such insight be tempered with the experience of the past. The sole adherence to either extreme Babbitt found undesirable and a violation of one of the central tenets of humanism. On a more specific level, he claimed that

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<sup>84</sup> After reading certain selections from Aesop’s *Fables*, I have used this idea by then asking my students to write their own stories from their past based upon the events of the original fables.

“Greater havoc has been wrought here than in Europe by the new education, an education that has been concerned with anything rather than with the transmission of ‘the best that has been thought and said in the world.’ As a rule it is only by the assimilation of this ‘best’ that one may hope to hold up critical standards” (*On Being Creative* 1).<sup>85</sup> The crucial term in Babbitt’s commentary was “assimilation.” The experience of the past was to be tied together with the present experience of students; they were not to be mutually exclusive. Trusting the wisdom and experience of the ages, students could assimilate their own experiences from their particular age. In using experience within the American curriculum, Babbitt simply asked for Dewey and his supporters to practice fully what they preached: using experience from the past that both stood firm on critical and positive grounds.

Babbitt directly cited only one of Dewey’s works in his writings: the quotation from Dewey’s 1909 *Moral Principles in Education*, concerning a child’s natural desire to serve humanity. Babbitt’s final mention of Dewey occurred in his essay “The Problem of Style in a Democracy,” originally an address given on November 10, 1932, less than a year before his death. Though there is no sure way to know what other works of Dewey’s Babbitt read, it is plausible to believe he was aware of Dewey’s *The School and Society* (1899), *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902), and *Democracy and Education* (1916). Babbitt was primarily concerned with Dewey’s definition and use of experience in the classroom, but it was not until five years after Babbitt’s death that Dewey published *Experience and Education* (1938). Even though Dewey was not prominently

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<sup>85</sup> *On Being Creative and Other Essays* was Babbitt’s work on the current state of literary criticism in America. His idea that the critical standards used to judge literary works were weakening was developed through the book. Ultimately, though, he placed much of the blame on the deficiently humanistic education provided to critics (and readers). This seems to be another instance in which his ideas of critical standards in literary criticism can easily be applied to the field of education.

mentioned in Babbitt's works (as compared with Eliot), Babbitt evidently included Dewey in his public addresses. Dewey was part of Babbitt's aforementioned 1932 speech, and in Babbitt's papers at Harvard, "The Amherst Student," the student newspaper of Amherst College, featured an article in its March 10, 1930, edition, concerning a speech given by at the college by Babbitt on "Humanism and Education." A detailed paraphrase of his speech was provided, including a summary of Babbitt's criticisms of Dewey. The (unnamed) reporter asserted Babbitt believed that there was a

will of transcendent nature[,] the existence of which Dewey denies.

According to Professor Babbitt, Dewey has mingled nature and human nature where there should be opposition, discrediting the continuity that apparently does exist. Humanistic and naturalistic experience are summed up in the terms one uses, which brings up the point that proper definition should not be abstract but inductive.<sup>86</sup>

Seemingly this particular speech of Babbitt's echoed the thoughts concerning Dewey found in his published works. Again Babbitt attacked Dewey's denial of the transcendental nature of experience. Earlier in the article, the writer noted that Dewey was the "eminent exponent of pragmatism, who expresses the desire for a philosophy of experience." The writer acknowledged that Babbitt agreed with this sentiment but argued Dewey needed to go further in his method. Babbitt did not deny that individuals experienced phenomena within the flux of everyday life (i.e. naturalistic experience), but this did not mean that this was the only experience that existed or was worth investigating. Babbitt, again, demanded for a distinction between nature (the flux) and

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<sup>86</sup> This copy is found in Box 19 of Babbitt's Archives ("Newsclippings, 1922- 1930 and undated").



human nature (the permanent). Both forms of experience were a part of a humanistic education.

### **Babbitt's Analysis of Dewey: Outside Perspectives**

While Babbitt's interaction with Eliot both professionally and intellectually has been well examined, the commentary upon his critiques of Dewey is a bit more sparse and puzzling. Modern critics seem to ignore Babbitt's argument concerning Dewey's use of experience almost completely, while one contemporary (and supporter) of Babbitt's illuminated this conflict of ideas even further. Louis J.A. Mercier, a colleague of Babbitt's at Harvard, published *The Challenge of Humanism: An Essay in Comparative Criticism* in 1933, the year of Babbitt's death. Published by Oxford University Press, Mercier attempted to recapitulate the central tenets of the New Humanism. Mercier's 1933 work was another contribution to the high-water mark of the popularity of the New Humanism in the early 1930s. Mercier studied and adhered to the principles of the New Humanism as a scholar early in his career in France; in writing this definitive book, Mercier worked directly with both Babbitt and Paul Elmer More (v). Included were two chapters specifically devoted to Babbitt and his particular principles, along with other chapters concerning specifically the nature of the dualism promoted by the New Humanists.

In addition to explicating Babbitt's main humanist ideals, Mercier devoted ample coverage to Babbitt's arguments with Dewey's beliefs concerning the use of experience in the curriculum. Mercier displayed no hesitation in attacking Dewey's ideas as well. In the midst of quoting and articulating Dewey's position that using experience and knowledge from the past have "been made impossible for the cultivated mind of the

Western world,” Mercier remarked “It is no doubt the imperturbable gravity of Dr. Dewey’s style which saves him from the accusation of arrogance so often leveled at his caustic opponent Irving Babbitt” (56). Mercier went on to quote Dewey frequently on his ideas of experience and change, inserting his own rebuttals throughout. Of course, Mercier’s views echoed Babbitt’s seamlessly. For example, Mercier lamented that

Dr. Dewey is ready to see all these ideas on which our civilization is based swept away in the name of what he calls a philosophy of experience. We must have ‘the faith in the possibility of producing the kind of experience in which science and the arts are brought unitedly to bear upon industry, politics, religion, domestic life, and human relations in general.’ For ‘the outstanding fact in all branches of natural science is that to exist is to be in a process of change,’ and ‘social and moral existences are like physical existences, in a state of continuous if obscure change.’” (57)

In attacking Dewey’s devotion to the “everlasting flux,” Mercier painted Dewey with the same brush as did Babbitt. Initially taking on the persona of Dewey’s belief, Mercier mockingly asserted that

knowledge is made up of ideas understood to be merely experiments in adjustment, in adjustment to the here and now, to the ever new specific situation which no human being before us has known and for which consequently he can give us no counsel. With John Dewey, naturalism reaches its most genial, confident, and impressive formulation. (58)

Here again, we are presented Babbitt’s assertion of the “wisdom of the ages” and the use of this experience within the curriculum. The rejection of such wisdom Babbitt certainly

witnessed in the naturalistic and humanitarian curricular strands infiltrating American schools, led, in part, by Dewey.

Mercier continued by explaining how Babbitt fought upon the same methodological ground as Dewey and the naturalists. In short, as Babbitt

wishes to be truly positivistic, truly ‘experiential’ as he calls it, he naturally searched through the records of the race for the confirmation of his own findings. For what possibility is there of determining the constants of human nature by a mere consultation of our own experience or of such experiments as we can devise? (110)

The answer for Babbitt, of course, was to use vicariously the “wisdom of the ages,” neglecting as insufficient our relatively minute personal experience as a guide.<sup>87</sup>

Ultimately Mercier argued that the philosophical divide between Babbitt and Dewey centered on the idea of the “wisdom of the ages” and its potential use in the curriculum.

“Is there or not,” Mercier asked,

a realm of law outside of man which he must discover if he would bring order into his personal and social life? This is why there is an irreducible opposition between John Dewey and Irving Babbitt. John Dewey repudiates ‘the antecedently real.’ As an integral evolutionist [...] he believes only in the emergent. As a pragmatist, he would, at most, bend the many to the advantage of the time and place. As an experimentalist,

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<sup>87</sup> Mercier went on to immediately quote Morris R. Cohen (1880-1947), an American philosopher. Cohen proclaimed: “Experience in the personal and ordinary sense is but an infinitesimal portion of what is going on in the world of time and space, and even a small part of the world of ordinary human affairs.” Mercier went on to argue that “It was the conviction of what Cohen further calls ‘the absurdity of identifying the whole realm of nature with our little human experience’ that early led Irving Babbitt to confront the experience of the East with that of the West in an effort to reach as much time and space as possible” (110-1).

he puts his trust in what Morris R. Cohen denounces as ‘the absurdity of identifying the whole realm of nature with our little human experience.’”

(257)

In the end of his book, Mercier conveniently summarized this divergence:

The naturalist is perpetually prone to reject the past findings of the race as outmoded moments of an onward evolution. The humanist treasures all traditions as data which can help to discover the constants of human nature. The naturalist remains lost in the welter of the changing many.

The humanist seeks to rise to the understanding of the abiding one. (259)

Herein stood Babbitt’s argument with the most prominent figure in American education in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Babbitt certainly appreciated Dewey’s belief in the use of experience within the curriculum, but he lamented Dewey’s unwillingness to take this belief to its ultimate end.

Mercier throughout his work also examined Dewey and the naturalists’ rejection of any notion of the wisdom of the past, a wisdom that stands above the “everlasting flux,” and what this meant for religion. Babbitt wrote relatively sparingly on religion (in terms of the emerging humanitarian influence upon Christianity particularly), and he never considered Dewey’s ideas of or influence upon religion at all. And yet, commentary upon this area seems to make up the most prominent modern criticism of Babbitt’s qualms with Dewey. In particular, conservative theorist Russell Kirk (1918-1994), the most prominent modern scholar to study Babbitt, wrote introductions to two of Babbitt’s books in which he devoted much attention on Dewey’s religious inclinations. In his 1979 introduction to *Democracy and Leadership*, Kirk mentioned briefly that

“Much of Babbitt’s life was spent in controversy – including public debates- with the disciples of Rousseau, Marx, and Dewey, whom he cudgelled in his writings” (12). But Kirk’s main focus concerning Babbitt and Dewey was the religious angle. He pointed out that

Dewey and his associates, in 1933, alarmed at the growing interest in the American Humanists, made a disingenuous attempt to capture the word ‘humanism’ by issuing what they called ‘The Religious Humanist Manifesto.’ Now Dewey’s friends, with few exceptions, were not religious men; and when once Dewey himself was asked why he employed in his writings certain religious overtones quite inconsonant with his naturalistic system, he replied that to cut away at once the last vestiges of religious sentiment might wound some people unnecessarily; they must be accustomed more gradually to the divorce. The ‘humanism’ which the Deweyites endeavored to promulgate has survived as a militant secularism; the word ‘religious’ has gone by the board. But Dewey’s humanism has little or no connection with the ancient continuity of thought and education which Babbitt, More, and their colleagues expounded.” (14-5)

Kirk’s lengthy 1986 Introduction to *Literature and the American College* followed a similar line: “Far more clearly than his pedagogical adversary John Dewey, Irving Babbitt foresaw the difficulties of the dawning era” (3). Later Kirk again discussed Dewey’s Humanist Manifesto and the tenets Dewey and his followers espoused: “Instrumentalists in education, nearly all; hostile towards churches;

rationalistic; progressivists, shrugging their shoulders at the past, or else condemning earlier ages. In short, they were extreme humanitarians who preferred to be styled humanists” (12). What is interesting to note in Kirk’s commentary is the acknowledgement within both of his Introductions to Dewey’s thoughts on the past. He pointed out that “shrugging their shoulders at the past, or else condemning earlier ages” caused Dewey and his followers to neglect the “ancient continuity of thought and education” Babbitt and the New Humanists believed in so heartily. Of course, this idea was on Kirk’s periphery, as he was much more concerned with the perceived religious strife between Babbitt and Dewey, though, again, Babbitt never confronted Dewey in writing on this ground. As the conservative intellectual leader of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century until his death, it is no wonder that Kirk focused on Dewey’s secularism within his introductions to Babbitt’s books. But it is worth contemplating what, if any, influence Babbitt could have had over educational spheres if Kirk, especially, focused more commentary upon this subject.<sup>88</sup>

Three scholars do focus, though, in this battle over experience in their book-length studies of Babbitt. Thomas R. Nevin begins early in his *Irving Babbitt: An Intellectual Study* (1984) by quoting from Babbitt’s papers at Harvard. In the conclusion of an undated address, Babbitt explained that “This tradition like that of other American colleges of its general type rested on the assumption that there is a body of selected experience, religious and humanistic, that lies at the very basis of civilization and that

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<sup>88</sup> Kirk additionally attacked Dewey in his essay “The Enduring Influence of Irving Babbitt,” found in George A. Panichas and Claes G. Ryn’s *Irving Babbitt in Our Time*. This collection of essays, edited by Panichas and Ryn, was published in 1986 by the Catholic University of American P., Washington, D.C. Kirk mentioned that “John Dewey’s brummagem paradise of egalitarian uniformity, devoid of imagination or faith, certainly has not come to pass” (24); he then attacked Dewey’s “Religious Humanist Manifesto” as “among the worst of those weeds” inflicting American culture (26).

therefore needs to be transmitted through education by each generation to the next” (7). Babbitt specified American colleges in this speech, so it is safe to assume that this particular address was focused upon university education. But based on the ideas found in Babbitt’s published works, this sentiment can certainly be applied to the lower schools as well. Nevin further explains that “a curricular reference to antiquity would perpetuate what Babbitt called ‘the total experience of the race as to the things that have been found to be permanently important to its essential nature’” (85).<sup>89</sup> Nevin takes Babbitt’s view to be a “kind of historical empiricism, a belief that through innumerable generations came certain centralizing hallmarks of human experience” (85). Nevin does, subsequently, reiterate Babbitt’s desire to avoid presenting this knowledge as something inherently rigid and mechanical. The knowledge and beliefs found in “the wisdom of the ages” are themselves “static,” but they are also at the same time “dynamic in that each generation had to apply them in its own contextual terms” (85). The opposite held true, according to Nevin, for “Deweyan education,” as he argues that “Society itself was becoming an experiment through the laboratorial ethic epitomized in men like” Dewey (85, 89). Babbitt stood against the Deweyan tide, in which American culture was “to be an exercise in experimental controls or a rendering of human experience into scientific formulas” (89). “For his part,” Nevin continues,

Dewey averred that cooperative observation, experiment, and ‘controlled reflection’ were the ‘one sure road to truth.’ This experimentalism neglected the aspect of culture upon which Babbitt most firmly insisted: a selective regard for the past, not on the basis of generational deference, but because the past furnished a succession of experiments of permanent

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<sup>89</sup> Nevin quotes from *Literature and the American College*.

human value, embodied in the works of those who had risen above their time in a sense that experimental philosophy could neither accommodate nor comprehend. Babbitt thought that a society became a humanistic culture only to the extent that it balanced its immediate concerns with reference to ‘certain constant factors in human experience’ historically revealed. (90)

Nevin quotes Dewey from *A Common Faith* (New Haven, 1934) and adds in the endnote: “In the same passage, Dewey writes: ‘The new methods of inquiry and reflection have become for the educated man today the final arbiter of all questions of fact, existence and intellectual assent’ (p.131)” (165).

In *The Critical Legacy of Irving Babbitt* (1999), George A. Panichas examines Babbitt’s disagreements with Dewey on experience on a more general level. Panichas focuses on Babbitt’s insistence on the primacy of the “inner working” of the student, and how Babbitt perceived in Dewey’s ideas the “exaltation of activity over thinking [as] a ruinous departure from the great body of traditional knowledge and the wisdom of the race. Babbitt sees Dewey’s influence in a national tendency among educators to insist on “the doctrine of service” at the expense of culture and civilization, and of character and the inner life” (141). This “exaltation of activity” of Dewey’s caused Babbitt to classify him as an advocate of “the everlasting flux,” as an educational leader who “failed to observe the ethical element in man’s moral and theoretical nature that transcends change” (152). As Panichas aptly points out, this refusal of Dewey to “observe” those humanistic elements of the past brought about much ire from Babbitt, who labeled Dewey the leading “incomplete positivist.” In refusing to use the experience of the past and instead



relying solely on experiments within the always present “everlasting flux,” Panichas argues that Dewey’s position on experience simply followed the societal climate of the time. For Babbitt and his desire to curb our expansive tendencies within the “everlasting flux,” the “progressive” era in which his arguments were formed certainly made his chances for success tenuous. “It could be said,” Panichas reflects,

that the restrictive essences of Babbitt’s thought worked against its popular acceptance and influence, in much the same way the human capacity for reconstructive change, or what Babbitt termed a ‘metaphysic of the many,’ as preached by John Dewey, spurred on an epidemic scale the refashioning of thought not only in philosophy but also in law, in education, in politics” (171)

Babbitt spent his career warning the ever-expansive desires of the individual needed constant attention and mediation. This expansion was encouraged within the curricular factions vying for prominence in American schools at the turn of the century; Babbitt’s call for a selective adherence to the experiences of the past stood against the ever-changing and expanding society of the time.

Along these same social and historical lines, J. David Hoeverler, Jr., in his *The New Humanism: A Critique of Modern America, 1900-1940* (1977), argues “There is no doubt [...] that the Humanists realized the weight and influence of Dewey’s pragmatism, and Babbitt knew that he would have to ‘meet the moderns on their own ground’ by a strictly empirical Humanism that shunned appeals to metaphysics and speculation” (42). Hoeverler’s work, arguably the most historically detailed account of Babbitt and the New Humanists’ influence on American culture, certainly provides an accurate account and

understanding of those curricular factions attempting to usurp the humanist curriculum of the time. Hoeverler is quick to point out Babbitt's insight on this battle and how most effectively to enter the fray. He goes on to add that the New Humanists'

dualistic account of human nature relied ultimately for its validity on the 'immediate data of consciousness,' and however mysterious, this duality was a fact of observation and experience. It could be demonstrated to anyone willing to test its premises by a self-conscious exercise of the higher will, and in this sense could withstand the criteria of the application of the scientific method, the standard Deweyan method of verification.

(42)

All three scholars concerned with Babbitt's battle against Dewey concerning the use of experience in the curriculum provide ample analysis and evidence of Babbitt's attempt to use Dewey's own methods in promoting humanism.

There is no doubt, then, that in advocating that his humanism enter into the American curriculum, Babbitt clearly perceived that its defense could no longer be based upon traditional or religious grounds. In his attempt to defend his curriculum on Dewey's own grounds, though, Babbitt clearly did not succeed. The question then becomes why he failed on modernist grounds. Both Nevin and Panchias are sympathetic to Babbitt's point of view, so they generally attribute his failure by transferring blame to early 20<sup>th</sup> century American society. In short, Babbitt faced insurmountable odds in arguing for a curriculum based upon the "wisdom of the ages" in this overly naturalistic time, no matter upon which grounds the argument was founded. For Nevin and Panchias, Babbitt was fighting a losing battle from the outset. Hoeverler, on the other hand,

provides a more objective account of Babbitt and the New Humanists on the whole, including their divergence with Dewey's ideas. In fact, he places some of the blame for failure on Babbitt and the New Humanists themselves. Hoeveler maintains that, in terms of the use of experience, Dewey helped to promote the notion that

Human nature was the virtual sum total of its multifarious interactions with its social environment, so philosophy was invariably social and practical in all its considerations. The perspective itself does not confirm the correctness of Dewey's views, though they had monumental implications that the Humanists too easily passed over; it does, however, demonstrate the advantages and appeal of a philosophical system that takes all of life as its grounds of investigation and includes in it a careful attention to the behavior of social classes, groups, and institutions, as well as individuals. (149)

In focusing primarily, perhaps even solely, on past experience and its use for the individual, Babbitt ignored any sort of a notion of a community or interaction amongst individuals. This denial was certainly not helpful to Babbitt and the New Humanists' cause in this period, as Hoeveler points out: "Their nearly total obsession with the higher life of the individual virtually blinded them to important movements in sociology, many of which could have been effective against their liberal opponents" (149).<sup>90</sup> There is no denying Babbitt's failure in this philosophical battle with Dewey, but it is certainly evident that Babbitt had an illumed consciousness of American education at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His knowledge of Dewey's precepts, along with his keen

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<sup>90</sup> Hoeveler goes on to explore the emergence of sociology as a science, including the work of Emile Durkheim. He argues that a closer affiliation with Durkheim and his ideas would have proved very helpful to the New Humanist cause (149-50)

perception that a traditional and religious defense of the humanist curriculum would ultimately, clearly show this to be true. As such, it is still a mystery as to why Babbitt has remained such an “outsider” within the history of the battle over the American curriculum.

Conclusion: Babbitt and the Humanist Curriculum: Present and Future

“You speak in your article of certain persons who are beginning to question the underlying postulates of Rousseauism in education. Who are these certain persons besides myself? There has been a curious absence thus far of this kind of attack in either English, German, or French.”

--Babbitt, letter to Paul Elmer More, June 11, 1908

In the 1980s scholarship concerning Irving Babbitt witnessed a rebirth after many decades of dormancy. In this decade three book-length studies of Babbitt were published: Thomas Nevin’s *Irving Babbitt: An Intellectual Study* (1984), Stephen C. Brennan and Stephen R. Yarbrough’s *Irving Babbitt* (1987), and *Irving Babbitt in Our Time* (1986), a compilation of essays from the “Irving Babbitt: Fifty Years Later” conference, held at The Catholic University of America from November 18-9, 1983. The conference was held to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Babbitt’s death; the subsequent book was edited by George A. Panichas and Claes G. Ryn. Additionally, the National Humanities Institute republished Babbitt’s *Literature and the American College* in 1986, including a lengthy introduction by Russell Kirk.<sup>91</sup> It is not overly puzzling as to why Babbitt incited a new-found interest in this particular decade, as his adherence to the wisdom of the past spoke to the conservatism sweeping American politics and education. In the 1983 scathing report on the disastrous state of American education, *A Nation at*

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<sup>91</sup> The most complete examination of the historical and philosophical threads of the New Humanism was published in 1977, J. David Hoeveler, Jr.’s *The New Humanism: A Critique of Modern America, 1900-1940*. Two subsequent books on Babbitt were published in the 1990s: Milton Hindus’s *Irving Babbitt, Literature, and the Democratic Culture* (1994) and George Panichas’s *The Critical Legacy of Irving Babbitt: An Appreciation* (1999).

*Risk*, parents, educators, policy-makers, scholars, along with all Americans, were both warned of our future under present educational conditions and prompted to make drastic changes in methods and ideals for American schools. One person to whom scholars could naturally turn was Babbitt and his traditional humanism.

A perplexity, though, did take place concerning Babbitt and this period. The seminal work within the reaction to *A Nation at Risk* was E.D. Hirsch, Jr.'s *Cultural Literacy* (1987). Hirsch put forth the thesis that American students needed to learn a nearly permanent set of knowledge in order to thrive both within school and outwardly in the global community. He based this idea on the evidence that the literacy levels of American students were continually in decline. Hirsch argued that literacy was inextricably connected to a person's prior knowledge: the more a person knew about a subject, the easier it was for him/her to comprehend reading about it. To improve literacy levels, therefore, Hirsch proposed that American students needed a better exposure to those perpetual terms, people, places, allusions, etc., found in public discourse. Once students had a grasp on the prior knowledge authors take for granted that their readers possess, reading comprehension became much more simple and effective. This background knowledge was what he termed "cultural literacy":

the network of information that all competent readers possess. It is the background information, stored in their minds, that enables them to take up a newspaper and read it with an adequate level of comprehension, getting the point, grasping the implications, relating what they read to the unstated context which alone gives meaning to what they read. (2)

For Hirsch, then, the key to improving literacy amongst American students was to improve the knowledge shared by authors and readers alike. Once students possessed this network of permanent knowledge (what Hirsch also termed “core knowledge”), they would then be able to understand the knowledge most authors kept unstated, thereby improving reading speed and comprehension. “The achievement of high universal literacy,” Hirsch continued, “is the key to all other fundamental improvements in American education” (2).

The problem, according to Hirsch, was that American educators were only concerned with teaching students reading skills and strategies. These skills and strategies, the thinking went, could be transferred by students to any and all types of texts they encountered. With this heavy emphasis on reading strategies, Hirsch maintained that schools wholly neglected teaching those aspects of Western culture that students needed to know in order to be culturally literate, in order to share the knowledge implicitly assumed by authors. In his subsequent books on education, *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them* (1996), *The Knowledge Deficit: Closing the Shocking Education Gap for American Children* (2006), and *The Making of Americans: Democracy and Our Schools* (2009), Hirsch consistently detailed certain historical and philosophical threads concerning education that seemed to echo many of Babbitt's own sentiments. Furthermore, Hirsch consistently praised those educational figures who defended the humanist curriculum at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century. Interestingly enough, Hirsch cited Babbitt only once in these works, a quotation about the poor reputation of schools of education from *Literature and the American College* (“In 1929, Irving Babbitt of Harvard observed that professors of pedagogy ‘are held in almost

universal suspicion in academic circles, and are not infrequently looked upon by their colleagues as downright charlatans”) (*The Schools We Need* 115). Hirsch cited this remark (along with other like-minded quotations in this section) from Geraldine J. Clifford and James W. Guthrie’s *Ed School: A Brief for Professional Education* (1998). Therefore Hirsch used no direct references to any of Babbitt’s works, even though his thoughts and beliefs about education often echoed those of Babbitt’s; in praising those who stood against Progressive education at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, Hirsch also ignored Babbitt’s voice.

It is worth examining how Hirsch continued the humanistic tradition in similar fashion to Babbitt’s work at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century; though, to be sure, they clashed at times, especially in terms of the ends of humanistic education. Remarkably, both Babbitt and Hirsch were experts in Romantic era literature, while both often disparaged its central principles. Babbitt spent his career attacking the ideas of Rousseau; Hirsch too had “a scholarly specialty in the intellectual history of Romanticism,” but continually fought against its influence upon American education (*The Making of Americans* 46). More specifically, Hirsch pointed to the decline of American education as a direct result of the influence of the Romantic Movement beginning at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century. He asserted that

we must cease attending to the Romantic ideas that the reformers of the 1990s, echoing the reformers of the 1920s, ‘30s, and ‘40s and all the decades in between, have been pronouncing in chorus. These ideas are emphatically not reforms. They are the long-dominant controlling ideas of our failed schools. Those ideas fall on receptive ears among teachers and



Americans generally because of their conformity with our Romantic assumptions about the superiority of the natural over the artificial. (*The Schools We Need* 217)

It is not difficult to imagine Babbitt making the same assertion in Hirsch's place. Likewise, Hirsch looked historically in critiquing Romanticism, exploring the history of the idea of "natural," as he examined "the idea that school learning, including reading, is or should be natural. The word *natural* has been a term of honor in our country ever since our forebears elevated 'nature' and 'natural' to a status that had earlier been occupied by divine law" (*The Knowledge Deficit* 4). Hirsch went on to set up the comparison between Jonathan Edwards in the Colonial Period with Emerson and Thoreau later in American history. Under the profound influence of Romanticism, Emerson, Thoreau, and other thinkers began to change the way Americans thought about the individual, as "To be natural was automatically to be good, whether in life or learning" (*The Knowledge Deficit* 5). The result for education was that children were to be left alone to develop and learn at their own pace and inclination. Again, Hirsch's sentiments echoed Babbitt's quite well; in fact, Babbitt used Jonathan Edwards' ideas as the consummate contrast to Charles W. Eliot's "humanitarianism" (*Democracy and Leadership* 290).

Hirsch also focused his attention periodically upon the profound influence of John Dewey on American education in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century. Predictably, he placed Dewey within the Romanticism Movement, though, as he admitted, he is often labeled as a "pragmatist" or as a "progressive." "But," Hirsch continued,

progressivism in education is just another name for romanticism. Within Dewey's writings about education beats the heart of a romantic, as indicated by his continual use of the terms *development* and *growth* with regard to the schooling of children – terms that came as naturally to him as they still do to us. (*The Knowledge Deficit* 5-6)

Hirsch's most poignant criticisms of Dewey appeared in *Cultural Literacy*, where he made the direct connection between Rousseau's ideas and Dewey's by pointing out that Dewey's "most widely read book on education, *Schools of Tomorrow*, acknowledges Rousseau as the chief source of his educational principles" (xv). Dewey "strongly seconds Rousseau's opposition to the mere accumulation of information, [while] [b]elieving that a few direct experiences would suffice to develop the skills that children require" (xv). Of course, Hirsch's primary purpose for his books was to promote (or to bring back) the idea of schooling as the source of passing cultural information and knowledge onto students. The antagonism Hirsch perceived to book learning and content knowledge from both Rousseau, Dewey, and their Progressivist disciples he believed the chief source of crisis in American education.<sup>92</sup>

In his few direct criticisms of Dewey, Babbitt certainly pointed to Dewey's romantic tendencies as well (such as citing Dewey's belief that children naturally desire to serve). Babbitt too objected to Dewey's pragmatic and utilitarian side, a critique also shared by Hirsch. Hirsch, in fact, considered the 1918 *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education* as derived from "European romanticism and American pragmatism as amalgamated in the educational philosophy of John Dewey" (*Cultural Literacy* 118). In

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<sup>92</sup> Hirsch did praise Dewey's "disposing of the polarity between child-centered and subject matter-centered education" in his 1902 *The Child and the Curriculum* (*The Schools We Need* 57-8).

examining the report, Hirsch argued that its romantic and progressive tenets were bolstered by “Dewey’s pragmatic emphasis on direct social utility as an educational goal. Thus, the most appropriate replacement of bookish, traditional culture would be material that is directly experienced and immediately useful to life in society” (*Cultural Literacy* 119).<sup>93</sup> Within Hirsch’s criticisms of Dewey’s ideas echoed those ideas presented by Babbitt earlier in the century: both were wary of the dualistic nature of Dewey’s beliefs, a mixture of romanticism and utility to the disregard of the passing down of a traditional set of knowledge and beliefs; both took exception to his idea that direct experience was to be valued over any sort of collective, traditional experience; and both warned of Dewey’s emphasis on service to others to the detriment of developing the individual first. Hirsch argued that the *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education* reigned in an era in American education in which “The schools were henceforth to focus upon the needs of the child and society, as Dewey had recommended” (*Cultural Literacy* 119).

But perhaps the most striking of Babbitt and Hirsch’s fundamental agreement regarding Dewey’s break from the traditional humanist curriculum, a transfer of focus from the “wisdom of the ages” and a set of “core knowledge,” came from two echoic phrases. After discussing Dewey and other naturalistic philosophers in *Rousseau and Romanticism*, Babbitt declared that “From an ethical point of view a child has the right to be born into a cosmos, and not, as is coming to be more and more the case under such influences, pitchforked into chaos” (388). Subsequently, after lamenting “The new kind of teaching espoused by Rousseau and Dewey” in *Cultural Literacy*, Hirsch proclaimed that “To thrive, a child needs to learn the traditions of the particular human society and

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<sup>93</sup> In *The Knowledge Deficit* Hirsch claimed that “Dewey’s Lab School, which he started in Chicago in 1896, was based on the conviction that children would learn what they needed by engaging in practical activities such as cooking” (9-10).

culture it is born into” (31). Because these utterances were nearly 70 years apart, it is striking to note that the assault on the “new education” remained stable. This speaks to the power of the Progressive curricular victory at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and its ability to maintain its prominent standing in American education. Too, it speaks, perhaps, to the fruitless attempts of advocates of the humanist curriculum to regain a place in the American schools. The same argument was made consistently throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century to no avail. Hirsch, in reflecting on the current period, vociferously argued that a “suppression of dissent” pervaded in schools of education throughout the nation, in which “students are being shielded from heterodox ideas in education schools, which are less like university departments than theological institutes where heresy is viewed as an evil that its members have a civic duty to suppress” (*The Making of Americans* 48, 50). At the very least, both Babbitt and Hirsch acknowledged their outsider positions in the perpetual educational conversation and consequently recognized the odds they were up against.

In addition to critiquing Dewey’s educational ideals, Hirsch also examined the broader scope of American education in Dewey and Babbitt’s time. Babbitt used the term “new education” in his time, while Hirsch, citing Diane Ravitch, called the era “a golden age” of “new theories” (*The Making of Americans* 35). Hirsch both doled out praise and derision to institutions and individuals, though, of course, Babbitt remained in the shadows. Both Teachers College and William Heard Kilpatrick were targeted by Hirsch in his three later books on education. These two targets go hand-in-hand, as Kilpatrick taught at Teachers College from 1912-37. Hirsch labeled Kilpatrick “the most influential introducer of progressive ideas into American schools of education,” as he

taught thousands (35,000 according to Hirsch) of future education professors ideas from his 1918 pamphlet *The Project Method (The Schools We Need* 50-1, 118). According to Hirsch, “Under the project method, subject-matter classrooms were to be abandoned in favor of ‘holistic,’ lifelike projects that would enable students to gain the life skills they needed by working in cooperation with their fellow students” (*The Schools We Need* 264). Some of Kilpatrick’s central tenets included “the insistence upon the individuality of the child and the autonomy of the teacher;” “the disparagement of mere subject matter and of other nations’ educational methods;” “the admonition to teach children rather than subjects;” and “the claim that knowledge is changing so fast that no specific subject matter should be required in the curriculum” (*The Schools We Need* 119). In short, for Hirsch, Kilpatrick’s rationale was that “Projects are better than books and lectures” (*The Making of Americans* 39). Of course, any sort of method or practice that deemphasized subject matter Hirsch found to be weakening American schools. With Kilpatrick teaching thousands of future education professors and school administrators as “new schools and colleges of education were beginning to be staffed,” Hirsch could trace the beginning of the prevalence of Progressivism in American schools directly to Kilpatrick and his *Project Method (The Schools We Need* 118). As for current educational practice, Hirsch contended that the project method still was still thriving in American schools under such guises as “discovery learning,” “hands-on learning,” and “thematic learning” (*The Schools We Need* 253). Kilpatrick was a nationally-known professor at Teachers College, but Hirsch was quick to point out that Teachers College itself was able to institutionalize many of the tenets of Progressive education to other schools of education, who, in turn, trained the nation’s teachers, administrators, and education professors. He

labeled, in fact, Teachers College as “the parent organism” that “exported professors and the romantic principles” found “in [the] intellectual sameness across the nation’s education schools” (*The Knowledge Deficit* 20). He considered the “fateful period” of Teachers College’s influence from 1910-30, from which “Romantic,” “antiknowledge,” and “break-the mold” reforms emanated (*The Schools We Need* 2, 118).

Hirsch readily admitted that his ideas concerning Teachers College and its continued profound influence upon American education beginning in the early 1900s was anything but new. He was quick to point to the previous work of Laurence Cremin and Ravitch in this avenue as well (*The Schools We Need* 215). And, subsequently, Hirsch was not “new” in overlooking Babbitt’s humanistic voice at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century either; in fact, as previously mentioned in Chapter 1, he joined many others in this oversight. Like others, Hirsch did laud those who promoted the traditional curriculum in the early 1900s. His most lavish praise was given to “the great” William C. Bagley (*The Knowledge Deficit* 120). Bagley’s “Essentialism” called for schools to impart a shared set of knowledge for all students, regardless of ability or future profession. “That Kilpatrick rather than Bagley won the minds and hearts of future education professors,” Hirsch lamented, “was a grave misfortune for the nation. Besides strongly opposing the newly fashionable disparagement of subject matter, Bagley passionately identified the need for schools in a democracy to share a community of knowledge” (*The Schools We Need* 122). The reason for this failure, according to Hirsch, was that “Being right was not enough; his writings simply did not obey the institutional imperative to form a distinctive and identifiable pedagogical discipline. [He did not utilize] an autonomous, process-oriented expertise and a jargon vocabulary that made

guild specialists of educators (in the way Kilpatrick's proposals did)" (*The Schools We Need* 123). Hirsch used Bagley's example as one of those "forgotten heroes [who] are historical proof that to be a professor of education is not automatically to be a professor of process" (*The Schools We Need* 125).

Hirsch pointed to other humanistic heroes as well. He credited Teachers College's Isaac Kandel, who taught at Teachers College from 1911-46, for opening his eyes to the "anti-curriculum" foundation of Progressive belief. After reading a Kandel talk originally given in 1939, Hirsch first grasped that the anti-curriculum movement had been the reason that "for more than half a century our public elementary schools have lacked a coherent curriculum, thus denying children at their most teachable age a systematic introduction to the rich domains of human knowledge" (*The Making of Americans* 37-8). As part of the "dissident" "Essentialists" at Teachers College, Hirsch related, Kandel clarified and simplified the curricular struggle as that between those who believed in a subject-based curriculum and those who did not (*The Making of Americans* 38). Both Bagley and Kandel, according to Hirsch, were labeled as "reactionaries" while at Teachers College, though Hirsch proposed to honor those voices that stood against their time.

As previously mentioned, though, one voice not mentioned in this regard was Babbitt's. This oversight is quite interesting. As mentioned in Chapter 1, most of the supporters of the humanist curriculum at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century came from outside of the public schools, as most, such as Babbitt, were found in universities. It is therefore not overly surprising that historians examining the curriculum battle almost completely ignored Babbitt and his works. But it seems that Hirsch's historical and philosophical

arguments would benefit well from the use of Babbitt's ideas. Of course, Babbitt could serve as an example of a contemporary of Dewey's who disapproved of a select number of his educational principles. More significantly, though, Babbitt included in his works numerous mentions of Hirsch's chief concern: the existence of a collection of knowledge that needed re-implemented into American schools. Hirsch's conception of "Cultural Literacy" (or later "Core Knowledge") was a list of "What Every American Needs to Know." This phrase was the subtitle of *Cultural Literacy*; the appendix of the book contained approximately 3000 names, events, people, items, examples of lore, and scientific terms "intended to illustrate the character and range of the knowledge literate Americans tend to share" (146). In 1993, Hirsch, along with Joseph F. Kett and James Trefil, published the revised and updated 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of *The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*. This guidebook listed over 500 pages of items from subjects such as proverbs, idioms, life sciences, American politics, and business and economics. Throughout the early 1990s, Hirsch also edited a series of guidebooks for kindergarteners through sixth graders, in which he provided a specific list of "core knowledge" students in those grades needed to know during each respective year of schooling. As Hirsch emphasized throughout these works, he did not expect (nor desire) for students to master a thorough and expert knowledge of each of the items he listed; instead, he asked the lists to be used as guides to those items authors alluded to within their writing. With these expectations in mind, students could achieve higher literacy levels by already having a general sense of the meaning of many of these items found in written works.

Hirsch's main concern in creating these lists and dictionaries was to improve literacy, as reading served as the basis of improving student performance in all subjects.



By advocating for schools to teach, by various methods and means, this set of “core knowledge,” Hirsch certainly could have used Babbitt’s remarks from earlier in the century as evidence that the “Essentialists” of Teachers College were not the only scholars advocating a core curriculum. Babbitt used numerous terms in this respect: “the wisdom of the ages,” “a general nature,” “the abiding,” “a core of normal experience,” and “a centre of normal human experience.” He never came near the specificity of Hirsch’s lists, but Babbitt certainly believed that literary classics, especially Greek and Roman texts, provided the wisdom and substantiation of a “core of normal experience” which abided in all times and places. As evident from his aforementioned comment concerning Dewey and the other naturalists, Babbitt certainly believed that the curriculum was becoming ever more fragmented and process orientated. Instead of being exposed to the wisdom of the ages in school, students were set in the midst of a curricular chaos, in which no set of abiding wisdom was passed on to successive generations of students. As both Hirsch and Babbitt maintained, decades apart, the curriculum provided no sense of any abiding knowledge for students to take as their own. As is prevalent throughout the history of American education, many of the same (or similar) ideas reappear in the curricular conversation under different guises. This seems to be the case with the curriculum “reforms” of Babbitt and Hirsch that nearly a century separated.

Interestingly, Babbitt would have taken issue with one significant tenet of Hirsch’s ideas: they both supported a defined and set curriculum, but they diverged philosophically with the final end or purpose of such an education. The basis of Hirsch’s idea of “cultural literacy” is to improve the literacy level for American students, thereby improving the ability of individuals to communicate (especially through reading and

writing). As he admonished in *Cultural Literacy*, “We must assure that new generations will continue to be enfranchised in our medium of national communication as securely as they are enfranchised at the polls” (108). In addition, Hirsch advocated putting more emphasis on the teaching of a shared scientific and technical vocabulary, as the “political decisions in our democracy have an increasingly technical element” that experts and ordinary citizens needed to share (*Cultural Literacy* 108). The overarching aim for Hirsch’s “cultural literacy” was providing an equal opportunity for success for all students once they entered the marketplace. His reasoning was based on future endeavors:

A good *general* education in the early grades is the necessary foundation for citizenship, literacy, effective use of computers, and, in the new economic era, for speedy and successful job retraining. Free-trade agreements have been especially hard on American adults because our schools have fallen behind in providing the adaptive skills and knowledge needed to adjust to new jobs. (*The Making of Americans* x)

Furthermore, “In the early grades of schooling in a democracy, the public sphere *should* take priority. [...] Most modern nations impose [...] compulsory early education because neither a democracy nor a modern economy can function properly without loyal and competent citizens able to communicate with one another” (*The Making of Americans* 24). Clearly Hirsch’s concern lay with the professional world the student was to enter into at the culmination of their schooling; as such, his views have a certain tendency towards utility.

His worries were brought about by struggles in the American economy on the global level, coupled with the ever-growing gap between rich and poor in America. As he continually argued throughout his books, wealthier students were much better able to pick up remnants of “cultural literacy” in their homes than were poorer students. Since, then, schools, according to Hirsch, were largely ignoring these tenets of this “core knowledge,” the achievement gap between economic classes grew larger and larger both within the school and in the marketplace, as wealthier students were becoming culturally literate at home. Of course, Hirsch desired for students to learn aspects of “cultural literacy” for their own sake; the emphasis on American history and politics on this list would make for citizens to have a much better knowledge and appreciation of the country. And, of course, his desire to improve literacy founded his entire framework. But it seems as if most of Hirsch’s purpose in exposing students to “cultural literacy” was in order to function more effectively in the marketplace. In fact, he even asked his readers to associate the “common” in “common school” with the New England sense of “commons,” “a space where all can consort as equals” (*The Making of Americans* 23). The early place of one commonality (the school) was to prepare for the later one (the public sphere). “Because broad knowledge enables us to read and learn effectively,” Hirsch concluded in his *Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*, “it is the best guarantee that we will continue to read, and learn, and deepen our knowledge. True literacy has always opened doors – not just to deep knowledge and economic success, but also to other people and other cultures” (xv).

Three of the four doors Hirsch’s “cultural literacy” was to open were outside of the student’s “inner life.” This, then, would be the major complaint Babbitt would lodge

towards Hirsch's "cultural literacy." Babbitt would search for where "cultural literacy" was to temper the expansive tendencies of the individual. Hirsch, on the other hand, seemed unconcerned with the results of students meeting in the public sphere after exposure to "cultural literacy." If the knowledge transferred within "cultural literacy" was to be a part of everyone's education and all met on "equal ground" in the marketplace, what assurance was there that individuals would not continue to exhibit the expansive desire for power and wealth? If the controlling function of a student's "inner life" was ignored, Babbitt would contend, what guarantee was there that individuals would enter the public sphere with anything but nefarious intentions? As mentioned previously, Babbitt pointed to both Henry Ford and John D. Rockefeller as individuals whose educations neglected to impart any law of restraint, in terms of material wealth, within their inner lives. Safely assuming that Ford and Rockefeller were both culturally literate, Babbitt would question what was to assure in Hirsch's time any sort of change or alleviation of the economic gap he perceived and desired to remedy?

The nature of this philosophical difference of the ends of a humanistic education comes down to Babbitt's belief in the "conversion" that needs to be undergone. In *Democracy and Leadership*, Babbitt asserted that "The whole of life may, indeed, be summed up in the words diversion and conversion" (242). By working "in the full ethical sense," the student "is pulling back and disciplining his temperamental self with reference to some standard. In short, his temperamental self is, in an almost literal sense, undergoing conversion" (242). This disciplining of those expansive desires, whether of sympathy, power, knowledge, wealth, for Babbitt, was a constant undertaking- an undertaking that could never be fully achieved. But the striving for this conversion was

the means for leading a proportionate, measured, decorous, humanistic life. All other pursuits were diversions from this continual attempt. Babbitt readily admitted in *Rousseau and Romanticism* that this conversion was not something that came from “thunderclaps and visible upsets of grace” (385). “The humanistic worker” was to obtain “this gradual conversion” through “work according to the human law” (385-6). He continued that “right knowledge[,] though it supplies the norm is not in itself this working, which consists in the actual pulling back of impulse. But an act of this kind to be effective must be repeated. A habit is thus formed until at last the new direction given to the natural man becomes automatic and unconscious” (386). What Babbitt deemed “the norm” was the standards of humanism- the principles of proportion, measure, and decorum that he believed all individuals should strive toward. The “right knowledge” was the humanistic curriculum he thought presented and guided these principles of behavior to students through story, myth, history, art, and other humanistic means. After being exposed to this “norm” in school, Babbitt believed the student then was ready to perform his/her own inner working on their temperamental selves until the inner working became habitual and automatic.

Babbitt later maintained this view in his essay “President Eliot and American Education,” in which he emphasized “that man needs to be disciplined in his natural self to some standard; that he needs, in short, in the almost literal sense of the term to undergo conversion” (203). For Babbitt, this “conversion always involves a facing about or turning away from the natural man;” he reiterated that this conversion for students in particular was “to be accomplished rather by the gradual formation from childhood of right habits” (203). Though Hirsch’s “cultural literacy” certainly promoted desirable

habits such as reading and studying, Babbitt would remain wary that the student's expansive desires continued unchecked and unabated. In fact, Babbitt remarked that

conversion implies an opposition in the heart of the individual between the expansive desires and a principle of control. The exercise of this principle of control requires the putting forth of a special quality of effort or will.

What I have termed 'the wisdom of the ages' is, in short, primarily concerned with the problems of the inner life, and in its attitude toward these problems it is dualistic. (203-4)

The literary works of the "wisdom of the ages" would serve, for Babbitt, as models on how to put forth this effort of controlling the expansive desires. Babbitt believed the "wisdom of the ages" provided a framework and foundation in exposing students to this humanistic way of life. Once the classical curriculum began disappearing from American schools, Babbitt believed that any sort of emphasis on conversion fled as well. "The humanist," Babbitt concluded, "is satisfied with imposing on these desires a law of measure or decorum. His programme may be summed up in the word mediation" (204). Of course, Babbitt offered no directions on how to teach this "mediation" of the inner dualism to students. Perhaps he believed that the continual exposure to these examples from the humanities would ensure that students would begin their own inner working in mediating this dualism. Unfortunately, as previously noted, Babbitt left us no specific direction in this respect.

It is plausible to believe that Babbitt would insist that Hirsch's curriculum ignored this notion of conversion and inner working; instead, it focused primarily on those pursuits outside of the individual. (Of course, Hirsch could just as easily maintain that

Babbitt provided no specifics on how to go about creating this inner conversion for students either). Babbitt was so concerned with the ever-expanding tendencies and desires of individuals that he would have questioned Hirsch about what inner working his “cultural literacy” provided students.<sup>94</sup> Babbitt insisted that this notion of conversion be paramount in a student’s education, though, of course, he ignored the specifics on how to achieve this. At the very least, though, Babbitt demanded that a humanistic education began within the individual student- no matter how his proposed mediation was to be achieved. Hirsch, on the other hand, seemed to ignore the inner life of the student completely. Instead, it appears that in setting up the ends of “cultural literacy” for better access to the marketplace and public sphere, Hirsch largely ignored what Babbitt believed to be essential in a humanistic curriculum. In considering the public sphere, Babbitt maintained that the “whole modern programme” was one “that makes for a formidable mechanical efficiency and so tends to bring into an ever closer material contact men who remain ethically centrifugal” (*Rousseau and Romanticism* 331). What Babbitt found to be “illusory” was the assumption “that men can meet expansively and on the level of their ordinary selves” (*Democracy and Leadership* 235). Babbitt believed that “men can really come together only in humble obeisance to something set above their ordinary selves;” otherwise, without the proper mediation between the dualism of expansion and control that a humanistic education was to provide students, their meeting in the public sphere would only be a continuation and amplification of their expansive

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<sup>94</sup> Later in *Democracy and Leadership*, Babbitt reiterated that “I have said that the whole of life may be summed up in the words diversion and conversion. But man does not want conversion, the adjustment in other words of his natural will to some higher will, because of the moral effort it implies. In this sense he is an everlasting trifler. But, though he wishes diversion, he is loath at the same time to admit that he is missing the fruits of conversion” (277). Hirsch, again, demanded that students work diligently in reading and studying within his cultural literacy framework, but Babbitt would seemingly argue that this working was not the “inner working” students needed for humanistic conversion.

desires (*Democracy and Leadership* 235). With the entry into the public sphere Hirsch's "cultural literacy" provided, what assurance, Babbitt would ask, could be promised that individuals would not continue to be driven by their ever-expansive tendencies? Hirsch was strictly anti-Romantic in all educational facets, but, possibly, would Babbitt consider Hirsch Romantic in his belief that good would naturally prevail in the public sphere once students were culturally literate? Babbitt, it seems, would continue to point to those individuals who are highly culturally literate and at the same time controlled by the overriding influence of their expansive desires.

As previously mentioned, Babbitt's outsider position to the curricular battles of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century did not help his cause for a "genuine humanism." Yet, it is irresponsible to argue that Babbitt's ideas would have been greatly influential only if he would have been better entrenched within the educational scene. After all, a number of individuals who argued for versions of a humanist curriculum, and who were better positioned in the battle, likewise failed. Hirsch's results remain to be seen. But Irving Babbitt and his New Humanism should remind us that while curricular frameworks and aims remain the topic of continual conversation and debate, it is important to be reminded that some voices in this conversation are on, and have been on, the periphery. From a century ago Babbitt warned us of our ever-expansive tendencies and the role of humanistic education in providing the proper restraint. As we look around today at economics, global politics, foreign policy, and particularly education, it is difficult to believe that we have heeded Babbitt's warning. Perhaps it is worthwhile to listen now to this voice from the outside.



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