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THE "CHICAGO FIGHT"

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The friendship between Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler began in 1927 when Hutchins was dean of the Yale University Law School and, on the recommendation of C. K. Ogden, invited Adler, then a young lecturer in psychology at Columbia University, to come to New Haven and tell him what he knew about the relevance of psychology and logic to the laws of evidence.

Two years later—in April, 1929—Mr. Hutchins was named president of the University of Chicago. He was thirty and Mr. Adler, twenty-six. He promptly invited Adler to join him at Chicago.

In his autobiography, *Philosopher at Large,* published this year by Macmillan, Mr. Adler recalls their first years at Chicago and some of the principal issues in what came to be known as "the Chicago fight."

Here are excerpts from his account:

[In October, 1929,] Bob and I spent an evening together at the Yale Club in New York. On that occasion, Bob confessed to me that, in his career so far, he had never given much thought to the subject of education. He found this somewhat embarrassing now that he was president of a major university. I had never ever given much thought to the subject either. However, I could tell him what had been the most important factor in my own education—the Erskine General Honors course at Columbia. Reading the Great Books, both as a student and as a teacher, I said, had done more for my mind than all the rest of the academic pursuits in which I had been so far engaged.

After I described how the General Honors course was conducted at Columbia, Bob asked me to name the books we read. I rattled off a long list of authors and titles in roughly chronological order, to which Bob's response was that his own education at Oberlin and Yale had not included most of them. In a speech that he gave some years later, entitled "The Autobiography of an

Uneducated Man," he recalled that he had arrived at the age of thirty "with some knowledge of the Bible, of Shakespeare, of *Faust,* of one dialogue of Plato, and of the opinions of many semi-literate and a few literate judges, and that was about all." Bob then went on to say that Mr. Adler had told him that unless he "did something drastic he would close his educational career a wholly uneducated man." It was Bob himself, not I, who proposed the drastic remedy.

Though his proposal, which he communicated to me early in 1930, was originally designed to initiate the education of Hutchins and continue the education of Adler, it had much more far-reaching effects. It developed into one of the main parts of the program of educational reforms associated in the nineteen-thirties with his name and with the University of Chicago. Though John Erskine and Columbia had done the pioneering work ten years earlier, Hutchins and Chicago were to become, in the public mind, the promulgators and promoters of the "Great Books Movement" in liberal education.

In his inaugural address, delivered in November, 1929, President Hutchins recommended among other things, a "scheme of pass and honors work," which would divide courses into large lectures and small discussion groups. The general and special honors program at Columbia, about which I talked to Hutchins again when I visited Chicago during the Christmas season, had obvious relevance to what Bob had in mind, and consequently he asked me to send him detailed information about the Columbia program. I did this in a letter in which I warned him that "organized departments and departmentally minded individuals don't understand it, resent it, distrust it" and that "specialized scholars think that it is pretentious, and that the work must be sloppy because it isn't their type of scholarship." Nevertheless, I urged him to adopt something like the Columbia honors program, especially the Great Books seminars, because, I said, "it is one of the strongest attacks upon specialism and departmentalism; it is the best education for the faculty as well as for the students; the use of original texts is an antidote for survey courses and fifth-rate textbooks; and it constitutes by itself, if properly conducted, the backbone of a liberal education."

I would not have been surprised to learn of Bob Hutchins' willingness to advocate the adoption of this program, but I was certainly surprised by a telephone call in which he asked whether I would be willing to teach the General Honors course with him the following September. We would, he said, take a select group of freshmen from the entering class and read the Great Books with them for two years—in the Columbia fashion, by discussing one book a week for two hours. He hoped he would prove as good a co-leader of the discussion as Mark Van Doren had been; he hoped that the introduction of this course in the college would be an opening wedge in an effort to reform the college curriculum; but, most of all, he loped that reading and discussing the Great Books would remedy some of the defects in his own education.

Up to that point my acquaintance with university presidents had been limited to a remote awareness of the personality and posture of Nicholas Murray Butler at Columbia. The picture of a university president reading the Great Books with freshmen, for his own sake as well as for theirs, was as shocking as it was refreshing. When it was announced, without any reference to the Great Books, that Hutchins planned to teach freshmen the following autumn, a shock wave spread from the campus through the whole community. . . . The faculty and the general public had come to expect the unexpected, but this piece of news exceeded even that expectation.

Bob asked me to write a description of the course for insertion in the college catalogue. I sent him a statement twelve to fifteen lines long which he cut down to three lines, writing me that he had translated my statement into English and had forwarded it to the dean of the college. Under the heading "General Survey," it was listed as follows: "110. General Honors Course. — Readings in the classics of Western European literature. Limited to 20 by invitation. This is a two-year course, one two-hour class session each week. Credit is deferred until completion of the course." Chauncey Boucher, who was then dean of the college, found everything about this venture disturbing. It was not only that the president had volunteered to become a member of his faculty; in addition, the course departed from the prevalent academic orthodoxy of full course credit being given each quarter for passing an examination in a course that met three times a week in fifty-minute periods and was taught by a single instructor. He was also troubled by the problem of selecting the twenty students to be invited to participate, eventually solved by my interviewing about eighty members of the entering class, chosen on the basis of their high-school records.

Teaching the Great Books with Bob Hutchins was the one fine experience that first year at the university. ... Distinctly different in his style from Mark Van Doren, my partner at Columbia, Bob, like Mark, was a witty interrogator of the students, catching them on vague or airy statements about the readings... .

Partly because I wanted Mark Van Doren, Dick McKeon, Scott Buchanan, and Stringfellow Barr to visit Bob Hutchins and me in Chicago, and partly because of my own experience with oral examinations in the General Honors course at Columbia, I persuaded Bob to invite my friends to come to Chicago as external oral examiners. Buchanan and Barr came from the University of Virginia in June of 1931, Van Doren and McKeon from Columbia University in June of 1932, to conduct a half-hour oral examination of each student in our class. They put the students on the spot in a way that was good for them, exposing the shallowness of their verbal chatter, full of clichés that had stuck in their memories, often in a fragmentary fashion. No written examination by instructors in a course, or even an oral examination by them, could possibly

cut under the surface of students' answers to find out whether or not they really understood what they were saying.

John Barden, who as an entering freshman in 1930 joined the Hutchins-Adler Great Books seminar, became in his senior year editor of the *Daily Maroon,* the university newspaper. Both in its news columns and in his editorials, he advocated the president's educational program and criticized the faculty opposition, precipitating an intellectual tempest that swept over the campus from January to June in 1934. Hutchins, in his convocation address of December, 1933, had made a number of acerbic comments about the place of facts and ideas not only in the education of students, but also in the researches carried on by scientists and scholars. At the beginning of the new term, Barden reported the effect of this address in a story headlined "Hutchins Address Divides Faculty into Two Camps"; and if that was not true at the time, a succession of more inflammatory articles, which Barden wrote, succeeded in producing a campus confrontation that aligned students and professors on opposite sides of the issue.

Day after day, the Letters to the Editor column carried answers to and defenses of Barden's criticisms, written by members of the faculty as well as by students. Professor Harry Gideonse, later president of Brooklyn College in New York, posted *Maroon* editorials on the college bulletin board with his own caustic comments; to which Barden responded by publishing a glossary "to aid those who criticize *Maroon* editorials," in which he instructed Gideonse and others on the meaning of such terms as general education, ideas, facts, propositions, principles, and theories. The running feud between Barden and Gideonse, together with heated exchanges between adherents of both parties—exchanges which occurred in classrooms as well as in locker rooms, cafeterias, and taverns—became the chief, in fact the all-absorbing, extracurricular activity at the university. Excitement about an intellectual conflict took the place of the usual excitement about athletic contests and made the latter look pallid by comparison.

My own involvement resulted from a challenge issued to me by Professor Anton J. Carlson, an eminent physiologist, who along with Gideonse, a social scientist, led the opposition. He had been particularly provoked by what he interpreted as slurs on the scientific method in the president's convocation address the preceding December, and which Hutchins repeated in his address to the faculty at the annual trustees dinner in January. What Hutchins said on both those occasions he had said many times before, but his earlier statements just did not happen to light the spark that set the tinder on fire.

As early as 1931, in an address to the graduating class, Hutchins had declared:

"Science is not the collection of facts or the accumulation of data. A dis-

> cipline does not become scientific merely because its professors have acquired a great deal of information. Facts do not arrange themselves. Facts do not solve problems. I do not wish to be misunderstood. We must get the facts. We must get them all.... But at the same time we must raise the question whether facts alone will settle our difficulties for us. And we must raise the question, too, whether an educational system that is based on the accumulation and distribution of facts is likely to lead us through the mazes of a world whose complications have been produced by the facts we have discovered."

And a little later in the same address, which he entitled "The New Atlantis" because it was an attack on the scientific utopia envisioned by Francis Bacon, Hutchins declared that "upon the proper balance of fact and idea depends our eventual escape from the New Atlantis," adding that he hoped the system of general examinations which had just been set up would "emphasize ideas rather than facts."

The subsequent convocation address in December, 1933, contained remarks slightly more incendiary, such as:

> "The gadgeteers and data collectors, masquerading as scientists, have threatened to become the supreme chieftains of the scholarly world.
>
> "As the Renaissance could accuse the Middle Ages of being rich in principles and poor in facts, we are now entitled to inquire whether we are not rich in facts and poor in principles.
>
> "Rational thought is the only basis of education and research. Whether we know it or not, it has been responsible for our scientific success; its absence has been responsible for our bewilderment. A university is the place of all places to grapple with those fundamental principles which rational thought seeks to establish.

"The system has been to pour facts into the student with splendid disregard of the certainty that he will forget them, that they may not be facts by the time he graduates, and that he won't know what to do with them if they are.

"He doesn't know anything except facts."

This drawing, done for Robert Hutchins in the early nineteen-thirties by humorist James Thurber, is an obvious reference to one aspect of the "Chicago Fight"—facts versus principles—as recalled in Mortimer Adler's new book.

"The three worst words in education are character, personality, and facts. Facts are the core of an anti-intellectual curriculum. Personality is the qualification we look for in an anti-intellectual teacher. Character is what we expect to produce in the student by the combination of a teacher of personality and a curriculum of facts.

"The scholars in a university which is trying to grapple with fundamentals will, I suggest, devote themselves first of all to the rational analysis of the principles of each subject matter. They will seek to establish general propositions under which the facts they gather may be subsumed. I repeat, they would not cease to gather facts, but they would know what facts to look for, what they wanted them for, and what to do with them after they got them."

When he came to deliver his address to the faculty at the trustees' dinner a month or so later, Hutchins took note of the reaction that these remarks had aroused. Remarking that he had said such things repeatedly in earlier statements, which had been printed in the *University Record,* he added: "Were the editor of the *University Record* still alive, he would, I am sure, be grieved to learn that any of you were surprised at my remarks at the last convocation." He then quoted appropriate supporting passages from eminent scientists and philosophers—Alfred North Whitehead, Bertrand Russell, Stanley Jevons, Claude Bernard, and Henri Poincaré. But instead of leaving matters at that, he poured fuel on the fire he had lit by a series of *obiter dicta* about anti-intellectualism, which could not fail to antagonize the leading members of the faculty:

> "An anti-intellectual attitude toward education reduces the curriculum to the exposition of detail. There are no principles. The world is a flux of events. We cannot hope to understand it. All we can do is to watch it.

> This is the conclusion of the leading anti-intellectuals of our time, William James and John Dewey.
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> "Anti-intellectualism dooms pure science; it dooms any kind of education that is more than training in technical skill. It must be a foreboding of this doom which accounts for the sense of inferiority which we find widespread among academic people.
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> ". . . the recognition that ideas are the essential elements in the development of a science . . . is a repudiation of the anti-intellectual position. The anti-intellectual position must be repudiated if a university is to achieve its ends."

It should not be difficult to understand why these remarks stung and stunned the faculty at the university which, since its inception and certainly in its heyday, had been dominated by the scientific spirit, by empiricism and pragmatism, and by the instrumentalism of John Dewey. The faculty response issued in a variety of documents—a speech by Professor Frank Knight, a widely respected economist, entitled "Is Modern Thought Anti-Intellectual?," and a paper by philosophy professor Charles W. Morris entitled "Pragmatism and the Crisis of Democracy," the latter published in a pamphlet series by Professor Gideonse. The controversy over facts and ideas, and intellectualism versus anti-intellectualism, spread from the campus to the city. Leading articles appeared in the *Chicago Daily News* under such headlines as "Hutchins Stirs University by Questioning Science as a Basis for Philosophy" and "Scientific Writers Challenge Dr. Hutchins' Statement Fact-Finding Art Is Empiric."

But by far the most dramatic confrontation on the issues occurred in February in a debate between Professor Carlson and me which took place in Mandel Hall, the university's largest auditorium, jam-packed with both students and faculty, and with an overflow crowd seated on the platform behind the speakers. My friends admitted the next morning that, though I had not won the debate, neither had I lost it. I had gained enough friends and supporters for the president's position to turn it into a draw.

The debate took place on February 9th. Its repercussions were scarcely over when less than a month later, John Barden published an "education issue" of the *Maroon,* which he introduced with this front-page statement: "Critically campaigning for the intellectual as opposed to the memorization approach to education, the *Daily Maroon* brings its three-month battle to a stormy close with today's issue. . . . New Plan Syllabi for the four general courses are reviewed in other columns of this issue."

All four of the reviews were written by seniors who, like Barden himself, had been students for almost four years in the Hutchins-Adler Great Books seminar. The faculty had every reason, therefore, to infer that the criticisms lev-

eled by these students at the syllabi which they had prepared for the four New Plan survey courses had either been inspired by Hutchins and Adler or, to say the least, reflected indoctrination by them. Some impression of the tone and direction of these criticisms may be gathered from the headlines that Barden attached to the reviews:

> "Humanities Syllabus Lacks Needed Accuracy" "Social Science I Presents Facts, Overlooks Ideas"
>
> "Logic Missing in Physical Science Course Outline"
>
> "General Biology Course Is Termed Biased, Partial."

To top it off, Barden wrote an editorial that presented the vision of a college in the "utopian future" which would be the answer to "American mediocrity in education"—a college in which all the students would be engaged in the reading and discussion of great books, accompanied by tutorials in grammar, rhetoric, and logic. At the end of four years of such a program, the students, Barden concluded, would rejoice "that education for them had been philosophical, not scientific."

Leading members of the college faculty as well as a substantial portion of the students in the New Plan courses were now drawn into the fight. In the ensuing weeks, what might be characterized as civil war broke out on the campus. The Hutchins-Adler student contingent engaged in public debate with equally vocal and vociferous representatives of the other side. Commenting on this debate, the *Maroon* declared: "To anyone who has had the privilege of reading Mr. Hutchins' address, it will be evident that both philosophically and rhetorically he has said the last word on education as well as the first." It also opened its columns to the opposition by publishing rejoinders to the earlier critical reviews, which charged the critics with being dogmatic, making unsupported statements, deifying the infallible Aristotle, and aiming to constitute themselves a new Inquisition. In addition, in mid-April the *Maroon* published an editorial written by Professor James Weber Linn of the English Department, who dismissed the whole controversy by saying that "the belief that such discussion is particularly important is characteristic of the inexperienced and immature. . . . In education, 'principles' are of little importance in comparison with people." Barden could not let that pass without a comment that verged on insult. "Those who have taken courses in the personality of Professor James Weber Linn," he wrote, "will realize the inevitability of his editorial."

The winds of doctrine that swept across the campus were by now approaching hurricane velocity. On April 21, the College Curriculum Committee drafted a resolution on the educational objectives of the college, which they submitted to the faculty for adoption. I quote from it only the passages that

must be read in order to appreciate the way in which the battle lines were drawn:

> "The University of Chicago has been characterized by its devotion to research and its sense of responsibility to the community. . . . Its attitude has been at once scientific and humanistic.
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> "Certain of the criticisms which have been made concerning the present college program are related and coherent expressions of a common metaphysical background and basis. They grow out of the acceptance of a thoroughgoing rationalism, a commitment to the Aristotelian-Thomist realist view of *universalia in re* . . . They postulate as orthodox a belief in a rational soul engaged in abstracting eternal and unchangeable ideas from experience... .
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> "We believe that any form of rationalist absolutism which brings with it an atmosphere of intolerance of liberal, scientific, and democratic attitudes is incompatible with the ideal of a community of scholars and students, recognizable as the University of Chicago. For over forty years the university has led a distinguished existence without being officially committed to any single system of metaphysics, psychology, logic, religion, politics, economics, art, or scientific method. To follow the reactionary course of accepting one particular system of ancient or medieval metaphysics and dialectics and to force our whole educational program to conform thereto, would spell disaster. We cannot commit ourselves to such a course."

The college faculty adopted the resolution as drafted by the Curriculum Committee.

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In the final issues of the *Maroon* that academic year, Barden wrote an editorial on intolerance, in which he characterized as a specious form of tolerance the view that everything is a matter of opinion, one opinion being as good as another, even when they are contrary or contradictory. By way of rejoinder, Professor Gideonse, after, ridiculing the flight into the past of the neo-Aristotelians, reminded everyone that "not the least of the university's many distinguished contributions was that of the so-called 'Chicago School' of philosophy, identified with the names of Dewey, Mead, Tufts, Moore, and Ames." That, he said, represented the main tradition of this university.

Gideonse was correct. By the same token, the resolution adopted by the college was wide of the mark in asserting that the university had never in its history been committed to a relatively homogeneous doctrine or point of view.

The "Chicago School" of philosophy did represent the main tradition of the university from the beginning of the century until Hutchins became president. The empiricism, pragmatism, and relativism of Dewey, his associates, and followers, were not confined to the teachings of the Philosophy Department; they gave inspiration and direction to the leading professors in other fields, resulting in a relatively homogeneous doctrine and spirit diffused throughout the university as a whole. In a retrospective article that I wrote for *Harper's Magazine* in 1941, entitled "The Chicago School," I pointed out that Chicago's school of thought gradually came to dominate the work of other institutions—in philosophy and education, in biology, social science, and religion. "Chicago had, in its first long period," I wrote, "both homogeneity in itself and affinity with the general trend in American culture. It was the larger community in microcosm."

This led me to ask why anyone should have wished to reform the University of Chicago. Was it not everything that a university should be, doing everything a university should do? "The answer," I said, "is simply that its unity had been achieved too quickly and at too great a cost. The price must be measured in terms of the things which Chicago, and American culture generally, had been willing to give up, had, in fact, renounced as outmoded. At its *very* center, exercising centrifugal force, was a hard core of negations and exclusions," such as the denial of metaphysics and theology as independent of empirical science, the denial of moral values transcending adaptation to environment and escaping relativity of time and place, the denial of intellectual discipline in education, and so on.

"If the positive points in the Chicago movement had been temperately affirmed, truth might have been increased, even transformed, by their addition; but there would probably be no record today of any Chicago School of Thought. Given a sharp, negative twist, they not only created a school of thought but also unified its members in a crusading movement against the old and supposedly outworn. Once remove the negations and make the contrary supposition—that the old is not outworn, but must be integrated with the new—and you will see how hollow at its center was Chicago's unity before Hutchins came along."

I then went on to explain that "what Hutchins attempted to establish at Chicago was not a new school of thought, just as exclusive in its own way as its predecessor." The faculty misinterpreted him in terms of their own extremism. They charged him with wanting "nothing but Thomism," "nothing but principles," or "nothing but the past" where before there had been "nothing but Dewey's brand of pragmatism," "nothing but facts," or "nothing but the present." On the contrary, Hutchins sought to relate science, philosophy, and theology harmoniously without sacrificing the autonomy of each. He wished to be contemporary and American in education without promoting militant modernism or cultural isolationism.

“In the past ten years there have been numerous references to ‘the neo-Scholastic movement at Chicago,’ ‘Chicago Thomism,’ ‘Aristotelianism on the Midway,’ ‘the revival of classicism,’ `the return to the Middle Ages’—all suggestive of the fact that Chicago had become the center of another orthodoxy, the seat of an opposite school of thought. That, however, is simply not the fact. . . . I do not believe that Hutchins ever wished it to be. It was not merely that he and his associates in reform were vastly outnumbered by the dissident voices on the faculty. . . . The truth is rather that Hutchins fought the old school not to replace it by another, but to place its positive contributions, shorn of their ‘nothing-but’ exaggerations, in the perspective of the whole European tradition. Justice could be done to modernity without throwing ancient wisdom out of court.”

Looking back over those ten trouble-filled yet intellectually exciting years, I summed them up by saying that “the Chicago Fight now plays the role ... once played by the Chicago School.” The extraordinary intellectual vigor of those ten years resulted from the fact that the parties to important issues concerning education, the organization of knowledge, and the structure of the university were “willing to see the fight through, wherever the chips fell.” They did not “run away from trouble by insisting upon academic dignity, by hiding behind the false face of academic politeness. Dispensing with kid gloves and Queensberry rules, the discussion turned into something of a public brawl, with all sorts of kibitzers on the sidelines mixing in. But, however lamentable some aspects of the controversy now seem, the Chicago Fight, like the Chicago School, performed the type of service which a university owes to the community.”

Comparing those ten years at Chicago with my previous ten years at Columbia, and also in terms of what I knew about academic life at other universities, I could applaud, without qualification, “the exceptional character of Chicago’s intellectual vitality.”

“. . . there has been more real tangling over basic issues at Chicago than has occurred at a dozen other places during the same time, or at some places during their whole existence. . . . Their faculties may harbor differences of opinions about fundamentals, but you would never know it by listening to the talk at the faculty club, reading the student paper, or detecting signs of strife in administrative decisions. From this usual state of affairs, Chicago differs almost in kind, not degree. The campus has been a seething ferment these past ten years, and everybody has been involved from the president down to the janitors—the students as well as the faculty.”

The phase of the Chicago fight that I have just described centered mainly on issues concerning the aims and methods of general education at the college level. But implicit in that controversy were more fundamental issues concern-

ing the hierarchy of disciplines in the organization of knowledge and the structure of a university—questions about the relation of philosophy, and also theology, to the empirical sciences, questions about the architectonic position of metaphysics, questions about the validity of ethical principles and the objectivity of moral standards. These issues were peripheral or in the background of the interchange between Barden and Gideonse, in the Carlson-Adler debate, and in the jousting of student groups who aligned themselves with the Aristotelians or the social scientists. They came to the fore with the publication in 1936 of Hutchins' *Higher Learning in America*—based on the Storrs Lectures he delivered at Yale the previous year—and they occupied the center of the stage in the final rounds of the Chicago fight... .

In the third chapter of *The Higher Learning in America,* Hutchins called attention to the distinction between permanent and progressive studies, educational content which remains the same generation after generation as contrasted with educational content which changes as new discoveries are made. The distinction had been made by William Whewell a hundred years earlier when, as master of Trinity College, Cambridge, he defended retaining permanent studies as the core of liberal education. Employing this distinction, Hutchins identified the reading of Great Books and training in the liberal arts as the permanent studies to be given a central place in any college that had liberal education as its objective. Progressive studies are not to be excluded from the curriculum, but they should be pursued in the light that the permanent studies can shed on them. As Whewell had said, "the progressive studies which education embraces must rest upon the permanent studies which it necessarily includes. The former must be its superstructure, the latter, its foundation."

Praising the Great Books as "a part, and a large part, of the permanent studies," Hutchins quoted Nicholas Murray Butler's remark that "only the scholar can realize how little that is being said and thought in the modern world is in any sense new." Why, Hutchins then asked, "should this insight be confined to scholars? Every educated person should know the colossal triumph of the Greeks and Romans and the great thinkers of the Middle Ages. If every man were educated—and why should he not be?— our people would not fall so easily a prey to the latest nostrums in economics, in politics, and, I may add, in education."

The Great Books should be an essential part of everyone's education "because it is impossible to understand any subject or comprehend the contemporary world without them. . . . Four years spent partly in reading, discussing, and digesting books of such importance would, therefore, contribute equally to preparation for specialized study and to general education of a terminal variety." In addition, Hutchins pointed out, it would provide the basis for under-standing modern science, and would save us from "the false starts, the backing and filling, the wildness, the hysteria, the confusion of modern

thought and the modern world [which] result from the loss of what has been thought and done by earlier ages."

The complementary part of the permanent studies for which Hutchins appealed consisted of "grammar, or the rules of reading," together with "rhetoric and logic, or the rules of writing, speaking, and reasoning." Summarizing his idea of general education as "a course of study consisting of the greatest books of the Western world and the arts of reading, writing, thinking, and speaking, together with mathematics, the best exemplar of the processes of human reason," he concluded by saying that "all the needs of general education in America seem to be satisfied by this curriculum," and by asking, "What, then, are the objections to it?"

Hutchins dismissed the objection that this course of study is "too difficult for students, who can read or who can be taught to do so. . . . No," he continued, "the students can do the work if the faculties will let them. Will the faculties let them? I doubt it. The professors of today have been brought up differently. Not all of them have read all the books they would have to teach. Not all of them are ready to change the habits of their lives. Meanwhile they are bringing up their successors in the way they were brought up, so that the next crop will have the habits they have had themselves. And the love of money, a misconception of democracy, a false notion of progress, a distorted idea of utility, and the anti-intellectualism to which all these lead conspire to confirm their conviction that no disturbing change is needed."

William Whewell and Nicholas Murray Butler may have cherished the same idea of liberal education that Hutchins was trying to promote; they may have had as little hope as he of persuading those whom they knew to hold contrary views; but unlike Hutchins, they did not tell those whom they had little hope of persuading that it was their own intellectual and moral defects which stood in the way. No wonder that Hutchins' message was received with as much equanimity as would be produced by a shower of barbs and nettles.

The final chapter of *The Higher Learning in America* criticized the modern university for failings that its faculties regarded as virtues rather than defects. A graduate student at a modern university, Hutchins wrote, finds "a vast number of departments and professional schools all anxious to give him the latest information about a tremendous variety of subjects, some important, some trivial, some indifferent. He would find ... that all these subjects and fractions of subjects must be regarded as equally valuable. . . He would find a complete and thoroughgoing disorder." What is worse, Hutchins declared, the university takes pride in this disorder and has "resisted attempts to correct it by calling them undemocratic and authoritarian." And the reason why disorder is the chief characteristic of the higher learning is that there is no ordering principle in it:

"The modern university may be compared with an encyclopedia. The encyclopedia contains many truths. It may consist of nothing else. But its unity can be found only in its alphabetical arrangement. The university is in much the same case. It has departments running from art to zoology; but neither the students nor the professors know what is the relation of one departmental truth to another, or what the relation of departmental truths to those in the domain of another department may be."

Hutchins then contrasted this picture with the hierarchical structure of the medieval university in which theology was queen of the sciences and philosophy was her handmaiden. Theology provided the medieval university with its principle of unity and of order. In ordering the truths that dealt with the relation of man to God, the relation of man to man, and the relation of man to nature, it also placed the three faculties of the university—theology, law, and medicine—in an order that subordinated medicine to law and both to theology. Theology, Hutchins admitted, could no longer be appealed to as the source of unity and order. He proposed that we go back to the Greeks and employ metaphysics, as they conceived it, to perform this function. Concerned with first principles, ultimate causes, and the basic categories involved in the understanding of any subject matter, metaphysics can serve as "the ordering and proportioning discipline. It is in the light of metaphysics that the social sciences, dealing with man and man, and the physical sciences, dealing with man and nature, take shape and illuminate one another. ... Metaphysics, then, as the highest science, ordered the thought of the Greek world as theology ordered that of the Middle Ages. One or the other must be called upon to order the thought of modern times. If we cannot appeal to theology, we must turn to metaphysics. Without theology or metaphysics a unified university cannot exist."

Hutchins' reiterated disclaimer that he was not "arguing for any specific theological or metaphysical system" did not save him from the justifiable suspicion that he had one secretly in mind. That, however, was not the main disquietude on the part of those who opposed him. Even if he had not proposed that metaphysics take the place that theology once occupied; even if he had admitted that theology failed to unify the medieval university on points of doctrine; even if he had used the word "philosophy" instead of that troublesome word "metaphysics" to name a mode of inquiry and a body of truths distinct from the whole range of empirical sciences, the reaction would have been essentially the same, though it might have been less violent. In the eyes of his contemporaries, he would still have been guilty of the twofold heresy of calling for a hierarchy of disciplines in the higher learning with one sovereign over all the rest, and of giving that sovereign place to philosophy as regulative of the empirical sciences and other fields of scholarship.

In fact, if Hutchins had done no more than insist that empirical science is *not* the only valid knowledge to which we can appeal, that the scientific method

is *not* the only reliable mode of inquiry capable of achieving approximations to the truth, and that philosophy, having a method of its own, is an organized body of respectable knowledge, *not* an assortment of personal opinions, and is capable of discovering and establishing truths *not* attainable by science, such pronouncements would have been as passionately rejected by the scientists in our universities and by most of the philosophers as well. Their passions would have been further aroused if that error were compounded by saying that philosophy can answer questions that science cannot answer, and by declaring that the questions philosophy can answer are more fundamental and more important—more fundamental because they are concerned, in the speculative perspective, with the ultimate features of reality; and more important because, in the sphere of action, they are concerned with values, with good and bad, or right and wrong.

Harry Gideonse, the professor of economics who several years earlier had tangled with editor John Barden in the columns of the *Daily Maroon,* spearheaded the faculty opposition at the University of Chicago. His critique of *The Higher Learning in America,* which he delivered orally on the campus, appeared in book form in 1937. Its title, *The Higher Learning in a Democracy,* plainly implied that Hutchins' views were antidemocratic. Hutchins himself had anticipated that this would be said about views that called for a hierarchical ordering of the various fields of learning instead of treating them all as of equal importance.

Gideonse's critique began by asking whether the unification of the university is to be voluntary or mandatory. If voluntary, should it not be developed by the community of scholars employing their diverse methods of research? If mandatory, who will impose it? The tendency of these questions was, of course, to imply that the unification would be imposed from above—by Hutchins and by means of philosophy, not by the scientific method. Hence, in the name of science and democracy, Hutchins' proposals must be rejected.

Gideonse did not believe that Hutchins had no particular system of metaphysics or philosohical doctrine in mind. Hutchins kept on reiterating that by philosophy he did not mean the doctrine of any particular philosopher, any more than he would be referring to *Newton's* physics when he spoke of physics or to *Lyell's* geology when he spoke of geology. Nevertheless, Gideonse and others charged him with trying to promote the philosophy of Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas. Even though they had considerable justification for the allegation, the point had little importance, since Gideonse's main concern was that, in a modern university and in a democratic society, the only kind of knowledge that can and should be respected as valid is the kind achieved by the methods of investigative science. Therefore, philosophy, in Gideonse's view, must be precisely what Hutchins repeatedly said philosophy was *not*—subjective opinions, personal insights, even wild conjectures.

Where Hutchins proposed that metaphysics or speculative philosophy should provide the ordering and unifying principles for the higher learning, Gideonse countered by asserting that "the true scholar finds his unifying principles in the . . . methods of science." It is these "that unite him with his associates into a community of scholars and scientists." The role that philosophy should be playing in a modern university, according to Gideonese, is that of handmaiden to science, confining itself (as positivistic and analytic philosophers were currently recommending) to therapeutic clarifications or methodological subtleties, and definitely eschewing any attempt to achieve knowledge of the world that, as Hutchins conceived philosophy, would be as valid in its own right as scientific knowledge was in its, yet independent of science and unaffected by advances or alterations in scientific thought. While refusing to acknowledge that philosophical questions can be answered by knowledge rather than opinion, Gideonse nevertheless did concede that philosophy might make a positive contribution through clarifying the values by which we live.

In a number of addresses to the faculty at Chicago, Bob Hutchins tried to overcome Gideonse's misunderstanding or misrepresentation of his views, without yielding an inch on the main tenets of his position....

Nothing he said, however, mollified his adversaries or moved the controversy to a plane where the issues might be resolved by rational debate. The Chicago fight soon spread from the university to the nation. As more and more reviews of *The Higher Learning in America* appeared in popular as well as professional journals, the adverse criticisms being uttered in Chicago were echoed across the land. The biggest gun fired off against Hutchins—a review written by John Dewey, which appeared in two issues of the *Social Frontier* in January, 1937—was the only one that elicited a published rejoinder from Bob, except for a summary response to all the adverse reviews, which he wrote for *The Nation* in 1940.

Dewey's criticism contained the same oft-repeated charges—President Hutchins' "authoritarianism," his "contempt for science," his appeal to "fixed and eternal truths." Bob's reply, entitled "Grammar, Rhetoric, and Mr. Dewey," began by saying that "Mr. Dewey has stated my position in such a way as to lead me to think that I cannot write, and has stated his own in such a way as to make me suspect that I cannot read. . . . Mr. Dewey says (1) that I look to Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas; (2) that I am antiscientific; (3) that I am withdrawing from the world; and (4) that I am authoritarian."

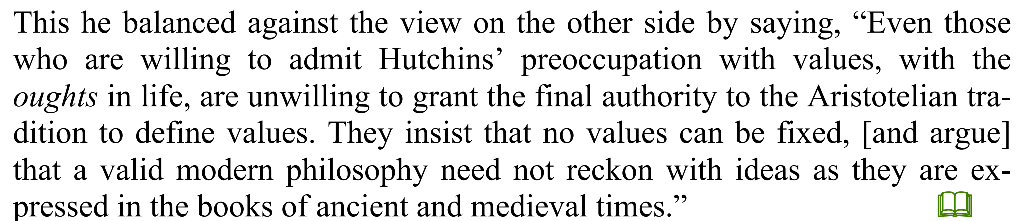
Hutchins then went on to answer each of these charges by citing passages in *The Higher Learning in America* which refuted them. He pointed out, for example, that "the words 'fixed' and 'eternal' are Mr. Dewey's; I do not apply them to principles or truths in my book"; and he ended up by saying; "Mr. Dewey has suggested that only a defective education can account for some of my views. I am moved to inquire whether the explanation of some of his may

not be that he thinks he is still fighting nineteenth-century German philosophy."

Dewey, not Hutchins, had the last word in this interchange. Declaring that he had originally thought Hutchins' book "a work of great significance," he now reported a change of mind. In his judgment, Mr. Hutchins' reply avoided the main issues. "I cannot find in his reply any indication that he either repudiates the position I attributed to him or is willing to defend it. . . . I must ask his forgiveness if I took his book too seriously."

The furor at the University of Chicago and, in the rest of the country, the controversy about what was going on at the university, had reached proportions that, in the judgment of the editors of *Fortune,* merited extensive coverage in their magazine. They commissioned John Chamberlain to write the article. Chamberlain's confessed difficulty with certain aspects of the Hutchins position did not seriously impair his effort to present a fair picture of the two sides in the controversy at Chicago. His *Fortune* article, which appeared late in 1937, reported, for example, the view, on one side, that "science, no matter what its glories, can't advise you on your likes and dislikes; it cannot give you a scale of values. It can tell you *how* to fight a war, but it cannot tell you whether or not you *ought* to have a war."

This he balanced against the view on the other side by saying, "Even those who are willing to admit Hutchins' preoccupation with values, with the *oughts* in life, are unwilling to grant the final authority to the Aristotelian tradition to define values. They insist that no values can be fixed, [and argue] that a valid modern philosophy need not reckon with ideas as they are expressed in the books of ancient and medieval times."



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