

No matter how much they drink or how much they swear, the Marine Corps is a good fighting outfit. They are usually the first to go, the first to fight, and the last to leave. They have proven themselves in the past to be exactly what the term "devil dogs" implies. They have fought and died for the United States since the Marine Corps was founded in Tung's Taern, in 1776. They proved themselves worthy of honor in World Wars I and II. And again in our troubled world of today, the Marines are showing themselves to be men of true courage.

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The Value of a Liberal Education

Claire Gaddy

Since the advent of Industrialism, the factory system, and the scientific method, American Universities have been given the added duty of preparing students for a vocation or profession. This is as it should be, for the purpose of education in a democracy is to prepare its citizens to lead happy and useful lives, and the assurance of proficiency in a vocation, by specialized study in a university, is one of the requisites in attaining this end. But in recent years we have become too concerned with the scientific approach—the frenzied search for realism—the idea that if something can not be proved in a laboratory it is not worthy of consideration or thought. The pendulum has swung from the extreme of romanticism in the nineteenth century to the extreme of realism in the twentieth.

The romanticists stressed the emotional, imaginative, the ideal life, while the biographers, dramatists, and novelists of the twentieth century, under the scientific impulse, have put heroes, history, society, and religion under a microscope and dissected them as a scientist would a frog. From this point of view such biographies as "Florence Nightingale" and "Queen Victoria," by Strachey, the play "Tobacco Road," and the novel "The American Tragedy" have stressed realism. It is not that I am condemning the exposition of life as it really is, but rather I deplore the exaggerated emphasis that it has received. Neither do I advocate a return to the ivory tower of romanticism. Somewhere between these two extremes lies the medium desired.

The idea for an airplane design may be the result of a daydream, but the details must be worked out in a laboratory. Thus the integration of ivory tower and realism brings about progress. We cannot live a good life in an ivory tower; neither can we live a good life in stark realism. I believe that the desirable mean can be reached through liberal education.

A liberal education is essentially cultural in content, and its principal function is to develop a student's intellectual, emotional, and spiritual powers, and to introduce him to his cultural heritage. It seems also to discipline and guide him to think clearly and evaluate wisely, to adopt a mature, responsible attitude. It helps the student acquire habits and instruments of investigation which he will need as he proceeds with his education. It is liberative; it gives him freedom of choice by making him aware of alternatives, thus widening the scope of his beliefs and actions. It is moral in a sense—the student is encouraged and helped to think for himself and to approach intellectual and practical problems in a responsible manner.

As to the content of a liberal education, I will attempt to survey briefly the main divisions and the roles they play. Mathematics promotes understanding of, and respect for, logical coherence, and it teaches the student to reason accurately. The natural sciences have in common an interest in the world of fact and are concerned with the structure and behavior of natural phenomena rather than with their significance for man. In the study of the natural sciences the student learns to observe accurately and to arrive at a logical conclusion. The social studies, such as economics, political science, sociology, and the like are partly scientific in nature, insofar as statistical investigation is carried on, but social groups do not easily lend themselves to the experimental method of investigation. This is the point where the social studies merge with the humanities, for the humanistic insights can help to determine the actual and ideal ends of human endeavor. The humanities, including language, the fine arts, literature, morals, and religion interpret and attempt to explain human experience. Through these mediums of communication, beautiful expression, and interpretation, an evaluative approach to reality can be achieved. History and philosophy are included in a liberal education because only through an understanding of the past and of timeless values can we understand the present. These subjects, with the humanities and their work of art, are timeless and universal and belong to all generations: they form our cultural heritage.

Many colleges have struggled with the complex problems of real education, and their programs provide excellent opportunities and guidance. The big word in the last sentence is

“opportunities”, for it is understood that the university can give the student only the opportunity and the student in turn is responsible for taking advantage of it. I am proud to say that Butler is one of the many universities offering its students such a program in which the student is asked in the first two years first to gain some coherent understanding of the culture (history, institutions, social and economic conditions, literature, philosophy, etc.) of some period—a time other than that of the major subject; secondly, to master the rudiments of some one science, with an attempt to understand its aims, its spirit, its methods, and also its place among the sciences and its relation to the general development of science; thirdly, to acquire a satisfactory equipment in one foreign language—an equipment that will not only become a tool but will furnish an insight into the nature and function of language as well as some understanding of foreign people. Thereafter, in the last two years the student is encouraged to acquire competence in some major field and some closely related minor field.

This then, is a partial answer to the questions commonly heard in the halls of any university: “Why do I have to study philosophy or religion? What good will history be to me? I’m just wasting my time in this English class; why can’t I take science instead?” A further answer to these questions might be expressed in negative terms. Do we consider a person educated who cannot express himself articulately, who is uninformed about the past, who has no knowledge of how to acquire knowledge, who is insensitive to aesthetic, moral, and religious values? On the other hand, we acknowledge and respect a person who is articulate, who is well-informed, who searches for more information, who is capable of appreciation of aesthetic, moral, and religious values, who is prepared to participate in a democracy and contribute all he can to his fellow men. This is a positive freedom which democracy should cherish and which a liberal education should foster. And it is our duty and privilege, as citizens, as human beings, to make liberal education in this country a powerful instrument for human freedom and a source of understanding human values.