

THE GREAT IDEAS ONLINE

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EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS

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Part 4 of 4

III. *CONCLUSION: A PROPOSAL TO THE ASPEN INSTITUTE*

- A. As I have already confessed, I have no hope.
 - 1. I think there is no chance of stemming the tide or reversing the direction in which things are going.
 - 2. On the contrary, I think there is every reason to believe that present trends in the wrong direction will be accelerated.
- B. Since we cannot look to our institutions of higher learning for the restoration of humanistic learning and the preservation of culture, where can we turn?
 - 1. The only answer I can come up with is: to the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies.
 - 2. At this benign moment in Aspen's history, when all its present programs will be enhanced by developments at Wye Plantation, the Aspen Institute, it seems to me, is in an ideal position to launch a new kind of program that may help to solve what otherwise appears to be an insoluble problem,
- C. To explain how the purpose and direction of the new program I am proposing would differ from all the programs currently in operation, let me call your attention to a fundamental diremption between two sectors of human life.
 - 1. All of us lead two lives, though unfortunately most of us in the contemporary world tend to overemphasize one at the expense of the other.
 - a. Each of us is a public person, a member of society, concerned with the problems that confront our social,

political, and economic institutions and with efforts to improve their operation for human betterment.

- b. But each of us is also a private person who should be equally concerned with his or her own personal development, with the enrichment of our minds, with the cultivation of our sensibilities, and the enlargement of our spirit.

(Unfortunately, as I have just pointed out, we tend to devote more thought and energy to human betterment through social improvements than to such betterment through personal development.

- 2. What I have just said is also true of the Aspen Institute. It has devoted most of its thought and energy to what I shall call “social humanism”—human betterment through the improvement of our social, political, and economic institutions.
 - a. All of the Aspen programs and projects now in operation, including the Executive Program, reflect this over-emphasis on, and sometimes exclusive concern with, social action.
 - b. The readings and discussions in the Executive Program are largely concerned with social, political, and economic problems, though there are a few spots where the interests of man’s private life come to the fore.
 - c. The Thought Leading to Action programs, and the other special projects, are similarly directed to man’s betterment through societal reforms.
 - (1) What has been accomplished in these programs represents a remarkable achievement.
 - (2) But, more important, what has been accomplished would not have been achieved if it had not been undertaken by the Aspen Institute,
 - (3) We could not have looked, to our universities, or to any other agencies in our society, for the results that have been produced,
 - d. The two words that sum up this aspect of Aspen’s contribution are “Governance” and “Action.”

To spell this out let me substitute for “Thought Leading to Action” a fuller formulation of what all these programs consist in:

“Thought—about the governance of our social, political, and economic life—leading to action that win result in the betterment of the human. condition.

3. But, as I have said, this should be regarded as only one half of the picture. This is the social or public side of humanistic studies. What about the other half—the private and personal side?

- a. If “governance” and “action” are the key words in all the public programs; the new program I am proposing for the other half—the private and personal side—of humanistic studies can be summed up by two comparable key words:

in place of Governance, *Culture*

In place of Action, *Understanding*

- b. Again, spelling out what I have in mind in a fuller formulation, I am calling for a program that might be described as follows:

“Thought—about basic ideas and the basic intellectual the arts and sciences—leading to the preservation of culture and to the betterment of the individual’s private life by the enrichment of his understanding and the, cultivation of his mind.”

4. Let me leave it at that—the proposal of a program of persona: rather than social humanism, devoted to understanding and culture, not to governance and action.
 - a. At this time, it would be premature and presumptuous to outline the shape such a program would take, to determine its substance and scope, or the means to be employed in its operation,
 - b. Next summer will mark—and, I hope, will celebrate—the thirtieth anniversary of the Aspen Institute, which owed its inception in good part to the inspiration provided by the letter Ortega y Gasset wrote to Walter Paepcke in 1949.
 - c. It would, therefore, be a most appropriate time for us to create a conference or workshop at Aspen to think

about the formulation of the cultural program that Ortega had in mind and that is so much more needed now than it was thirty years ago.

- d. If the objectives I have proposed are clear in our minds, I am sure that we can devise the means for achieving—or at least approximating—the ideal that guides us in our efforts.
5. The end we have in mind—an end that we now recognize no longer motivates or guides our institutions of higher learning and that we must hope Aspen can achieve—is the restoration of what Aristotle called “paideia”—
the humanistic learning of the generalist that is no longer promoted or cultivated by our colleges and universities—

or, in other words, a program of humanistic studies that aims at the preservation of culture and the dissemination of it for the enrichment of the Individual’s private life and the fullest development of the human spirit.

6. If we can, in any measure, succeed in this effort, we will have realized the dream that Ortega had in 1949 for the mission that Aspen. should perform—a mission that the universities have turned away from and that our society has neglected.



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