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**ABSTRACT**

Transcripts of three conversations on liberal education, recorded at a 1977 conference at St. John's College, Santa Fe, are presented. The idea that great books are the best instruments for liberal education is addressed, and it is suggested that great books demonstrate to the student what is possible in the way of inquiry and expression, and that a great book is one that proposes a possible truth. Opinions are voiced regarding whether a book that raises important questions should be included in a curricula, and generally the criteria that are used in determining great books. Attention is directed to the kind of ordering principle that is possible and appropriate for a curriculum of liberal studies, and the question of art and method is raised. The broader issue of the relation of the undergraduate college of liberal arts to the modern university is also addressed, and it is suggested that the student should be taught the habit of inquiring into the foundations of the special disciplines. One view is that each discipline has its own proper methods and that a liberally educated person possesses the methods of the primary disciplines. Another topic of discussion is the purpose of studying works that represent the human figure acting and suffering. It is suggested by the editor that two main educational principles seem to underlie the conversations: the purpose of undergraduate study and the nature of learning. Participants took the position that the proper activity of undergraduate study is liberal education, or general education, and that learning is an activity of the student in which the teacher may be helpful. Liberal education is concerned with the whole range of human knowledge and experience. (SW)

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# THREE DIALOGUES ON LIBERAL EDUCATION

*With Foreword and Afterword*

*by*

**WILLIAM A. DARKEY**

*Editor*

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3

# CONTENTS

## PERSONS OF THE DIALOGUES

*vii*

## FOREWORD

*ix*

## FIRST DAY

1

## SECOND DAY

40

## THIRD DAY

84

## AFTERWORD

117

# PERSONS OF THE DIALOGUES

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Asterisks indicate members of the Committee on the Liberal Arts. Mr. Weigle was present for the first discussion only, Mr. Townsend for the third only, and Mr. Ault did not attend the second session.

## FOREWORD

The three conversations recorded here took place at St. John's College in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in April 1977, as one part of a conference on liberal education. The conference and the publication of this book were made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to whom we express our gratitude. Participants in the conference and in these conversations were all members of faculties which are now, or formerly have been, committed to unconventional programs of liberal education. It will be evident to readers of these *Dialogues* that all of these programs have evolved from the so-called "great books" movement which began after the first World War at Columbia University under the guidance of John Erskine and has continued throughout the succeeding decades in various realizations and at different institutions. These programs continue to provide both in educational philosophy and practice the only serious alternative to the chaos of elective proliferation which has all but suffocated liberal education in America.

The curricula represented at the 1977 conference differ a good bit from one another and, moreover, have undergone divergent evolutionary developments in the course of their separate existences. The conference was conceived as an occasion upon which collective experience might be shared in the context of a common agreement about fun-

## Foreword

damental educational principles. Therefore we did not propose at this conference (unless by implication) to debate the major educational issues which we would draw with the educational establishment at large. Admittedly, that debate might be of greater intrinsic importance than our actual discussions, and no doubt it would provide an occasion for more dramatic confrontations. On the other hand, the dialectical process that would have been necessary to come to terms adequate to support a meaningful intellectual engagement over those issues could not fail to be long and tedious; and, since only three days were available for the conference, it seemed more likely that real conversation could take place with the present rather specialized cast of characters than with a group more broadly representative. We hope that in future a second conference may provide the occasion to join some of those more fundamental issues.

This having been said, it might well be asked what general interest we conceive these conversations could have to warrant our publishing them. The question has force in view of the number of books on education now being published. Our answer, whether it persuades or not, is very simple. It seems to us that the three dialogues are interesting conversations on an important subject. A large part of that presumed interest lies in the very fact that they are conversations—or dialogues.

Dialogues are not very common these days, especially in written form. They do not much suit the spirit of the time, which favors the "one-liner" for amusement and the analysis-and-proposal style for the presentation of serious practical issues. Dialogue, by contrast, is speculative and leisurely. Thinking takes time. Nevertheless, dialogue is the natural way we find out what we think, the way we discover the principles on which we act, and the way we discover in thought the implications of those principles.

The essence of dialogue lies in the interchange between our own mind and other minds. The ultimate importance



## Foreword

of such interchange is a matter of the commonest sense. We know very well that, whatever position we take on any subject, another mind is bound to see it in a different light, and that such cross-illuminations may lead to important discoveries by those listening to the conversation as well as by those who are doing the talking. In either case listening is essential.

This makes it possible to say why we offer the *Three Dialogues*. We believe that there may be some considerable number of persons interested in education who would like to listen in on three conversations that actually took place among a group of teachers who are deeply concerned about liberal education, and who have committed their lives to a special way of carrying it out in practice.

Because dialogue is such an unfamiliar form of writing, it may be helpful to offer a few comments about it. To begin with, the reader must bear in mind that the dialogue does not intend to end up with a proposal for action. On account of this it may seem not to "get anywhere." The aim, though, is to try to understand, and if in the end something has been understood, then one has gotten somewhere important.

Each discussion begins with a question proposed by the chairman of the meeting, and a comment about this practice may help to avoid misconceptions. The opening questions are really ways of indicating a topic and a perspective on it. It is presumed that the ensuing conversation will take off from that beginning and perhaps move about it as a center. It is not supposed that the question will be definitively "answered" in the way an equation is "solved"; indeed, it is obvious that the questions proposed are not the sort that can be disposed of in such a way. Once a discussion has begun in response to the opening question, the conversation that follows becomes a sort of organic creation of all those who are part of it, and it may well uncover a center of its own which turns out to be rather different from the one initially proposed. This kind of self-definition is not neces-

## Foreword

sarily to be regarded as a failure of relevance; it may simply exhibit the virtue of following the argument wherever it may lead the participating minds.

It is, of course, not to be expected that a reader will agree with all the things that are said in a dialogue. Surely he will disagree with many of them. But in reading a dialogue it is not the point to be persuaded by the speakers—who in any case often do not agree among themselves. For the reader, the whole point is that by agreeing or disagreeing he will thereby have the pleasure and profit of formulating for himself his own answers and objections to what has been said, and thus of discovering or rediscovering what he himself thinks about the matter at hand.

As a final piece of information, it should be explained that, before the conference was convened, all members were asked to read Plato's dialogue, *Meno*. Therefore, although this work is not an explicit text for the discussions, it nevertheless provides a context for them and underlies much that is said. It is, indeed, a fourth dialogue on liberal education, and a far better one than these three. It should be well known to all who have an interest in the subject.

In the following discussions, the terms *seminar* and *tutorial* are introduced by the speakers without explanation. It will be helpful to the reader to understand that the two words designate the principal kinds of classes used in teaching the curricula under discussion. Although one effort of the discussion is to define these terms as fundamental modalities of teaching and learning, some preliminary clarifications are possible.

Both kinds of classes proceed by free discussion of a text that has been read in advance of the meeting. They differ in that the seminar consists of about twenty students and two teachers. Seminar readings are comparatively long assignments from works of philosophy, poetry, history, economics and so on, which are taken up, as the great

## Foreword

books are taken up, in chronological sequence. Seminars meet twice a week for two hours or so.

Tutorials are smaller classes that meet more frequently under the guidance of one teacher (tutor). They are devoted to the study of languages and mathematics. In the tutorials texts are read much more slowly and more closely than in the seminars. Reading is accompanied by regular exercises in translation, demonstration, exposition and experimentation.

## FIRST DAY

*Mr. Darkey:* On the part of St. John's College and our Committee on the Liberal Arts, I welcome you all most warmly to this conference. We look forward with much pleasure to the three days of conversation we shall be sharing.

The most obvious characteristic we all have in common is that we belong to faculties who are committed to liberal education in a sense of that term that we hold to be fundamental, even though it is at great odds with current educational orthodoxy. Superficially we might all be said to be engaged in "great books" education. We all recognize that this is not a very happy way of putting it, because, for one thing, we have plenty of examples all around us to show that the books we agree to call *great* can be used in many different ways and with many different intentions.

But it seems likely that we who are here make radical assumptions about what great books are. It seems likely, too, that our many decades of shared experience in teaching with their help may have brought us to new understandings or deeper understandings of their real nature and right use.

The question, then, with which we propose to begin today's discussion looks towards a possible re-examination of the idea that great books are the best instruments for liberal education. I ask then, what do we now think great

## First Day

books are? How do we think they ought to be used for liberal education? And why?

Mr. Bart: I've often heard it said, and I think I agree, that the reason we use great books can only be because we expect to find the truth in them. If I'm quite sure the truth is not in a book, then I'm sure it is not a *great* book, and I see no particular reason for students to read it.

I can well imagine my account of great books would prove very controversial, but as I have reflected on it, that seems to me to be where I really stand. Books from which I did not expect to learn at least a truth, if not *the* truth, I think I would reject outright as not being useful for our educational purposes. I feel my duty as a teacher is to bring my students to confront a great book as being one that proposes a possible truth. I am ready to entertain the thought that the truth is in it.

Now I admit this claim is difficult to maintain with respect to certain of the books we read, say, the older scientific works that we feel are outdated. For instance, I don't entertain at all seriously the idea that the earth is at rest with the planets going around it. On the other hand, I think Ptolemy's approach to his data in his *Almagest* may be as good an approach as a scientist can possibly take. So, although that's not a truth in any final sense, I do think it is worthwhile to look at Ptolemy's work. And yet, even so, I would doubt the value of our studying some other "outdated" scientific works, because I don't see anything in them like what I see in Ptolemy:

So I suppose that, even to myself, I'm not going to be able to justify all of the books on our reading list on the simple proposition of their truth. Even so, in the case of the most central books, I would maintain that we read them because we expect to find the truth there. That makes my position different from the position of those who hold that the truth is in some particular one of these books; and also from the position of those who say that it is not in

## First Day

any of them. Both would disagree with me completely, and they would have to give an account entirely different from mine of how and why these books ought to be used in liberal education.

Nevertheless, I have stated my own assumption and the teaching practice that follows from it: I put one of these books before the student, and we inquire together in complete seriousness whether what the author says may not be the truth of the matter.

*Mr. Nicgorski:* Working with your preliminary account, could we try to bring under its umbrella some of those books like the outdated ones in the history of science, where their account doesn't seem to be the truth, by saying that we can find in them something that is true about the method or the art of inquiry? This might be a way to move from your preliminary account of great books as having the truth to an independent and secondary consideration of these books as examples of the arts of inquiry and the liberal arts of expression?

*Mr. Simpson:* But surely we don't need to make any apologies for Ptolemy's work. His fundamental principle of regular motion in a circle is hardly outdated.

More generally, though, I think there are many ways in which a book may be speaking the truth.

*Mr. Bart:* I wasn't saying that Ptolemy's work was simply not speaking the truth; and the case is certainly a simpler one than one might be.

I'm grateful for the implications of your remarks.

*Mr. Weigle:* I think what Mr. Nicgorski has said ought to be followed up. For it does seem to me that the great books are exemplars of the liberal arts, the arts of the mind. That's at least a second reason for using them in a liberal arts curriculum: they demonstrate to the student what is possible in the way of inquiry and expression.

*Mr. Steadman:* I'd like to suggest another approach to the question, though I don't know how far it is in the

## First Day

end from what Mr. Bart suggested. Could we start with the Socratic principle, the one principle he has faith in and will fight for, that it is our duty to inquire for the truth, because that will make us better men? From that viewpoint, it may be that we see in a great book the work of a human being at the height of his humanness. Aristotle terms it "the activity of the soul in accordance with reason and the most excellent of its kind." Looked at that way, these authors can be seen as human beings who are carrying out this human activity in its best mode. That would mean that, whether or not they had come to certain understandings which we would want to call "scientific" truths, nevertheless, we as human beings have some essential relationship to what they have done.

This points from another direction to a possible reason for the use of great books in liberal education, (remembering that *liberal* education means *freeing* education), namely, that we want to help our students begin to carry out that specifically human "activity of soul in accordance with reason", and to carry it out as excellently as they can. So we try to get them to confront and understand and be led to admire and imitate some other human being who has achieved that kind of excellence.

I think the two views that have been expressed so far of what great books are, products of the highest human activity, as I've been saying, or containers of the truth, as Mr. Bart was putting it, may not be so far apart.

*Mr. McArthur:* Mr. Bart raises a practical problem in saying that when he puts a great book before his students, he is seriously proposing it to them as a book that may contain the truth about the subject—or even a truth about the subject. A new or inexperienced tutor couldn't do that, because he might never have read, say, Newton's *Principia*, or some other great and difficult work that is prescribed by the curriculum. Doesn't a tutor in that position have to say, then, that as far as he's concerned, the work in question is

## First Day

a *proposed* great book, and that he has a certain faith in the judgment of the teaching community that it's worth his time and his students' time simply to explore it, seeking for what's there? Because it may be only after years of study that he can come to any settled judgment of his own about the greatness of such a work as the *Principia*. But that oughtn't to prevent him from exploring works like that with his students.

So your statement, Mr. Bart, would be the statement of a person with considerable experience, but it couldn't be the stance that a young tutor just beginning could take with his students.

*Mr. Simpson:* It seems to me that even the initial reading of these books, however exploratory and doubtful and complicated it may be, somehow or other is energized by the smell of truth. There is something about even this first reading that is attractive to the mind.

And I think that's somehow the point about the seminar. Over the years, the seminar is energized by the sense that we are in contact with sources that are rich and exciting; that in a certain sense there is more substance to the experience than an abstract faith that the community has hit on the right books; and that really we are feeling excitement at the prospect of something turning out to be right. And even if, on the face of it, it turns out to be dead wrong—maybe like the Ptolemaic system of the world—it's wrong in a way which looks fascinating to the mind.

I like the ground you proposed for us, Mr. Bart.

*Mr. Bart:* I welcome your support. It helps me move towards an answer to Mr. McArthur. I think what you say, Mr. McArthur, about the situation of the new teacher is probably simply true. But I was looking mainly to the student rather than the teacher.

I think the claim the student has on us is that he rightly wants to know the truth about things. Of course we can say, "You're very young, and you'll have to postpone that con-



### First Day

cern"; but even if we avoid him that way, it still seems to be his legitimate concern to know what is the truth about the world and about his relationship to it. In that sense, I cannot picture myself addressing him without presupposing that he might find the truth in what I'm offering.

That's what he wants, I believe, and I don't think he is properly served either by being told to wait or by being presented with some opinion as though it were a truth, nor yet by being told that everything is just a matter of opinion—as I was told when I first went as a student to Harvard. "Look around," they said, "and take up anything that interests you. One course is as good as another." I can't think of anything more chilling for a young person who would really like to know the way the world is. It's tough enough that there's no book of which you can say, "Go read this and you'll know the truth."

What you've said, Mr. McArthur, has been immensely helpful, because it has helped me to say explicitly that so far I have been thinking about the student's situation and about my relation to him as a teacher. I don't shrink from declaring I don't have the truth, and I don't really know that the truth is in these books. But I don't know anywhere else to look for it. I must say I offer them to students wholeheartedly with the idea in mind that they do, somehow, contain the truth, so that I am frequently accused of being a complete believer in a vast variety of incompatible texts.

*Mr. Nicgorski:* Then, Mr. Bart, you are stepping back from your first position and are now saying that you don't know that the truth is in these books, but that you have some sense that they are the best place to look for it?

*Mr. Bart:* Yes. If that's a stepping back, yes.

*Mr. Weigle:* Maybe that's where the faith in the judgment of the community comes in.

*Mr. Bart:* I meant to be saying that we—or I—put these books before the students because the truth might be in them. I see no other adequate reason for doing what I do.

### First Day

But I fully understand that a teacher who would say that he knew the truth was in a particular one of these books would have to give a different account of why we should read them.

*Mr. Steadman:* Are there any books you're quite sure the truth is not in?

*Mr. Bart:* In the sense in which Mr. Simpson joins me, I would say no.

*Mr. Steadman:* Then any book might be a great book?

*Mr. Bart:* No, most would not.

*Mr. Steadman:* But why wouldn't any book be a great book, if, as you say, the truth might be in any one of them?

*Mr. Lyon:* I'd like to move off the heights of truth and make a more modest proposal in answer to Mr. Darkey's opening question. I think I also may be proposing a sort of instrumental answer to Mr. Steadman's question about how you can recognize great books.

All educators, but especially those who are involved in our sort of venture, are faced with the practical problem that the number of things to know is infinite and the time we have to teach our students is very short. I think it might be that we choose what we're calling "the great books" to be elements of what we believe to be the best liberal arts curriculum, because they can't be reduced to any one "subject matter" and can't really be treated adequately from any one particular approach. So as I've listened to the exchange between Mr. Bart and Mr. Steadman, I've been wondering if we could say provisionally that the more a book permits itself to be reduced to a subject matter, the less truth there is in it?

*Mr. Steadman:* Would you say that about Euclid's *Elements*?

*Mr. Lyon:* I don't know how to answer that. I wouldn't be sure.

*Mr. Simpson:* Well, I for one don't know what the subject matter of Euclid is. It might be tragedy.

## First Day

Mr. Steadman: It might be, but that's kind of straining it.

I think Mr. Lyon has made a useful suggestion, because I do believe that it is our common experience as we read and re-read these great books that more and more understandings come from them from more and more directions. Euclid's *Elements* may start to look like a tragedy. And to use that criterion as a practical test in other places, we can see that Plato's *Republic* cannot be reduced simply to a treatise on politics, or to a treatise on philosophy, and still less to just "literature."

But that's only one way of looking at some of these books, or maybe even a lot of them. Some of them, though, are fairly straightforward. In the case of Euclid's *Elements*, one can say, "Yes, that's mathematics, in the usual sense of the word; and it just isn't poetry, in the usual sense of that word."

Mr. Tussman: May I, as an outsider not identified with the great books system but sympathetic to it, indicate how surprised I am to find you having this discussion? I don't quite understand my reaction, but I find that the emphasis on truth is not moving me at all. I'm sure I'm wrong, but let me at least say what my initial feeling is.

If *truth* is made central, it's conceivable that we could find the truth about one thing or another in ways that are more economical.

My sense of the educational issue—and this takes us away from truth, although I don't want to say that truth is not an element—is that we have a culture. And I admit it's a notion I find myself horrified even to be talking about. Nevertheless, there is a communal mind that has been developed, and what we call "the great books" are high points in the development of the mind of the culture. Sometimes such a book is a response to a crisis, and in that case the truth component is relatively unimportant. The book is significant as a great human response which is part of the

### *First Day*

series of responses which have developed, let's say, the mind of the West, for example.

If we define the community or culture in terms of these high points—and I think we do—the reason we bring students to this or that great book is that educating them really is initiating them into the culture as members of it. For there is a sense in which a book is dead until it's incarnated in a mind.

The problem of keeping the culture alive is the problem of creating minds of which these great cultural features are a constituent part. So that an emphasis on "We read these books because there is where the truth will be found—or where methods of inquiry will be exemplified," seems to me to be less important than the notion, "We are part of an ongoing culture which is significantly defined by these great episodes or great achievements, and we don't want it to die." The only way to keep it alive is to create every generation in such a way as to incarnate it in the living mind which then is the continuing culture.

It would seem to me that some such way of putting it—although this is a terribly loose way—would be a more natural way of defending the commitment to the great books as instruments of liberal education. And, moreover, this puts the commitment to them in terms which make it impossible to dream of a substitute.

*Mr. Weigle:* When you talk about culture, you're talking about the Western tradition, or our intellectual heritage? Something like that?

*Mr. Tussman:* Yes. Because there are many sets of great books. After all, we're not China or India.

*Mr. Weigle:* But a part of our tradition is constant examination and review, the constant calling into question of the tradition itself. And whenever anyone comes along and contributes something new, that new thing becomes part of it too; so that the culture is a kind of evolving thing.

*Mr. Tussman:* Certainly. Nothing I have said is hos-

### First Day

tile to the notion that truth is important, and inquiry, too, and the re-examination of what has been received. Of course I agree that all of that is important. But I wonder if what I have said about culture doesn't really describe why we do what we do—why we read great books?

*Mr. Bart:* The difficulty I have with what you say is that I'm not sure who the "we" is. Is it "we as teachers"?

To me it seems that what you say is of very great importance. I would say "the very greatest importance," except that I have something stronger yet. For I often describe our task in terms that I think are comparable to yours. But even so, I have to ask myself on what basis would young men and women wish to take up that tradition? Since, as you say, it must be reincarnated.

Now the way in which they would be interested in it is not, it seems to me, automatically from the vantage point that they have behind them a tradition pressing them on, but rather that they want to know the way the world is.

I fully understand that we do give that kind of pressure to certain studies, for example to the historical studies to which I was subjected. And, as a matter of fact, when I went to college I took it for granted that I wanted to know about the past. But in the end, I think the only reason anyone wants to know about the past must be because some truth might be found there.

In short, I do think the student will want to know whether Plato was right or Democritus was right.

*Mr. Haggard:* Let's take your earlier case of "outdated" scientific works and suppose that Ptolemy was not right. Didn't Mr. Nicgorski meet that objection by saying that at least his work does exemplify true methods and arts of inquiry?

*Mr. Bart:* I'm willing to bend to that view and include it. But still, I think that the moment we divorce the arts of inquiry from the truth and the good that might come from those arts, we involve ourselves in some palpable pervers-

First Day

sion of things. So I'm reluctant to say that the arts are thus separable, though I know what Mr. Nicgorski means, and I'm sure I often talk that way myself; and a lot of my teaching is concerned with arts of inquiry. But faced with the challenge, "Really, why should we read great books?"; I just couldn't shrink from what seemed to me the ultimate basis of it: the desire to know the truth.

Mr. Nicgorski: I hope you understand, Mr. Bart, that by saying what I did about methods of inquiry, I didn't in the least mean to abandon my agreement with you about the primary ground for reading great books.

Mr. Bart: No, I understand. I just wanted to connect the two trains of thought. For it seems to me perfectly possible to make the connection.

Mr. Nicgorski: I'd like to raise one question about something Mr. Tussman said. You said, Mr. Tussman; that we choose great books, because they represent great and significant human responses. My question is, how do we determine which responses are the great and significant ones?

Mr. Tussman: I don't know. Why do we still have Plato's *Republic* with us as something we all recognize as a great response to the self-destruction of a culture? How would you answer that question?

Mr. Nicgorski: I would turn to the primary ground of truth that Mr. Bart has laid down. I think that has something to do with why we regard them as significant.

Mr. Loomis: But there's a further question that might be asked about Mr. Bart's criterion. Suppose you do give your students books that have the truth in them. Once you've read these books with a class, how do you think about that experience? What makes you remember that your experience with one book was good and with another it wasn't very good? I'm asking a question I will now try to answer.

The books I remember as great are the ones that have.

## First Day

set the students and me in motion and have moved us in a direction in which we found we could go on for a long time, wondering, and asking questions, and finding some answers.

Let me take an actual example. Last year a group of our students happened to be given a standard biology textbook at the same time they were reading Ptolemy in their math class. They complained about the textbook, saying they didn't want to use it, because it wasn't a "great" book. We had discussions with them and tried to see if we could discover together what kinds of differences there were between the two books.

The one thing that came out clearly was this: everybody who read Ptolemy, including the teacher, was always left wondering in the end; but with the textbook, sooner or later, you came to a point where it stopped—where it wouldn't lead you any farther. And even the questions it posed were stated in terms that weren't useful for continuing the exploration even of purely biological questions.

So it seemed to me that Ptolemy's book is a teacher we never exhaust; whereas, by comparison, the biology textbook was soon exhausted, and the possibility of our going beyond its limits depended entirely upon the challenge that could be presented by the living teacher in the classroom.

One mark of a book that's truly great is that it's an inexhaustible teacher.

*Mr. Haggard:* That's one case, isn't it, where we can't simply say that the difference between the two kinds of books is that one contains the truth and the other doesn't. Because Ptolemy's *Almagest* is scientifically outdated, and the textbook, I suppose, was the latest thing. So something more needs to be said to account for your experience and to say why we study Ptolemy.

*Mr. Steadman:* The criterion that comes out of what you have just said, Mr. Loomis,—and I think it's the essence of Mr. Bart's position—is that a great book is one from which both the student and the teacher are learning.

### First Day

Of course, for that to work, you have to approach the great book without supposing that you already know the truth that's in it. It's not so hard to approach it that way the first time you come to it; but after some experience, you may think you know the truth that's in it. And that idea changes your position in the classroom. You've become a knower of the truth, and you're no longer a student. But if I want to get my students to take a book seriously, I have to take it seriously myself as a work from which I myself can actually be learning right there in the classroom. That calls for the property of inexhaustibility that Mr. Loomis was pointing to.

*Mr. Darkey:* I like the metaphor Mr. Simpson used a while ago, when he said that every reading of a great book, even the first one, is "energized by the smell of truth." The books we have chosen for our curricula are, for the most part, ones that have that smell about them; and I have no doubt that it is this alluring scent that accounts for the kind of classroom experience that Mr. Loomis and Mr. Steadman have been talking about.

But when we talk about *choosing* great books, I think we involve ourselves in an ambiguity. In a restricted sense, we mean that we, as teachers, choose some number from among the great books—from among however many there are—for our professorial task of constructing a curriculum of liberal studies. On the other hand, there is a very real sense in which our great books have been chosen for us already. I mean this in a way which I think is related to Mr. Tussman's notion that a literate tradition or culture seems simply to know its great books, indeed, seems almost to postulate them. And I would suppose that the choice, in this latter sense, must have come about because there is that about them which leads us to suspect they really may reflect something of the way things perpetually are.

*Mr. Simpson:* I was thinking of a kind of internal evidence. They *are* chosen for us; but when we handle them, they come to life again. That life is . . . well, like the



## First Day

term, *wonder*. I think wonder has something to do with what I was trying to suggest.

Mr. Ascher: I'm in some ways an outsider to this discussion, though for many years I have taught a modified version of a "great books" approach to my own subject matter. And I find I am very much in agreement with Mr. Tussman, though I think I would add some things to what he has said.

I am troubled about going to students and telling them that there is a truth to be found in these books. First of all, I would rather say that these books have asked important questions, and that really they're the right questions to ask about man. Secondly, I would want to say that they have come up with modes of reasoning and with conclusions that many people in our Western tradition have considered and have found to be plausible. If I use that approach, I find myself less dogmatic. This isn't to say that I myself don't have some notion about the truth; but I wouldn't want to push that too hard with students. And, finally, there might even be books that are not *great* in the sense of being great works of art, but which, nevertheless, we'd all agree are important for having tried to address very basic questions and have thereby exerted a powerful impact upon Western tradition. And I would include them in a curriculum of liberal studies.

I would feel much more comfortable with that kind of approach.

Mr. Darkey: But, Mr. Ascher, isn't there a very great psychological difficulty for any inquirer to engage seriously in a search for the merely plausible? What one really wants to know is how things *are*; and if, in the pursuit of a particular inquiry, we end up with an answer that we see is no better than plausible, we know that our quest has failed and we've come off second best. I mean to say that even if the plausible is the best we can ever get, nevertheless, it's not something we can set out to look for, because

### First Day

it isn't what we really want—it's by nature a by-product of the search for what is true.

Mr. Ascher: Perhaps I could give an example of what I have in mind. I don't know exactly what you mean by great books, but let me ask this. Would you read Hitler's *Mein Kampf* in your curriculum?

Mr. Weigle: Not at St. John's.

Mr. Ascher: Well I would certainly agree that under certain criteria it is not a great book—indeed, it is not a great book under any criteria. But I would say that, if one were to take the approach of Mr. Tussman,—though he may not agree with me here—I think one would say that for someone studying the Western tradition *Mein Kampf* ought to be included. It has had enormous impact. It asks the very basic questions about man himself and his relationship to other men. Yet, at the same time, it's certainly not a book I would want to advocate as having a truth in it.

Mr. Steadman: But aren't you suggesting that it does?

Mr. Ascher: It asks some important questions.

Mr. Steadman: But if it asks some basic questions, then it's true that those questions are somehow important.

Mr. Ascher: The question, yes. I couldn't say the answers are.

I'm thinking of my own teaching experience. I have in mind a modified great books course based on the course in Western Civilization given at Columbia University which I taught at Brooklyn College, and your curriculum at St. John's is partly modeled after that, though you must work on different presuppositions, since at Columbia *Mein Kampf* was read. And I wonder, if we take your approach, wouldn't *Mein Kampf* be automatically excluded?

Mr. Bart: Yes. Automatically. But I completely agree with you that *Mein Kampf* is worth reading, and I think one would do well to look in it very carefully. But I would look at it from a different point of view. And I'm interested that your point of view would be rather closer to mine, inas-

### First Day

much as we both would want to choose books, which raise important questions.

But I guess I've gone further than that. For I really do believe that a vast number of books—thousands and thousands—raise important questions. That is why I've gone a step further; I simply had to go further than that.

It does seem to me, though, that you and Mr. Tussman are united on the theme that we should look at what lies behind us because very important things have depended on our antecedents. And I agree with you about that. I think it's a very good thing to do.

*Mr. Tussman:* I'm a little uneasy, by the way, with the formulation that puts this in historical terms.

*Mr. Bart:* You spoke of a *tradition*. That seems to me perhaps not necessarily . . . I was not quite sure what you did mean.

*Mr. Tussman:* I don't regard Plato as "historical." We don't need it for historical reasoning.

*Mr. Bart:* One way you spoke seemed to me to say: "There have been great moments that have defined certain cultures, moments in which men have confronted crisis." Now I don't think of that as a particularly historical approach either. Rather, I should suppose such confrontations are to be taken as models. The question I have about this approach is whether presenting models is giving an adequate account.

But as you were speaking, I did think that at times you were saying other things which I very strongly feel are very different from what I first proposed this afternoon. I think the difference has something to do with one's views of history. For instance, I agree it's rather important for us to see what does lie behind us. That might be a very strong reason for Americans particularly to read certain major texts which have converged on the American Republic—even if one has very great reservations about the claims that the invention of the Federal Republic was one of the

## First Day

great answers that came out of an historical confrontation with crisis. But still, it might be a reason for studying those documents.

I wasn't sure whether both of these things, the idea of the model and the importance of knowing our antecedents, weren't wedded in what you're saying. If they're separable for you, then I can't say what I just said. I myself feel that the only historical element that I want for students is that they should know these questions have been asked, and will, I suspect, be asked again and again.

My difficulty with your way of putting it was how one can know what the important questions are and which are the important models. It just doesn't seem enough simply to say to students, "Here's a collection of possible questions and possible models." I think almost all of us have been saying students want more than that.

But I'm not sure we all do agree about that: Maybe Mr. Lyon doesn't, by the way.

*Mr. Lyon:* I'm wondering very much about these "possible models" and "plausible answers." Let me try to put Mr. Darkey's question—or answer—another way. He suggested a moment ago that we inquire because we want to know the way things are, and that great books are instruments of inquiry; but it has struck me at times that that's not our reason at all. We already know the way things *are*. Our inquiry is into the way or ways things *might be*. We are, if you will, looking for alternate models.

I suppose I'd want to separate things according to the true and good. In a basic and primal sense we know the way things are, and that's what's *true*. But we want things to be in other ways that we could conceive of as *good*. So I think perhaps our inquiry is aimed, not at uncovering the way things are, but rather at uncovering the nature of the good and what possible order of things would please us more than the order we all recognize to prevail.

*Mr. Darkey:* Do you mean that alternatives to the pre-

### *First Day*

vailing order—which you think we fundamentally agree about—suggest to us that the way things are is not really necessary, is such that things might be otherwise? And that we tend to get locked in to what are merely habitual and conventional ways of thought so much that we come to believe those ways of thinking represent the way things really are? So that by reading the work of a mind that is looking at the same world as ours and yet is seeing it very differently, we may uncover possibilities we couldn't have imagined or conceived for ourselves? We may then discover that the nature of things might be less restricted than we have supposed, judging merely by our own personal or temporal limitations. Is that possible?

*Mr. Lyon:* It's what I meant to suggest.

*Mr. Weigle:* Maybe this is Mr. Tussman's "culture." The culture is here, it's available, it's timeless, and it has been contributed to by these great writers. Therefore, as we approach a book, looking at the questions the book raises—which are questions also for us—we do indeed discover ways things might be, or at least ways different authors suggest they could be.

Putting it that way entirely avoids any merely historical approach to this business of culture. The tradition is there. Or rather, it's here and it's now. Right here. It's just a matter of learning to read and discover the way the tradition impinges on the present and offers the alternatives you're talking about.

*Mr. Starr:* I think you're right that tradition is somehow here "all-at-once." But isn't it remarkable that it seems to be here in a determinate way? Or perhaps one should say that it's present in a given order which leads us to read authors who lived in an earlier time than ourselves and to read their books which were written in an earlier time. By which I mean that if you simply begin to look about you in the works of contemporary authors for ideas that truly challenge, stimulate, move and incite you to the activity of

## First Day

imagining and thinking critically, I think you find—at least I myself have found—that the modern authors who have that effect are the ones who speak in some way out of the tradition. And they, I take it, were moved in the same way by, say, Kant and Aristotle. Then, when you start tracing these genealogies backwards, you finally come to the Greek thinkers by way of the medieval thinkers. And then, when you get to these roots of things, you turn around and start understanding forwards.

So, in one way, we can think of ourselves as trying to re-think our historical tradition as it somehow is of the past. But we do that always and only because the questions asked, the metaphors proposed, are somehow alive and moving for us here and now. The tradition is truly present and at hand for us; and yet also there does seem to be a kind of temporal order in it as well.

*Mr. Haggard:* Isn't that observation connected with Mr. Loomis's account of the kind of experience that I imagine is pretty common amongst us. For it may be true that very many books pose important questions that we ought to address. But the books that we actually choose to include in our curricula (and probably all of us here have the greater part of our reading lists in common)—these books, I say, pose the important questions in ways that are peculiarly accessible. They exercise our own powers actually to think our way to the place where we can see for ourselves what's at stake in the question that's being taken up. It's not just that the question is *proposed* or *formulated*; we actually go through the argument, reflect on the conditions, and in some way ourselves come to a live questioning, even though we may also see the difficulties which the author's attempted answer has left him with, so that we may decide, in the end, to go a different way for ourselves. But you don't simply wind up with questions; you know where they came from. And what's more, you have posed the questions for yourself.

## First Day

Even in the case of a book whose final conclusions you might doubt or reject, you still know perfectly well that it leads the student to achieve a certain degree of genuine insight into the problem and, as Mr. Nicgorski said, to acquire the skills he needed to get him that far. Those skills have an educational bearing beyond whether Ptolemy was "right" or "wrong." Ptolemy leads on to a particular understanding, but the process of thinking it through goes on from there.

*Mr. Starr:* To say how our way of reading in the tradition differs from the historical—or the historian's—way would be to say how and why we read books in historical sequence. Why, for instance, do we read Diaphantus and Pappus or Apollonius and Euclid to get a background on Descartes and Newton? We do it, not because we're interested in Descartes and Newton as historical characters, or even as important links in a chain of historical development, but rather primarily because they move us and challenge us to think. And I have found for myself, at least, as I go back to the people who moved and challenged Newton, that I in my turn am moved and challenged to think critically. It's not at all a matter of simply detecting influences; it's something much more direct.

*Mr. Steadman:* And it's the power of these books to move us and challenge us to think that is the source of the influence that Mr. Tussman and Mr. Ascher are seeing as coming from them. They are profoundly influential because they address basic and important questions that a great many people have found plausible. Yes! Precisely! And we're simply exhibiting that fact. If we read them, we're profoundly influenced.

I think Mr. Bart was trying to specify the cause of that influence. Why is it that such a book influences us? Well, it's because there is a truth in it.

*Mr. Nicgorski:* We've said that there are many books common to our reading lists. Let's risk a couple of examples

### First Day

so they themselves will be items of our discussion. Let's take Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Karl Marx's *Capital*. We might approach these books convinced that they do not contain the truth and yet feel that they do represent a link in the living tradition of thinking about matters political.

To take the Marx, we might approach his book because it has had influence and impact, so that we feel compelled to think through his arguments with our students, even though over the years we have made our judgment about the book with regard to the truth.

I'm wondering if Mr. Bart would accept the way this is going?

*Mr. Bart:* Very reluctantly. So seriously do I take my position that if I were convinced I understood Marx well enough to say that he's simply false, I would probably not read him at all. Unless, of course, I were to say: "We're an island in the Marxian sea, and we clearly should know what has taken over the world outside us." But that's an altogether different basis of thought from what we were talking about; though maybe it's one reason for reading Marx or Machiavelli.

But it's not easy to know what's in Marx. I mean it's clear that some of the things he says are as doubtful or as problematic as some of the things in Ptolemy. To me, though, it's not clear that everything he says about the condition of man as he observed it is false by a long shot—not by a very long shot.

*Mr. Haggard:* But in support of Mr. Nicgorski, I don't think Socrates' usual procedure of refuting or at least raising serious doubts about the conclusions to which he's led his interlocutor and ourselves as his readers prevents us from learning a great deal through having come to those conclusions and seeing the bearing of his objections.

*Mr. Bart:* I could simply be wrong, and I'm sure examples would reveal that I'm not able to maintain my own dogma. Nevertheless, I'd worry about myself as a teacher,



## First Day

if I were in the position of offering to the student a book in order for him to "see through" it. I don't feel the least bit comfortable with that. I don't feel I have shown enough respect for the student, if I say: "It will be good for you to see what's wrong with this book."

*Mr. Nicgorski:* I must say I do think that would be an inappropriate seminar response.

*Mr. Bart:* Yes. And I think trying to point out what one thinks is wrong with Machiavelli or Marx would be an excellent topic for a lecture, and I'd enjoy the question period. But I don't think that's quite what you meant to say.

Mr. Steadman formulated very well an aspect of what I had in mind. We read books from which the teacher expects to learn at least as much as the student. Now I do think one could be learning the arguments against Marx in studying Marx; but I guess I think that is not the sort of thing I was looking for as the main business of undergraduate education or as the central activity in undergraduate education.

*Mr. Steadman:* To put that another way, it seems to me that in discussion or in reading, pointing out the mistakes that are made isn't very interesting. The search for truth is enormously more interesting than the search for falsehood, because falsehood is inherently uninteresting.

*Mr. Starr:* The last three comments from Mr. Nicgorski, Mr. Bart and yourself, Mr. Steadman, imply the question, Well, why should we read Marx or Nietzsche or Machiavelli—pick the author that appeals to you least—but not Hitler's *Mein Kampf* as well? If we want to claim that a book which is very powerful and has been very influential is nevertheless unworthy of our seminar's attention, we probably want to say that there is a sense in which it was not intended as a genuine incitement to thought; that it did not itself result from any act of discovery, but was rather a piece of pathological behavior. And it may indeed be something that challenges us to think, so that

First Day

we need to explain how such a thing ever came to be written. But such a book is not primarily a consideration that came about as a result of having seen things that hadn't been seen before, whereas I think Marx's *Capital* came out of a new way of seeing things.

Mr. Ascher: I certainly agree with your characterization of *Mein Kampf* as a pathological phenomenon, and that's why I brought it into the discussion. But, on your own principles, wouldn't you make use of a book like Marx's *Capital* in your curriculum, even though you don't accept it? I certainly don't accept it myself, but it surely has all the characteristics you have named as being found in an important and a great book. Wouldn't you give your students Marx to read?

Mr. Bart: Of course I would give it to them. I would give it to them because in almost anything Marx wrote there is a claim about the human condition which I consider very seriously.

Mr. Ascher: Then I see. I have not been understanding you completely.

Mr. Bart: That's not because I'm a Marxist. I read Marx passionately, because I learn from it constantly. I don't know whether some of the most important things he says are true, although I think the things he most prides himself on in certain of his works are probably false. I certainly don't know that his account of capitalism is wrong, and at least some economists claim that you can't decide whether it's right or wrong. But I mean to be saying it's not a question of whether it's right or wrong when we decide to use it in our curriculum.

I am reluctant to give students books which I know are wrong, because it puts me in the posture of reducing them to size. I will be looking down at the books, and, unless I am mistaken, I will be inflating my students. If I do that, I will not be respecting what I think highest in them, their concern to know how things are.

### First Day

I feel the same way about the beauty of anything. Analogously, I would wish to put before them only works of art that I sincerely thought were beautiful. I would not want merely to say: "This represents a certain style or a certain historical period," or "This had a tremendous influence." I myself want to be arrested before the work of art or before the book along with my students.

But I seem to have been carried away, and I feel as if I'm in the position of having answered a question. What was it? I certainly didn't attempt to answer the question, "What constitutes a great book?" Mr. Darkey, what was your original question?

Mr. Darkey: Mr. Bart, I think you have indeed come perilously close to answering a question. And I'm glad you've reminded us that we ought to remember clearly where our conversation started from before we go any further. I confess I've been so interested in where we were getting to that I'd almost forgotten where we began. The opening question had two parts: What do we here now think great books are? and How do we think great books ought to be put to use in the business of liberal education?

This may be the right moment for me to try to summarize our conversation. I think we have not agreed about criteria for judging what great books are, nor yet in saying how they ought to be used. Nevertheless, while we have been thinking and talking out of our experience of teaching with the help of great books, some remarkable metaphors, and many working examples have come into the discussion as witnesses.

I think *tradition* has become the heavy term for us. We seem to agree that our great books—however we might characterize or define them—are at least one of the ways we inherit our tradition. But I sense that the issue we feel among us has to do with the meaning of *tradition* and the end of liberal education. Does our tradition of great books—maybe we'd be willing to say "of great books and liberal

## First Day

arts"—aim primarily at the perfection of the individual person by helping him to understand how the world is? Or, on the other hand, does the tradition of great books and the arts of reading them aim, in the first instance, at the preservation and continuation of the culture of which it is the vital principle, initiating and incarnating its members into itself by implanting its forms and institutions into their minds and memories?

I hope I have not distorted the issue by putting it this way, and I'm not at all confident that I haven't. But the term, *tradition*, does seem to me to have become crucial.

Mr. Dragstedt: I wonder if the St. John's approach doesn't differ from other "great books" approaches to liberal education precisely in that it creates the conditions for an aporetic treatment, really of the tradition itself? Tradition isn't just continuum, it's discontinuum too. Part of the problem in Plato's *Meno* is that Meno himself has too much "culture." The task of fighting sophistry is, really prior to any continuity of tradition, to any handing on of the torch. A book that is very great can throw a reader into an aporetic state with respect to his whole culture. That is, you can be turned into a Menonic slave-boy and be paralyzed, just as he was, by the culture itself. That is to say, only by dying to culture can you live it. But you can't accumulate it, you can't just sit like Fafnir in his cave on the hoard of Western civilization.

I was particularly struck by the position Miss Brann takes in her paper\* that the work of Marx is fundamentally wrong: She seems to have such a conception, and I'd fight it out all the way with her on that issue, but she seems to be stepping forward quite starkly in the right way. And I don't think she means we shouldn't read Marx.

Mr. Steadman: Mr. Dragstedt, I'm wondering if what

\*Brann, Eva T. H. *What Are the Beliefs and Teaching of St. John's College?* Occasional Paper No. 1, Committee on the Liberal Arts, St. John's College, Santa Fe, New Mexico, April 1978.

### First Day

you said about the *discontinuity* of tradition and what you said about the *Meno* as proposing the prior task of fighting the sophists doesn't suggest that the liberal arts, or the liberating educational experience, should free one from that tradition? Not that it should free him in the sense of removing him from it, but that it should enable him to rise above it and enable him to fight the sophists within it. Is that what you had in mind?

Mr. Dragstedt: Sophistry is something you have to combat all over again every day, and that means you have to fight against phony conversation. The task of really getting to the tradition is the task of creating a genuine rather than an orgiastic conversation.

Mr. Steadman: Then I'm not sure what you meant by the discontinuity of the tradition.

Mr. Haggard: That to experience *aporia* is a stop, not a flowing on. You find yourself at a loss with no apparent way to go on. You have to undergo that and cope with it for yourself. Understanding doesn't just keep piling up automatically as tradition accumulates.

Mr. Dragstedt: I think Epicurus says, "Hoist full sail and flee from culture." And right within the culture, within the tradition, the greatest thinkers have seen the tradition itself as the biggest problem.

But whatever one thinks of the Epicureans, it seems to me that confronting the great books nakedly, as we do by means of the seminar, is a struggle. For the seminar is not simple presentation of the great books as such, as if the students were Christmas trees standing there to have tinsel thrown on them. Rather, the great books create there the conditions for the sharpest kind of struggle for everybody within himself. In the seminar, "recollection" in Plato's sense of *anamnesis*, is methodically induced by the appropriate aporetic struggle.

Mr. Steadman: From what you say, I gather that you and Mr. Tussman have rather different views of what the

### First Day

culture is. You seem to be saying that it's something you must free yourself from, something you must rise above; and that the tradition, understood in the right way, enables you to rise above the culture.

Mr. Dragstedt: Mr. Tussman was saying that the great books ought to be included in a curriculum because what we want to do is pass down the culture. In that case the culture must clearly be different from the books. So I would ask him why it is that the culture hasn't been able to defend itself simply as a torch worth handing on.

In a certain sense, I think the problem of the St. John's approach is that it seems to be the only tradition with the power to fight for that tradition. Other approaches which seek to come to the tradition not aporematically, but positively, seem simply to sink down beneath the burden. But the task of actually mobilizing the tradition and of living with it is one that the St. John's program seems able to accomplish precisely by creating very careful conditions for those seminars in which all kinds of other struggles are taken up as well.

In our conversation so far we've talked principally about the seminar; but it must be remembered that the seminar is the cap-stone of a number of other essential enterprises which are carried on in conjunction with it. I mean the laboratories, tutorials and so on. In these, provision is made for the enrichment of terms through engagement with all kinds of specialized procedures and specialist questions.

Recently, for instance, I was reading Levi-Strauss with one of my classes. Levi-Strauss proposes that the phenomenon of the French Revolution was different when lived by a *sans-culotte* and by an aristocrat. At this point the students raised the question, "Well, is the phenomenon of Mars the same for Kepler as for Ptolemy?" In this context of inquiry, the question of Ptolemy's being somehow, "out-of-date" would be completely irrelevant. The really important question that has been posed is, "What is a phenome-

## First Day

non?" Perhaps a phenomenon is simply a line of sight; in which case Kepler and Ptolemy could be said to be observationally equivalent and Levi-Strauss to be in utter confusion as to his proposed basis for scientific analysis.

Such a conversation, it seems to me, can take place only by the elaboration of many facets. And it is essential that it should take place. But you cannot expect to bring it about simply by handing out a book to your students.

*Mr. Starr:* Do you mean to be saying something like this, Mr. Dragstedt: that in order to be worthy of our spiritual heirlooms, we can't simply receive them as so much baggage—as things we may memorize and take a sort of mindless pride in—but that to be worthy of them we must learn how to use them, regardless of which ones of our spiritual ancestors produced them, or what for? And in order to learn that, we have to take the chance of discovering that some, at least, of the heirlooms were badly formed, and that perhaps some part of that ancestral activity was simply perverse? It seems to me, at least, that that's what we have to face in order to become worthy of an inheritance which, at first, we might be tempted to receive uncritically, as the glory of our ancestors. Is something like that what you're saying?

*Mr. Dragstedt:* I mean that we can finally become good speakers. We can finally become spontaneous and invent new arguments, so far are we from sinking down beneath the weight of the three thousand years that are cluttering us up. For the three thousand years would do that, if we didn't know how to leaven them with conversation, with dialectic, and if we spoke without orienting ourselves towards the tradition in the sense you say. But doing that will free us to think creatively, to invent, that is, and to become oriented towards dialectic as a mode of penetrating appearances and creating new terms, enriching terms, and thereby getting to truth.

I might add that I myself don't think one can eliminate

## First Day

truth from such discussions as this one we're having; but I think the problem one has with students, at least in many cases, is that they want it immediately. They don't want to take hypotheses. They want the truth right now. Part of the struggle of the *Meno* is just that. Plato says: "No, you'll have to look at the slave-boy for awhile." For, really, you can't just walk right up and get the grail. You have to take detours. But that doesn't mean we throw the truth out. The truth is recaptured and defended in a most emphatic way, I think, by our tradition.

*Mr. Steadman:* Doesn't that mean, then, that at least some books which have been very influential in forming our culture are not necessarily any part of what we want to pass on? For instance, just *because* certain kinds of "cop shows" on TV happen right now to be very influential, they are in fact something we have to get away from. They constitute an environment that we have to be able to shut out in order to pass on our real tradition. And I mean our *tradition* here to be opposed to our so-called *culture*—our modern American McDonald's culture. So I can only wonder what are the criteria that Mr. Tussman and Mr. Ascher would use to judge which are the important and influential books that we want to avoid.

*Mr. Ascher:* I'd prefer to change the terms and to speak of "major" books rather than of books that I believe contain a truth. I think that way of putting it would have quite different implications. And I am quite sure that, even so, we'd all of us have most of the same books in our curricula, and that they'd be the books you have now. There is no question about that.

*Mr. Steadman:* But do you want to make sure your students understand how we have arrived at the McDonald's culture?

*Mr. Ascher:* No, I don't think I'd take that for an educational goal.

*Mr. Steadman:* Why not?



## First Day

*Mr. Ascher:* Well, if you want to get at the major books by doing it that way, I guess I won't object. But I would rather pose the question in some different form, because I don't think your way of putting it in terms of "the McDonald's culture" suggests the questions that are crucial now for Americans.

*Mr. Steadman:* But how can you tell the difference between *culture* taken in that sense and the kind Mr. Dragstedt is talking about? To be able to make that distinction is why I think it's crucial to have criteria for great books.

*Mr. Tussman:* This is an interesting, complicated, and difficult question; but it's a question that exists within the context of formulating an educational problem: the problem, on the one hand, of how to initiate people into a living culture as against the notion of confronting them with the truth, on the other. Now I take it that the friendly issue we have before us here is which of these formulations we can defend or give an account of in such a way as to justify our paying high educational attention to it? For I take it that, on either view, we would most certainly agree on the corpus of *great*, or of *major*, books that ought to be included in a curriculum.

If we were to discuss more fully the implications of the whole concept of initiation into a culture, then we would begin to see how we make these decisions:

I'm very uneasy about our imagery when we speak of "handing on the torch." I regard it as a much more fundamental thing than that suggests, for I think the shaping of character and the continuation of the community are the things at stake here. This is a life or death problem. It isn't at all a case of "Here's the torch. Carry it, if you've got the time, or if you care to." Actually, if you want to know who you are in any real sense, you must see that you are a fellow of Plato, thinking about your relation to your community; or that you are an Hobbesian, wondering if there

## First Day

is any way out except total submission. And so on. So I find the imagery of cultural goodies which are being "passed along" to be very misleading.

I have no way to put what I mean except to speak of reincarnation, and for me that is the natural way to talk about it. It's our business to keep our culture going, but it isn't that we're "passing it on" like some external things. We keep it going by becoming a living part of it. And we are enabled to do this by being initiated into it.

I think St. John's College is a great institution because it does this. And I don't know of any others that are doing it very well except by habituating people into institutional forms which are unintelligible apart from their background and history; so that, for the most part, people are exercising habits without understanding the basis of those habits. And this is to say that in educational institutions students are not being liberally educated.

*Mr. Steadman:* But what criteria do you use to judge what parts, or aspects, of the culture you would want to reincarnate?

*Mr. Tussman:* I don't know yet how I would formulate particular criteria in our present context. At the moment I'd say it's the culture as a whole that I want.

*Mr. Steadman:* Including McDonald's and the cop shows?

*Mr. Tussman:* I don't see why I have to make a case for McDonald's, but, if pressed, I would probably be tempted to try it. When you're dealing with the phenomena in considering a mass culture, you have to look at such things.

For instance, if you put together all the legends of "the westerner," you find you have a great epic story with heroes, villains, courage, integrity—all of the human virtues that are exhibited in warfare. It's potentially a great story, though we haven't yet told it greatly. But the epic tradition

## First Day

out of which the *Iliad* came was not built in a day either, and someday there will be a poet or a filmmaker who will do for our culture what Homer did for his.

Mr. Haggard: Mr. Tussman, all of us know that at Berkeley you proposed and set up and carried out a program of liberal studies that had some kinship to the St. John's program. And you did this in the context of a great university. This is a very impressive achievement, and it does seem to me that to accomplish such a thing implies an enormous degree of selectivity and an emphasis quite at odds with what ordinarily goes on in the academic world. I think it is from our awareness of these things that the questions are being directed to you. You have seemed to be asking us, "Why do you want to press certain distinctions upon me?", while it seems clear to us that you yourself must have made those very distinctions when you proposed that such a program as your "experiment at Berkeley" was appropriate for undergraduate education.

Mr. Tussman: The great universities of today do not have an educational enterprise of direct initiation. Indeed, one would have to say that the modern university as a whole is a continuing exemplification of our culture, but in an uncomprehending way. In its way, it does incarnate and preserve that culture, even though it doesn't go about it deliberately by taking seventeen-year-old American boys and girls and bringing them into it. Instead, the university brings them into it by all sorts of strange and inadequate ways.

Mr. Starr: Isn't what you're proposing exactly the distinction pointed out in the *Meno* between *memory* on the one hand and something like *recollection* on the other? That is, one receives stories, remembers them, lives in accordance with them, and perhaps retells them. And that's one sort of initiation into a folkway.

But it seems to me that whatever tribe possesses its story, its tradition of memory, in that way only, is in grave dan-

## First Day

ger of becoming a sort of dead thing—or at any rate, not a growing thing. The people within that tribe aren't encouraged and initiated into the further business of trying to see what truth was in the story, or of trying to understand the motives and the artistry of the best story-tellers. This latter sort of critical understanding might be akin to recollection. Perhaps the one who possesses this sort of critical memory eventually becomes the best story-teller. At any rate, he will have a critical understanding of the inherited stories.

*Mr. Tussman:* I would agree with you. But, at the lowest level, the point about the story is that it must be handed on. That keeps open the possibility that at some moment there can be reflection on the story, that the gloss will reappear. And that is a great part of the problem: the stories are not known.

*Mr. Starr:* And I entirely agree with you there. So it seems to me that the problem is "Can there be more?" Is there some way in which an educational institution can give people the kind of reflective freedom we have been talking about with respect to the received stories? It seems to me that you are now addressing yourself to the question of how one makes possible the necessary initiation into that self-critical business of analysis and of recovery and of rediscovery.

*Mr. Tussman:* I thought that's what we do—or what you do—when your students read the great books in a carefully structured educational context, so that they do become initiated into it and find, once they have read Plato, Plato doesn't disappear, as yesterday's thing, but is with them for four years. It becomes part of their equipment. So if, in fact, you succeed in doing this, the question would be, Why aren't more people doing it?

*Mr. Starr:* Isn't that what we're trying to put our finger on? Somehow or other, in these various ways we've been trying to find words for, there is a difference between "ma-

## First Day

“great” books and “great” books. For us, when we read Plato in our seminars, Plato once again is incarnated and becomes alive for us. To do that is the power of a book which is “great.”

Mr. Tussman: I'll agree that that can happen with some Greek books. It happens sometimes with Plato's *Republic*, for instance. But take other things you read. For example, what would be the greatness of *Genesis*?

Mr. Starr: If I followed what Mr. Dragstedt was saying (this is how I read your oracle, Mr. Dragstedt), I think he was saying that, in essence our tradition is a philosophical tradition. What must be passed on is the shock of coming to know that you don't know. And that what we call “great books” are the most efficacious means of radically bringing about that discovery. Now they don't always work. But every once in a while, we, or our students, say on a reading or a re-reading, “My God! Can it possibly be that way?” And you stop, having been reduced to perplexity.

I thought you were saying, Mr. Dragstedt, that it is that act, that experience, which is important in essence, rather than merely seeing that this book doesn't tally with that one, and so on.

Mr. Dragstedt: I don't like to find myself in the position of seeming to advance reduction uniquely. One couldn't, after all, read Homer aporematically.

It seems to me that the task of maintaining tradition is to find the greatest enemies within it and to bring them into dialectical confrontation with one another. One must, for instance, see how dangerous an enemy of Plato Homer really is. To do that, one must entertain the view of Homer as the man who could lie better than anybody else. The struggle of the seminar is to grasp this not as a dead issue but as a living experience. For, while from one point of view Homer is the deadliest enemy of all, you must also see that you can create conversation about him whereby all sorts of necessary questions can be asked, questions, for instance, like Who is Odysseus' son? and What is a son?

### First Day

Now these are "Who?" questions. And one would have to say that, since Plato himself found it necessary to introduce characters into philosophical writing, this very fact asks us what does the question, Who is Theodorus?, have to do with dialectic? That is, what do "Who?" questions have to do with the nature of conversation?

If you could really answer the question, "Who?", then you would know something about "What?"—about What is geometry?, for instance. And finally about What is a sophist?. In this way you would come to see that the very opposition between art and conversation can be brought within the same conversation.

I want to add that I'm horrified at the thought of censoring literature from the point of view of any ideology. I think we can have an ideology only if we move into the tradition with some special *a priori* conception of what the limits of conversation are. In the present instance, you could have one only if you "knew" what dialectic was, and only if you "knew" that it didn't take place in Homer; and that it could take place only under the very special conditions created by Plato and Aristotle. No, I don't think anything useful can be done in that way.

To continue with Homer, the sense in which Homer is a creator, a man who could actually see new figures so as to see what a son was after the time of the *Iliad* and to see what a son had come to be under changed conditions, meant that he had to have a very fundamental understanding of the matter. And that means he conducted conversations with himself. That dialogue of the soul, the conversation of Homer with himself, would be a formidable book.

Mr. Nicgorski: Earlier in our conversation Mr. Bart cautioned us against including in our curriculum books that we as teachers feel are simply wrong on the most important things, because in such cases we as teachers run the risk of looking down on these works as we lead discussions on them. That danger I think is very real. On the

## First Day

other hand, as Mr. Loomis has remarked, we do have the experience in our teaching that some books powerfully open up certain questions for our students, even though we as teachers feel that the way these books resolve those questions is wholly unsatisfactory. My question, then, is whether the sheer power of a book to raise important questions might not itself be a claim upon us to include that book in our curriculum, a pedagogical claim, that is to say?

Maybe a case in point would be Machiavelli's *Prince*. In my experience it almost always opens up for the students a way into a fruitful discussion of the question whether the political realm is independent of the ethical realm, and whether the nature of politics makes that separation necessary. This book raises that question very forcefully. Furthermore, it has some simple cultural impact as well, since students continually encounter the term, "Machiavellian." These considerations seem to me to exert pedagogical claims upon us.

And yet, for all that, if I were to choose books in terms of the positions they take on the relationship between politics and ethics, I would want to stay away from *The Prince*. This is not to say that Machiavelli's work is dead for me; the questions it raises are alive but frequently in a different way or at a different level from that at which they strike students initially encountering the book.

Now I think my example might stand or fall for any one of us, depending on his assessment of this particular book. But I do think a larger question is implicit. Is some criterion involved in our choice of books for our liberal arts curriculum other than that we expect to find the truth in them? Are there totally different and purely pedagogical considerations? Of course the question of truth and the art of pedagogy are not so easily disjointed. If a book were in no way alive for the seminar leader, I have my doubts that he would lead well.

Mr. Bart: I would want to say this: it seems to me es-

### First Day

essential in undergraduate education that at certain moments one stops to say, "Wait a minute. Is this right?" If that question is not somehow before us most of the time in undergraduate education, it seems to me that we're divorcing ourselves, as teachers, from where our students are. Or ought to be. They want to know. And they want help with finding out what's right. They want to know how to ask the question, "Is this right?" about a vast variety of claims that come before them as to what is right.

I have felt surest about my discussions with students when we have come to some kind of terms with the text and paused to admit to ourselves that we are not only interested in it because of various other considerations, but because we want to know whether it in fact seems to show us some real perspective on the truth of the matter.

Of course I agree with the wonderful things Mr. Dragstedt has been saying, but I would want to turn the model of the *Meno* upon him a little bit also. I'm sure he's not going to disagree with me. When the slave boy has been brought to an *aporia* from which he sees no way out, Socrates, in his presence, solves what is implicitly one of the most difficult of all mathematical problems and gives him a way towards the solution.

That is to say, Mr. Dragstedt, I think you are surely right that our task, especially with respect to the culture that is given to us at any time in history, is, first of all, somehow, to arrest ourselves in front of it, to become aware that we do not really understand it, to shed it as something *given*, and to become distressed at our lack of knowledge in general. But it is a terrifying prospect, if we merely leave our student there and say, "That's already a great benefit, and that's enough." I know that Socrates says that at times. And to be sure, the one thus reduced is surely benefitted. But, for me, it is significant that the story ends with his also offering something very important for his further consideration. You wouldn't repudiate the model, would you?



## First Day

Mr. Dragstedt: No. I certainly would agree that a part of the task we face is to give content to discussions by offering paradigms of interpretation, paradigms of behavior, paradigms of procedure. And there are all sorts of ways to do this that we think up over the years of our teaching experience. It's not possible to be heuristic in this sense. There is a certain sense in which Socrates resorts to a tutorial policy in confronting the slave boy.

Mr. Starr: I would like to propose an irony for our consideration. One of the elements that I recall in the proposal to set up the Committee on the Liberal Arts was that we encounter a crucial difficulty in finding the proper place for imaginative works, for works of poetry, in our program of studies. Works of philosophy, scientific works, works with theses, these we are much better able to deal with than with this other kind. It strikes me now that the question of truth—which I think is in an important way the right question—has led us into a discussion of works which propose theses by means of arguments for the reader's consideration. The only examples we have raised of works of the imagination are the Homeric poems, and these have come up two or three times.

It seems to me that we need very much to think about the ways in which the criterion of truth applies, or, indeed, whether it applies, not only to works which we may regard as fundamentally *mistaken* (as, for instance, some of us seem to regard Marx or Machiavelli), but also to works whose intention seems not to be directly to propose a thesis in the way a philosophical work does. And I am wondering in what way a philosophical work does. And I am wondering in what way the question of truth arises about works that don't proceed either dialectically or demonstratively.

Mr. Bart: I can only say a very little bit about that, and it could only start us off. As Mr. Dragstedt has reminded us, Plato thought that Homer was the enemy, so that there must be some encounter between Plato and Homer. Mr.

### *First Day*

Dragstedt has given an account of it which I probably don't exactly subscribe to, namely, that Homer had a great conversation with himself. I just don't know about that. Homer is certainly immensely intelligent.

To take a second step, it seems to me to be clear, although I haven't ever defended this thesis, that Vergil thought that Homer's account of the world was altogether wrong and wrote his poems to set before us a truer account of the world. Moreover, it is certain and quite explicit that Dante thought the same thing of Vergil's account, though not in quite the same way. And both of them acknowledged their debts to their predecessors. I think Dante does simply assert that Vergil's vision is profoundly defective, and it seems to me that Vergil quite carefully says that Homer puts the human question altogether wrongly.

Now you might say that those are just my theses about those works and that they don't really touch the works themselves. But to me Vergil is unthinkable without a sense of what he was writing against, that is, the Homeric view of the world. More broadly, it is hard for me to conceive of an artist who did not have before him the works of other artists, the inadequacy of whose vision he sought to correct.

*Mr. Darkey:* Gentlemen, we all know that conversations like this one do not end; they just stop. Today's time is up, and we must stop now. We'll come together again tomorrow afternoon at the same time.

## SECOND DAY

*Mr. Darkey:* Yesterday we addressed ourselves to the implications of our common use of great books as instruments of liberal education, and, among other things, compared our experience with this practice. Although we talked for some two hours, we never did produce even a tentative working statement of what it is that makes a book great—unless it was Mr. Bart's opening proposal that a great book is one in which we think we might find the truth. So we could go on with that discussion. Instead, however, let me propose a different topic, which will surely build on the previous discussion, but from another viewpoint.

If the colleges we here represent differ from other American undergraduate colleges in our common use of great books instead of textbooks for instruction, it is probably even more anomalous that we prescribe highly structured curricula for our students and offer virtually no elective courses. All of our students are required to study the same subjects. The assumptions, philosophical, pedagogical or whatever, that lie beneath this formal outward characteristic ought to be examined. The use of great books does not seem of itself to dictate specific curricular arrangements.

On the other hand, reading great books may imply a necessity to teach certain arts. Minimally, these would be the arts one must possess to read the books that are proposed. These just might be the liberal arts. It seems to me

## Second Day

that for us at St. John's the major assumptions, which have functioned as exploratory hypotheses, are that these fundamental arts are the arts of language and the arts of mathematics; and that a new problem faces us in the twentieth century in trying to understand the laboratory arts.

'But I think that at St. John's we understand the seminar—or rather the activity that goes on there—to be the center of our teaching enterprise, and that the four or five other divisions of the curriculum are thought of as being in various ways ancillary to the seminar. Is this assumption common to all of us here today? I think I ought to add, by the way, that I am not quite sure that all of my colleagues on the St. John's faculty would agree with what I have just said about them.

*Mr. Berquist:* I don't think it would be true to say that our program at Thomas Aquinas College is ordered to the seminar. We have ordered our curriculum according to the principles of philosophy and theology. The seminar we see as being a valuable initiation to the art of inquiry, but not as a central or final method.

*Mr. Steadman:* But you haven't said in what mode your inquiry into philosophy and theology takes place. I gather it's not by means of the seminar?

*Mr. Berquist:* Our teaching procedure in these inquiries is similar in some ways to a seminar, but it's closer, I think, to what you at St. John's would call a tutorial, and that's what we call it ourselves. Discussions there are much more structured than seminar discussions usually are. And it inquires into matters where the teacher wants to proceed more formally.

*Mr. Darkey:* Do you mean it takes the form of an *explication de texte*?

*Mr. Berquist:* Sometimes it can take that form, yes. But it's impossible to do that altogether, given the size of the works we read. I think it's more like the way both you and we read Euclid's *Elements*. We move from point to

## Second Day

point and one thing builds upon another. Clearly, some points will be discussed more thoroughly than others. In manner, though, it's also something like a seminar—the students speak to one another and carry on conversations among themselves. It's not at all a lecture by the teacher. Nevertheless, our philosophy and theology tutorials are, I think, more strictly structured by the subject matter they address than a seminar is.

*Mr. Darkey:* You have suggested that it's analogous to the way we study mathematics in our tutorials. How do you mean that?

*Mr. Berquist:* In this way: in both cases you're dealing with the method of a particular science, not with a general method of inquiry, as you are in the seminar. Dialectic, at least as Aristotle conceived it, can be brought to bear on any subject, and that is most appropriate to the general discussions of the seminar. But in addition, there are particular methods which are proper to particular sciences. In geometry, for instance, you must deal with construction as one part of the method. We think there are proper methods in the other sciences, too—in philosophy of nature, in ethics, and in metaphysics.

*Mr. Steadman:* Well, if we at St. John's were to say that we structured our program around the science of mathematics, for instance, and therefore around the mathematics tutorial, and that we related all our other studies to that, wouldn't that be an assertion that we are not trying to give a liberal education, but rather an education in a particular science and a particular method? So I ask you if you're not really saying that your curriculum aims at giving an education in philosophy and theology rather than a liberal education?

*Mr. Berquist:* I'd put it this way: we're aiming at the whole, not at the part. We see this whole as having a certain structure and a certain order. Some of the parts of that whole are more principal than others. We don't study phi-

## Second Day

philosophy only for the sake of theology; and yet we study it more for the sake of theology than for its own sake. So we are aiming at a universal education, but we understand that to mean that there is an order to the parts that must be studied. But I think I'm repeating myself.

*Mr. Steadman:* Would it be fair to say it's an education in the humanities with a major in philosophy?

*Mr. Berquist:* Perhaps. But with this distinction: we hold that there really is a major in theology, because that's the nature of liberal education. Its parts are of unequal value.

*Mr. Steadman:* So your assertion is that liberal education requires a major in a particular science?

*Mr. Berquist:* I think it would be fair to say that, though I wouldn't understand the word "major" the way it's used in the American college system, where it goes along with electives and credits and a lot of other things that are totally irrelevant to what I intend. So, really, when you put it that way I think you're making it much less clear than it was before.

*Mr. Steadman:* What I meant to ask was whether you aim at professional specialization by the undergraduate?

*Mr. Berquist:* I don't think that's the right question. We don't aim at such specialization in order to prepare a student to enter the profession of theology, but because theology is intrinsically better.

*Mr. Darkey:* Aren't you saying, Mr. Berquist, that the architectonic of your whole curriculum is philosophical?

*Mr. Berquist:* Philosophical and theological. Mr. Steadman asked what we are doing about liberal education after I had said we order our curriculum to the principles of philosophy and theology. I took his question to be whether we were studying a part rather than the whole; and I answered him in the light of that objection. I guess my answer, formally put, is that we are studying the whole, but that we see the whole as having an order among its parts.

## Second Day

and that philosophy and theology are the sciences which really provide that order.

*Mr. Steadman:* Yes, that's why I characterized it as a curricular major.

*Mr. Ascher:* Mr. Berquist, would you tell us a little more about the role of the seminar at Thomas Aquinas College? What kinds of readings do you take up, for example?

*Mr. Berquist:* We take up literary works in the seminar, and historical works. And we also take up in the seminar such philosophical works as we believe do not require the kind of close reading we give to those works we study in the philosophy tutorial. For example, we don't think you can extract much of the intelligible content of Aristotle's *Physics* without spending a great deal of time on the details, so, as I said a few minutes ago, we teach it the way Euclid's *Elements* is taught at St. John's. The *Elements* and the *Physics* simply aren't works you can plunge into just anywhere—there's a proper starting place, and the order of the steps you take is, to a large extent, dictated by the nature of what you're studying. There's simply no getting around that.

*Mr. Steadman:* I certainly agree that we do that very thing with Euclid. My worry is that if I then went on and said, "Furthermore, I want my students to study mathematics because that is the most important part of their studies and the other liberal arts are ordered to it," I would think that in that case I was not giving a *liberal* education, but instead a specialized professional education. For I don't see that liberal education does have the kind of order you have in mind.

*Mr. Berquist:* If you should order your education entirely to mathematics, the serious question would be, Haven't you set up as the principal science one which, in point of fact, isn't principal at all? You'd simply have chosen the wrong ordering principle.

## Second Day

*Mr. Haggard:* Surely none of us would include, mathematics and laboratory science in our curricula unless we thought it possible to treat them *liberally*. And I'm perfectly clear that no one of us here today supposes a curriculum can claim to be a liberal arts curriculum in our common meaning of the term simply because it requires its students to read books chosen from our reading lists. Students in humanities programs everywhere read these same books, but the meanings of those enterprises are altogether different from the meaning of ours.

It's hard to characterize that difference except by saying that our main concern is not to study about philosophy and philosophizing, but to philosophize. We want to engage actively in the very inquiry that the book itself proposes or reports, because the book is the author's account of his own experience with that inquiry. We want to try reflectively and imaginatively to grasp for ourselves what he thinks he has seen and what his reasons are for thinking as he does. So the basic question of liberal education doesn't seem at all to be one of mere curricular arrangements—of whether, for instance, the tutorial subserves the seminar.

Maybe you don't mean to assert that, Mr. Steadman, but you seem to me to be heading in that direction.

*Mr. Berquist:* It would be a strange thing, too, Mr. Steadman, to base liberal education on the assumption that there is no order in the sciences. And yet, in effect, that seems to be your position. You seem to be maintaining that there is a kind of opposition between being liberally educated and recognizing and acting on an existing order.

*Mr. Steadman:* I think I was trying to say what Mr. Haggard has said much better, namely, that I am very reluctant to impose in advance any particular order upon the inquiry of the seminar by positing that some particular method of inquiry is the uniquely right one. I want the book itself to tell us how to read it, and I want it of itself to raise



## Second Day

the questions we discuss. I don't want to come to the book supposing in advance that I know either what it contains or the one right technique for reading it.

*Mr. Berquist:* What you've just said doesn't bear on what we were saying earlier.

*Mr. Steadman:* I thought it did. When you say that there is an order to the sciences, don't you mean that there is some one science by means of which we ought to deal with all the rest? That there is a *method*? I thought you were saying, "I have a particular science which is universal, and I can use it to tell me how to deal with books that present themselves."

*Mr. Berquist:* No, I didn't say that. In fact, I explicitly denied that when I said that all of the sciences have their own proper methods. But that doesn't prevent one science from being ordered to another. You could conceive of geometry as being ordered to astronomy, as it seems the older educators did, and still recognize that there are differences in method between astronomy and geometry.

*Mr. Nicgorski:* But some one particular science is the architectonic?

*Mr. Berquist:* Of course. My position doesn't negate the distinction in methods. In fact, it requires the distinction; since, if there were only one method, there really would only be one science.

*Mr. Haggard:* Would you say more, though, about the way you understand the ordering of your curriculum according to the principles of theology and philosophy to be of the essence of liberal education? It seemed to me that you meant to assert that the very liberal quality of your education lies precisely in its being appropriately ordered to the ultimate end, and to the correct primary goal?

*Mr. Berquist:* Yes, I did mean that. I would say that education would not be truly liberal without that kind of order.

You yourselves at St. John's certainly have elements of

## Second Day

that kind of ordering, and maybe in abundance. For instance, to study Euclid's geometry is to propose one sort of order. Or take what Mr. Bart said yesterday. If your goal is to grasp the truth, to understand to the best of your ability the way things are, it seems to me very obvious that, when you begin to reflect, you discover that not all truths are of the same order, or even that they are not all equally true. For example, I could memorize the telephone directory and get all those names down just right. That would be a kind of truth, but a truth that's not very true and not much worth knowing.

So, once you start out with the premise that your goal is to understand the truth, right away you see that there is an inequality among the objects of knowledge. Eternal things are more worth knowing than temporal things, higher things more so than lower things, living things than things that are not alive. Right away all kinds of distinctions come to light, so that you say, "If I'm going to seek to understand the truth, I'm going to be concerned primarily with those things which are truer."

*Mr. Steadman:* I guess I'd like to know in what sense theology is architectonic. When you first agreed to that formulation, I supposed you meant that theology is used to provide a scheme for understanding other things. Now I'm not sure whether you've denied this or not. So let me ask, in what sense does theology order the other sciences?

*Mr. Berquist:* Let me give you an example, if I can. When you start to study a science, you begin with that part which is easier and more accessible to a beginner. Then, as you progress, it becomes possible to compare what you learned first with what you learned later. I mean that you begin to learn about particular things considered by themselves, and then later you can make relationships among the things you have learned. For example, understandings your students have reached in the study of mathematics may at some later moment have a bearing upon their study

## Second Day

of natural science and even, perhaps, their study of ethics.

At Thomas Aquinas College we do hold that the consideration of these same matters from the perspective of theology is of a higher order than the consideration of them as particular sciences. Of course we study Aristotle's *Physics* as it's written, and we have long discussions about *nature*—we don't do this from a "theological" perspective. And we do think also that a later reconsideration of these same matters from a theological perspective is an enterprise of greater intrinsic merit. But of course we could never undertake the second unless we had done the first.

Mr. Steadman: I think I understand now what you mean.

Mr. Haggard: But again, it seems to me that this poses a most interesting question for all of us. Your position, put in its strong form, forces us to ask whether, without that proper ordering and that proper end, education can be liberal in any true sense.

Remembering yesterday's conversation, I think all of us subscribe in some real way to Mr. Bart's formulation that we read the great books because we expect to find the truth in them. But the discussion yesterday kept moving back and forth trying to face the question, What intrinsic characteristics of a book tell us that it is great? What criteria do we use to make that judgment?

You seem to be saying today, Mr. Berquist, that the study of theology, which is at the center of your curriculum at Thomas Aquinas College, provides the criteria for making that judgment, and, moreover, provides a schema for ordering your various studies into a meaningful whole.

For us at St. John's, I think it may be more difficult to say just what the corresponding principle is. And we must have failed to reflect in some important way, if we don't know what we mean by saying that our education is *liberal* and yet lack a ready answer to the question you put to us. And it does seem to me to be an altogether appropriate question.

## Second Day

*Mr. Berquist:* We see it this way. If you think that the Christian Revelation is truly from God and is a reliable way, then you're going to have one view of liberal education. If you think it's bogus, you're going to have another. For us here today, the question about the real nature of liberal education does depend upon one's answer to that prior question.

That is to say, you can't set out and say, "This is what liberal education must be in order to be itself, and therefore there must be a God." Rather, it's that, having seen that God as a principle exists, you can't avoid saying to yourself, "Really, it seems that all my studies ought to be ordered to a knowledge of that ultimate principle." It isn't that this is the *only* thing worth knowing, but that one sees that God is incomparably *more* worth knowing than any of these other things.

Everything depends upon that question. Everything. That's why it's such a problem for us; people so often try to give an account of what liberal education is and fail to confront the deeper issue about the nature of things. Yet the nature of education ought to follow from the nature of things.

*Mr. Haggard:* I certainly shouldn't speak for Mr. Bart, since he speaks so well for himself; but I would suppose that he wouldn't want, any more than I would, to have to choose between these alternatives. I certainly wouldn't want to regard the claims of Christianity as "bogus"; yet I don't think that St. John's takes these claims as the end to which our curriculum is explicitly ordered. And still, the Christian claim is very significant in our studies here.

*Mr. Steadman:* But to return to the question of how one arranges the order of studies, I wouldn't want to say, as you did, that we must start off with the easier things and work up to the harder. After all, we begin with the *Iliad* and Plato and Aristotle, and then go on from there. For our practical purposes we adopt a roughly chronological order.

## Second Day

*Mr. Berquist:* I'm not going to insist on that. I only meant to say that in order to compare things among themselves, you first have to grasp each one of them in some way. In the case of theology, you possess certain principles in terms of which you can see the unities and the subordinations of things.

*Mr. Steadman:* You mean of *other* things?

*Mr. Berquist:* Of other things, yes. The theological principles are the principles in terms of which you see those other things, and not vice versa.

*Mr. Steadman:* That's the way I was understanding you. In your teaching at Thomas Aquinas College you use a particular method for approaching each of the books you read in the seminar, and you look at all of them from a particular point of view. But I see us at St. John's as trying to read each book without presupposing that a particular method is the right way to read or to compare it. In my own teaching I try to let each book tell me how I must compare it and on what terms I must take it.

*Mr. Berquist:* Let me say once more that I am not talking about anything that substitutes for what you are speaking of, but about something additional. There is no place in the study of Euclid's geometry where we consider it in a theological perspective. Consideration of a theological perspective on anything whatever would properly belong to the study of theology. One must let the sciences be themselves. We certainly do not hold, for example, that there is any *Christian* mathematics, as opposed to mathematics of some other kind.

And I mean to admit very freely that we at Thomas Aquinas have a harder job trying to say what it is that we are trying to accomplish than you at St. John's have.

*Mr. Bart:* Don't we, however, by this discussion gain a point that we may have in common with Mr. Berquist? I, for one, am extremely grateful for his insistence upon the importance of *the whole* in any serious consideration of

## Second Day

liberal education. And I would agree that any real concern with the way things are necessarily raises the question of whether there is a whole or not. Now to say that is admittedly to say a good deal less than you have said, Mr. Berquist. But I think that liberal undergraduate education ought to postulate as a fundamental tenet the necessity of inquiring into the possibility of a unity of knowledge. One must inquire whether there is some viewpoint from which all knowledge might be put into order.

To postulate that may distinguish your own notion of what is possible in liberal education from ours. For us it seems to be enough to seek to discover whether, with the help of these writings and these arts, we can discern either an actual whole or even the possibility of a whole. The very possibility, for us, would already be very much. That postulated inquiry, I think, must in practice underlie our education. And I would say more that tenet is possibly the most important single criterion for our selection of the books on which we have constructed the St. John's curriculum. I would guess that our selection of what books to include might reveal our sense of what kind of whole is possible, some point of view from which we suspect things might be seen as a whole. For we are regularly asked by proponents of special disciplines why we select some one book for study rather than another. I believe that our single most important criterion is that a truly great book must have some view or some implication of wholeness.

I know my reply is not completely satisfactory to you, Mr. Berquist. You and we cannot meet perfectly, but your positing that a concern with the whole of knowledge is an integral part of liberal education establishes a deep common ground for us.

*Mr. Simpson:* The difference we have—and it's seen as a problem on one side of the table and as a principle on the other—is whether the seminar inquiry is properly the focus of our undertaking or whether tutorial exposition is. Now

## Second Day

if it is clear that there actually is an order which can be found by following certain disciplines in the right ways, then the study of those disciplines must be made primary, and the tutorial in which they are taken up must become the main channel of instruction. On the other hand, if the existence of such an order has to be stated as a question, then that question, as a real, felt question, will be the energizing principle of the seminar throughout the four years of study and it will remain the center of everything. All other curricular engagements will be ancillary to that one real question from which the energy derives.

The seminar itself, it seems to me, is usually disorderly by its nature. I know we all think we see themes and principles of organization in the seminar, but we never feel enough confidence in any of them to urge that there is only one right order for reading the books we read. We always catch glimpses of underlying problems that we can see might overturn any possible proposed order. So I think that here at St. John's the search for order, which we undertake in the seminar, is in itself a disorderly search.

*Mr. Darkey:* I think we all do agree that to carry on a program of liberal education we must in one way or another seek a view of the whole and keep our eye on that as an ultimate principle of everything we do. Unless we can do that, there will be no way we can avoid the combined social, professional and psychological pressures towards those sorts of fragmentations which destroy liberal education as such.

On the other hand, the sorts of questions we must in conscience take up with our students are not the sorts for which solutions are easily possessed. Whatever understandings one may achieve in these areas must continually grow and deepen and be revised and repossessed, or even be discarded and replaced with others, by the sometime student as he gains more experience and grows more remote from the academic situation in which he first con-

## Second Day

fronted the fundamental questions of whole and part. So viewed, it is not a question of an institutional position implemented by a curriculum of study, or even a question of what the student may be doing while he is actually engaged with his liberal academic studies. Rather, the question seems to me to be, What can a college do to insure his continuing liberal education after he graduates?

Looked at in this way, it seems to me that one may want to address the matter of the student's continuing intellectual life in terms of possessing the liberal arts. I am persuaded that it is the business of liberal education to help young men and women to acquire the arts of the intellect as the necessary instruments for the growth and expansion of their human experience throughout the rest of their lives.

From this point of view, and in the light of what you have been saying about your curriculum, Mr. Berquist, which would be the arts you would want to impart?

*Mr. Berquist:* I think our views about the arts are pretty much the same as yours. That is to say, we teach grammar, logic and the mathematical arts. We like to build these arts both theoretically and practically. We spend some time studying the doctrine of Aristotle's *Organon* itself as a text, but we also try to pay careful attention to its use in practice. And we spend some time on the formal study of grammar, taking up questions, such as What is a noun? What is a verb? and so on. And throughout all four years we try to pay attention to the way our students use these arts:

I don't think we have any great differences between us on the question of which arts are to be taught. To repeat what I've already said, I think the difference between you and us would be put in terms of something additional in our case. We think that the various parts of philosophy have distinctive methods of procedure in addition to those that are common to all of them. Special attention must be



## Second Day

given to those methods which are in fact distinct. So we want to acquire the method that is proper to the naturalist, the one that is proper for the moralist, maybe even the one that is proper to the wise man. In all of this we pretty much follow the well-known text of Aristotle where he says at the beginning of *Parts of Animals* that a well-educated person is one who has acquired at least the basic parts of all the methods of all the sciences, so that he knows what is appropriate in each case as well as what is common to several or to all.

Mr. Bart: In what you have been saying the word *method* has been a very important term. Without meaning to be captious, could I ask whether what you are meaning by *method* is quite what Mr. Darkey meant by *art*? Or at least is there some clear way I can transform the one term into the other?

Mr. Berquist: I guess you'd have to ask Mr. Darkey what he meant by *art*.

Mr. Bart: Really, I meant to be asking you what you meant by *method*, if I may be so rude as to persist; since I think even in Greek *methodos* might be understood differently by people with different views.

Mr. Berquist: Let me try then. Could we begin by stating the situation that makes art necessary? Art becomes necessary when there is an end to be reached and we haven't been equipped by nature to reach that end. For example, I eat my food and swallow it, then nature takes care of the rest. I don't need to learn any procedure to digest my food—I have it by nature. But I carry on other activities for which I don't have that kind of right sequence built into me. But to get to my goal I still have to follow a certain number of steps in the right order, just as nature does. If I'm making something, I have to discover those steps and the right order for carrying them out, and then I have to apply my understanding. Art is that kind of enterprise. It's a knowledge of how to reach some given end through means that are not determined by nature.

Second Day

In philosophy, too, I think we need an art of inquiry. That's why we have logic. Socrates made the momentous discovery that nature has not equipped us with a method for arriving at the truth, and he saw that we need a method for getting there. For instance, in the *Meno* he addresses the question of definition. He says to Meno over and over again—and Meno refuses to believe him—that you can't tell whether something is teachable unless you first know what it is. That, I say, is a very simple point of method: if you want to get to that goal there, you must start here and proceed by the right way.

*Mr. Steadman:* The way you put this puzzles me. You say you're going to get to your end only by following certain steps in order, and you talk about methods for reaching those ends as if they were really well laid out and pretty clear. That just doesn't seem to be the case at all, not even in mathematics, not even in Euclid's *Elements*, which is such a clear and beautiful case of a book that is very well ordered and highly teachable. It turns out, when you examine the book, that Euclid could have arranged his propositions in many different ways.

For instance, if the goal of Book I is to get to Proposition 47, the "Pythagorean" proposition, he could have done it with fewer than half the number of propositions he actually includes. He really needs only about twenty to get there.

So I guess I don't take those intellectual skills and techniques that we call the liberal arts to be methods that are as mechanical as the ones you describe.

*Mr. Berquist:* I would make a distinction between *mechanical* and *determined*. I would also say your example establishes my point: Proposition 47 does not depend on every proposition that comes before it, but it does depend upon some of them. And you can't get to that proposition without them.

*Mr. Steadman:* Even that's not true, I think. There are many different ways to prove that proposition, and many

Second Day

of them don't have much to do with the propositions with which Euclid chooses to approach it. I think there isn't any method which is uniquely necessary for getting there.

*Mr. Berquist:* Let's make a wager. After we adjourn today, we'll go to a classroom, and I'll bet you can't demonstrate Proposition 49 without using Proposition 32.

*Mr. Steadman:* Yes. But I can do it with many different versions of Proposition 32.

*Mr. Berquist:* But not without it?

*Mr. Steadman:* Well, without anything that looks like it; because you can use a different postulate from Euclid's Fifth Postulate.

*Mr. Berquist:* I'd love to argue more particularly with you about that.

*Mr. Steadman:* But it's true. You could perfectly well use an alternative postulate in place of the Fifth.

*Mr. Haggard:* I wonder if that's quite the point? You wouldn't deny, would you, Mr. Steadman, that the order Euclid actually adopts is probably to some end?

*Mr. Steadman:* Yes, I'd agree to that.

*Mr. Haggard:* Euclid has some goal in mind, some end, some place he wants to arrive at. If we could see that goal clearly, it would help us understand why he selects and orders his propositions as he does. Surely that's what governs what you're both saying, and you don't have any dispute.

*Mr. Berquist:* It sounded like a dispute to me. I thought it was about the starting point of an inquiry.

*Mr. Haggard:* I don't think Mr. Steadman disagrees with you about that. He is saying that the end is not uniquely determined by the character of the propositions and their relationships. Euclid, for example, certainly made selections, probably with an eye to the problem of dealing with irrational magnitudes. But in any case, he does have a goal, and I don't suppose you'd disagree that the goal is correlated with the order of the propositions?

## Second Day

*Mr. Berquist:* Let me make this point to you. There is art to the extent that the means are determined. If you could get to your goal in just any way, no matter what you did or in what order you did it, there would be no schools and no teaching. Everything would just happen by nature, if it happened at all. It is clear that it does make a difference what order you proceed in and how much time you spend on such and such a thing. To the extent that this is the case and that the necessary order is discoverable, you have an art.

*Mr. Loomis:* As I recall the course of our conversation, this question about method first arose when we were talking about the relationship between the seminar and the tutorial. I have been wondering whether we might not say the seminar does have method, but in a different sense of the word than the one I understood Mr. Berquist to be giving it. To say something about the other possible sense of the term, I'm going to borrow some words from a colleague of mine at St. Mary's College who tried to write down some things about the seminar. He said this:

The seminar stands typically to the other parts of the curriculum as a whole to parts. In comparison with the tutorials, its intent is total and its accomplishment is incomplete.

In each part of the program students are thinking and talking and writing to each other about things. But the questioning in the seminar—again, typically, rather than invariably—would engage things not in this or that aspect (as observable and measurable, as diverse aspects of the human mind) but in their roundness against the all and nothing of human life and being. And it would implicate the persons of all the participants in their moral and theological depths rather than primarily as apprentices in the liberal arts. If the seminar is an arena for the exercise of the diverse liberal arts forming in the several tutorials, the liberal arts are here employed and directed by a sort of apprentice or journeyman wisdom. If the sem-

## Second Day

inar is to the other parts of the curriculum as a whole, it is not as a sum to addends, but, say, as a square to roots.\*

I would like to read one more passage from this paper in view of Mr. Berquist's saying at the beginning of today's conversation that in the curriculum at Thomas Aquinas College the tutorial might be more central than the seminar and take precedence over it. If you say that, it seems to me that you give another meaning to the word *seminar*, for then the seminar is seen from a different point of view. But if you see the seminar as taking precedence, it seems to me you might say this:

Conversation within a tutorial, while it may be quite various and full of surprises, is bound to the demands of a subject matter and a formal object and method. Meetings of the tutorial are sequential and gradual. Each seminar, on the other hand, is an original venture at the all-together or all-at-once and may best flourish in forgetfulness of any other seminar meeting, even of earlier meetings on the same book. The conversation, while it may concentrate on some small point which seems to hold the world, may go wherever the spirit blows in following the demands of the argument which arises out of the all-or-nothing of things and these persons. To some extent the virtue of the tutorial is bound up with its temporality, but a good seminar is unprecedented.\*

In view of the passages I've just read, I wonder whether anyone else besides me would be willing to call the seminar *methodical*? I don't think the seminar proceeds by nature, like digestion. I do think it proceeds methodically, though without foreknowledge of where it is going, since it always has within it the structure of its own argument. I mean that anyone who says something must be able to give an account of how what he says is related to what went before.

\*Lanigan, Joseph, unpublished paper.

\**Ibid.*

## Second Day

But I don't think that kind of method is describable in the way Mr. Berquist describes the method of the tutorial, especially of the mathematics tutorial, as the method which he believes is to take precedence in a curriculum of liberal arts.

*Mr. Haggard:* It's not even clear to me that under the best seminar leader the discussion proceeds with art, let alone method. The things that are said by the various participants seem to come from all sorts of directions, though, hopefully, they contribute to a whole. Openness and receptiveness and alertness and imagination seem to be far more essential than having a clear notion in advance about a specific goal or order of the discussion. In fact, a leader can take the life completely out of a seminar discussion by having a particular goal clearly in mind, by knowing, that is, just what is the point that the students ought to get or that they haven't yet got in the book being discussed. A seminar discussion won't really have any life unless the students are piecing together for themselves their own understanding of the book, even though such a preliminary understanding has many inadequacies. Inadequacies, by the way, which it's often risky to try to correct. I suppose we all make such attempts, but it's a way you can strangle a discussion. At least I can.

*Mr. Loomis:* I wonder if there is a sense of *method* which wouldn't strangle, couldn't strangle?

*Mr. Nicorski:* Mr. Loomis seems to be putting Mr. Haggard's point in other terms. Leaving the term *method* to one side, could we say that there are principles for the direction of the seminar?

*Mr. Steadman:* Maybe it's one of the principles that there be no method.

*Mr. Loomis:* Your saying that makes me remember Mr. Bart's asking Mr. Berquist, "What do you mean by method?" I guess it might be a principle of the seminar that it follows no method. Seminars certainly aren't, and

## Second Day

maybe they can't be, like exercises for Descartes' *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*. To me they always end up looking like fragments of Platonic dialogues, very small fragments sometimes. Often it takes me months to be able to see them this way. That's why I was wondering if there isn't some sense of *method* that couldn't possibly strangle, that couldn't even be misused to strangle?

*Mr. Steadman:* I think you've helped me find a way to say what I wanted to say earlier today. The only way I can be sure I'm not going to strangle a text is by not coming to it as if I knew the right methods for reading and talking about it. Rather, I must come to it willing to let the conversation happen by itself, as an unprecedented event. The description you read to us a few minutes ago was very good. It's absolutely true that one must let the book and the conversation about it try as it can to discover for itself and on the spot the right way to approach it. So, I too think there isn't any method for seminars.

*Mr. Loomis:* I don't believe I'm thinking about the liberal arts and their relationship to method in the same way the rest of you are, and maybe my way is really bizarre.

If the liberal arts were methods, and if one taught methods by tutorial instruction, then there could be tutorials for teaching the liberal arts as distinct from those in which, say, the mathematical or grammatical arts are taught; and students could come to the seminar discussions already having learnt, or partially learnt, the methods of the liberal arts. But it seems to me they come to the seminars to learn what can't be taught in the tutorials. The special thing to be learnt in the seminar is how to proceed when you haven't been told what method to use and when the topic you want to think about hasn't been sorted out and arranged in such a way that you can see how to proceed according to a method you have already acquired. I don't think any of this means that you can't, or don't, proceed methodically in the seminar. But in order to say that you

## Second Day

do; I think you have to find some analogous but different meaning for *method*.

I say this because I don't think the truth about good seminar discussions can really be that they are simply non-methodical, while the liberal arts themselves are methods. That's not possible, is it?

*Mr. Haggard:* No, I don't think that. But isn't it true that the seminar is characterized by an attention to the whole in a way that the tutorials are not? Or at least not for us at St. John's. For instance, in a tutorial we may stop for a very long time over a few lines of a text, if we need to, trying to open them up. On the other hand, in our seminars, we try to read and discuss very difficult texts whole and in a few hours, or, at most, in a few sessions.

*Mr. Loomis:* I was thinking of "whole" in a different sense from that. I was meaning it not in the sense of a whole work to be read and discussed, but in the sense of *the whole*—all the things that can be wondered about. And I was thinking that maybe the liberal arts individually pursued in some problematic way are different from that great whole when it's faced and wondered about in its wholeness. I question whether the difference is merely that one is methodical and the other isn't.

Whenever I have learnt from seminars, it's because I have discovered how they went. I mean, I can remember where they started from and where they got to. It is those sequences in seminars which I can recollect from beginning to end that teach me things. For me, the bad parts of seminars are the ones where I remember that first that was said and then this, but I never can figure out how we got from the one place to the other, or what it was all about.

I guess I was thinking that *to recall the order* is some kind of method for the seminar. But it's not the order of any single liberal art.

*Mr. Starr:* Insofar as we at St. John's have a method, perhaps it's not so very different from yours, Mr. Loomis.



## Second Day

And, by the way, I should say that I don't know that what you've described is what I'd mean by a method. I'd sooner say that it's a statement of certain ends and means.

I think that the end one aims at, not only in the seminar but in all the tutorials as well—eventually I'll come to what I think the difference between them is—is trying to see into some reality and to share one's vision, one's insight, if you will. What I mean by *reality* is something quite general, whatever is able to move or be moved. I think it is in the seminar that we aim at trying to see the most important realities. In a merely human way, that means that the things that are able to move us most deeply are also the things that have the most extensive implications for our lives. Of course, that end is difficult to achieve.

It seems to me that we have two ways of getting there. One is by means of the imagination. I know of no method whatever for the production of metaphors, of ways of helping another or oneself to see fully and gain an understanding of a thing glimpsed. What we do have and can share are the sum products of that mysterious business of seeing something and coming up with metaphors. Then along with this we have a second means, the application of logic to those claims or possibilities which have first been stated in the form of metaphors or propositions. I mean that we can talk together and criticize one another, and in such criticism we share the basic logical principles of excluded middle, non-contradiction, and so on.

In our tutorials at St. John's it seems to me that we look at objects that have been well seen and well stated by others before us. In all of these studies we follow the paths of those who first came at them in one way, and then later we follow the paths of those revolutionaries like Descartes who propose another way. We do follow the classical texts, and in a certain sense we could be said to be studying method; or in an alternative sense, ways of living without method, that have been handed down by tradition.

## Second Day

On the other hand, in the seminar we come up against what Kant has stated rather well, and I think I agree with him, that, whereas in the mathematical sciences and in the natural sciences there seems to be a clear and universally recognizable progress, or at least a development, somehow, in the matter of first philosophy each generation is thrown back to the beginnings. Not absolutely, of course, for we do possess the strength of the fine and powerful arguments of our predecessors in these matters. But along with these arguments we have also inherited powerful counter-arguments which qualify them for us.

I think this helps to say why it is that in the seminar one must always begin afresh each time, and why one doesn't have to begin afresh each time in the tutorial. It is in the light of these considerations that the question of method is far more controversial with respect to the seminar. And it is also why, at least for us at St. John's, our seminars do have some of the peculiar qualities that Mr. Loomis has been describing.

• *Mr. Steadman:* I'd like to take issue with Mr. Berquist's position from another perspective. I think this is the particular in which I differ from him the most. I'm sure that all of us, in one way or another, take our start from the text, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Now Mr. Berquist seems to be convinced that he does know the truth, and that he knows, therefore, what will make his students free. But for myself, I'm not so sure that I know the truth, though I'm just as firmly convinced as he is that the truth will make my students free, and that's the very thing I'm trying to do—liberate them by giving them a liberal education. In going about that task, I've got to try to avoid the danger Socrates was afraid of in the *Phaedo*, namely, the danger of deceiving himself and his hearers out of his own enthusiasm and then going off like the bee, leaving behind the sting of a false argument.

I try to avoid that danger as Socrates does in most of his

## Second Day

dialogues, by bringing the discussion once more to a question that is truly open, either the one with which the discussion began or another one that has come to light in the course of the argument. Unless we do that, we're in danger of leaving behind the sting of our false argument, thereby imprisoning our students in falsehood instead of freeing them.

*Mr. Berquist:* You speak of "knowing the truth," Mr. Steadman. But we don't have to know everything to know something. I do think, though, that if we profess to be teachers, we should have some knowledge beyond what all men commonly possess. Now often the truth is spoken of as if it were some single great thing of such a sort that one has either got the whole of it or none of it. And I suspect, Mr. Steadman, that that is where our deeper disagreement lies. I think you can come to a reliable knowledge of some conclusions, while other conclusions which may be much more important and much more interesting remain open to you or doubtful to you. Even Socrates says, "There are some things which I don't doubt."

If I go any farther than Socrates, perhaps it is to say that I have moved somewhat beyond the place where all men are, that is, from knowing the things that everybody knows; and that I have arrived there by the right way. The fact is that I do know certain things that not everybody knows, and that's why it's worth somebody's time to be my student, even if all I do for much of the time is sit at the head of the table and ask, "What was that you just said?" It's certainly not a question of standing there and simply pouring out the conclusions. That's a parody of teaching. Nevertheless, I do give my students some direction, though often that direction consists of being quiet and letting them go their own way. What governs the whole enterprise is that I, as their teacher, do know something.

*Mr. Steadman:* I guess one of the things I think I know is that we will be "better and braver and less helpless

## Second Day

if we believe in the duty of inquiring after what we do not know" than if, like Meno, we have the habit of answering questions as if we knew the answers. Socrates' most important task is to overcome exactly that position of thinking that you know something. So on the most important questions, such as, What kind of life should I lead? and What is virtue? it is crucially important not to be in the habit of knowing, but rather to be in the habit of inquiring.

*Mr. Berquist:* Is this perhaps consistent with what you are saying? One wants to know himself, and self-knowledge means knowing when you don't know, means being aware of your ignorance. Now it seems to me to be quite true that self-awareness is—or ought to be—primarily the awareness that we do not know, just as the awareness of our own moral character obliges us to be more conscious of our deficiencies than of our virtues. Nevertheless, it seems to me that in the intellectual order it is important also to know the things that we do know, because that is the only way we can have any starting point for the work of discovering both the things we do know and also those we don't know.

So it seems to me that the virtue in this case, as was being said in your student seminar last night, Mr. Steadman, does lie in a kind of mean. Of course, there is a way of overstating what one knows, and that is the way of an intellectual braggart, I guess. But there is also a way of understating what we know, and that is an expression of despair and skepticism which seems to say that in the final analysis we will never know anything for sure.

*Mr. Steadman:* Of course. And I certainly don't want to go that far. But I wanted to formulate it that way in order to bring out what appears to me to be the source of the differences between our respective colleges. At St. John's we take this open approach to the seminar which we conceive to be at the very center of our curriculum. All our other studies are intended to nourish and support that cen-

## Second Day

tral stalk, because we believe that bringing our students into that kind of inquiry is the most important help we can give them. And I do think that this view of liberal education is opposed to what you originally said about your emphasis at Thomas Aquinas College.

Mr. McArthur: Yes. As long as we keep trying to formulate principles at this level, we will find some differences, and those differences are certainly discussable. But when we look to our actual teaching practices, it turns out that we're not so very different after all.

Take an instance from what we've just been talking about today. Suppose we do spend more time reading Aristotle's *Physics* with our students than you do with yours. What of that? When you get right down to it, that isn't a very basic difference, compared to the fact that, in the first place, we both do read this book at all—how many college students today read the *Physics*? We have pretty much the same reasons for thinking this book is important for them to read.

And then, we read it in much the same way. By "in the same way" I mean that we read Aristotle's text and not some digest of it. We examine the arguments carefully together, trying to understand what he can mean by what he says and the way he says it. "Is this plausible?" we ask. "Does it fit with our experience?" "How does it go along with something he has said earlier?" And so on.

I mean to be saying that we get into just exactly the same kinds of classroom discussions you get into here at St. John's. How much time either one of us finally decides to spend on a given book or a given topic is really a very particular consideration, and not at all a question of any serious difference of educational outlook. And it's not a question of a difference of *method*, taking that word in some special sense.

I want to say this here today, because I think that St. John's, by consistently carrying on its program of liberal

## Second Day

education over the past forty years, has been doing a thing which may yet make possible a decent education for at least some students in this country. For instance, if there were no St. John's, we at Thomas Aquinas would find it very hard to carry on our own teaching. That's the important thing, regardless of the kinds of differences we can find to talk about.

For surely it is possible to hold firmly to a vision of genuine liberal education in such a way as makes possible the cooperation of those who are engaged in it, regardless of the differences they may have in religious belief. Liberal education is possible for us at Thomas Aquinas with our commitment to Roman Catholicism, but I can't see any reason at all why a group, say, of Jewish people should not set up a program of liberal studies within the context of their religious beliefs. If you have a religious belief, and if liberal education is going to mean anything, the two must have a meaningful relationship to one another.

But my main point is that all of us who agree about liberal education ought to try to combine our insights and experiences, and ought to spend more time in looking at what we have in common than in taking issue about differences that aren't essential.

*Mr. Haggard:* Surely we're all sitting here at this table today because we assume that, even with our differences, we hold very important things in common. One of them is our agreement on the importance of seeking for the whole if liberal education is to take place at all. This is not the assumption of the modern university, for instance. And not of most contemporary colleges either, I would think.

*Mr. McArthur:* Yes, that's true. And while it's also true that the things we have in common do involve differences, even so, our basic agreements taken together with our differences ought to lead to fruitful consequences. I want to shy away from discussions that tend to separate us by concentrating on the differences. You see, I think there

## Second Day

is a practical urgency about our cooperation, because I don't see how you can have a civilization without this kind of education. Maybe I'm wrong, but I simply don't see how the civilization we have can maintain itself without general liberal education.

*Mr. Tussman:* May I say that I find this discussion fascinating but extremely baffling? Your perceptions are very different from mine, and to me the differences among you are interesting but minor. Each of you has a common curriculum and a central curricular idea that is your basic identity. Yet, when you talk about what you're doing, your language is the language of the university in a fantastically puzzling way.

In trying to explain what you're doing, or to justify it, first you speak of "grasping the truth." It's by entering a college or a university that one gets the truth. When that fails, you fall back—as we in the university do—on "methods of inquiry." Or maybe inquiry itself is what we're after. That leads very quickly to talk about method and discipline and the arts. You here talk about the *liberal* arts, which, to be sure, isn't a very big thing with us in the university; but nevertheless, that whole set of terms, *truth, inquiry, method, art*, is the familiar group of categories in terms of which the university describes itself.

Now, if it comes to the search for the truth, the university will not defer to you in any way. We in the university think we have methods for the discovery of truth in particular and truth in general. And they are powerful methods. We go through the same business about methodology, and our great creative people scoff at methods, and so we talk about how it is that methods don't understand the creative process.

For me, your discussion, the mental language in which you discuss your basic operations, is completely unrevealing of the essence of your activity. What I would long for would be a discussion of what you're aiming at that would

## Second Day

make sense of what you do. I am puzzled by your overuse of unrevealing words, and by a kind of narcissism about what seem to me to be minor differences between you. But I get no illumination about the theoretical basis of what you practice. For example, you use the language of the university, but you don't even mention the distinction between the university and the college, and that is fundamental.

So I find myself fascinated when I look at your curriculum to see what is going on, if only from the point of view of the techniques of small group discussion and what you do with books. I was fascinated and impressed with the classes I visited. You're highly skilled to teach a general attitude while the students do the work. The teachers are extremely sharp, and they know what they're doing. You teach well with these techniques.

But the gap I find between your skill in the practice of your teaching tradition and this sort of formulation of your theoretical principles in terms with which I am very familiar—and which you use just as freely as the university uses its own dogmas—that's what astonishes me. The gap I find is left by the failure of this discussion in any way to illuminate or justify your practices.

*Mr. Bart:* We haven't been talking very much about the students, have we, Mr. Tussman?

*Mr. Tussman:* I'm not speaking primarily of the student either.

*Mr. Bart:* Well, but I would have to answer you in terms of the student. I would be surprised if one of our most fundamental premises is exactly *not* a supposition of the university, namely, that the truth, such as it is, is in the student and not in the teacher. It follows that when one is teaching he is neither professing nor is he informing the student.

*Mr. Tussman:* I would no more put the truth in the student than I would put it in the teacher.

*Mr. Bart:* Then it is a really fundamental difference



## Second Day

between us and the university, because it supposes that we, his teachers, have nothing to inform him about.

*Mr. Tussman:* When you say the truth is in the student, I struggle to understand how you would justify that.

*Mr. Bart:* It's a very puzzling fact.

*Mr. Tussman:* But it's not a truth.

*Mr. Bart:* It's the premise we completely adopt in our practice by asking the students questions.

*Mr. Starr:* We might add that it's a difficult business to get it out of the student.

*Mr. Dragstedt:* I wonder if it's not through our failure to carry the St. John's method far enough that we have left a weakness for Mr. Tussman to seize upon? Perhaps we have failed to radicalize the problem latent in "common" logic, as Mr. Berquist was calling it. To say that philosophers—or all men—have logic as an uncontradictory, common possession would disqualify all concern with method. But philosophers are so far from agreeing about what concepts are and how meaning arises, that utterly independent philosophical structures arise out of divergencies at just this level expressing disagreements on speech and hence on method.

The way to draw the issue between St. John's and the method of university graduate schools is to concentrate our attention as sharply as possible upon the liberal arts as the arena in which debate about method can be carried on in a fundamental way. For the *University* or its schools, the Trivium can be presupposed as something preparatory; for the *College*, nothing must prevent our returning to such preparatory disciplines for a more critical look. Unless we do this, some hierarchy of being may impose itself upon us that seems to arise from behind speech itself. That is to say, to create order you must begin by destroying prior spurious disorderly orders. Once the opinions which reflect disorder are pulverized, there is some chance that meaningful discourse can be achieved, some chance that

## Second Day

you might be able to talk about the truth, and that the principles of a science could progressively be clarified.

Our tension with the University obtains to the extent that its graduate schools presuppose the adequacy of the terms and the principles on which they found their disciplines. For the truth is, to take an example, that any decision about what, say, Anthropology is comes from assuming—whether knowingly or not—some position with respect to the Trivium. The graduate schools can no longer give an account of themselves because they cannot base their teaching on conversation, but are constrained organizationally to presume the meaning of the terms they employ, and to presume that these terms are in fact meaningful. But if you put dialectic first, if you put the struggle for meaning—as radically as Plato posed it for us, then I think we can't just start with assumptions about an order. *That* question has to recreate a struggle for us every time.

*Mr. Nicgorski:* With an eye to the nature of the seminar struggle you speak of, Mr. Dragstedt, I'd like to return to the beginning of today's discussion. Between St. John's and Thomas Aquinas there has emerged a difference that has been stated in terms of the place the seminar has in their respective curricula. For St. John's the seminar is the center of inquiry. For Thomas Aquinas the seminar is ancillary to the tutorials in philosophy and theology, which are seen to be the center and to provide the ordering principles of all the other studies. I should like to propose that at Notre Dame our General Program seems to take a middle ground between these two in the following way:

Like St. John's, we *center* the program of studies in the seminar, and our procedures there are, I think, akin to those of both St. John's and Thomas Aquinas. But, as Mr. Simpson has said, the seminar proceeds in a way that is essentially disorderly, so that we have felt the need to supplement the kind of consideration of the whole that takes place in the seminar with tutorials in philosophy and the-

## Second Day

ology—and for the reasons that have come out in today's discussion. One is the need Mr. McArthur spoke of to spend more time and care on certain important texts. A more important one is the conviction we share with Thomas Aquinas College that the most important questions are considered in philosophy and theology, and that the seminar is not an adequate forum for these considerations.

Mr. Simpson: I thought the implication of what Mr. Dragstedt was saying is that the apparent order of the tutorials arises from nothing more essential than the repetitive way we go about teaching them. That seems to me true. We very carefully build up a structure there—say a mathematical structure—but all the while, the very concepts which are taken as firm and on which we build with such care, are really sources of great difficulty, and are always doubtful. As I have been thinking about it from that point of view this afternoon, it occurs to me that tutorials are only superficially and procedurally different from the seminar—I mean in matters like their address to a small text and so on. But the deep difficulty of addressing real questions isn't resolved by being very careful from day to day and following the argument. It's not really resolved at all, but only built up structurally and more artfully than can be done in seminar discussions. The deep questions remain. And, insofar as the students and the teacher recognize that they do remain, the tutorial is only another way of doing the seminar. *This* is the sense in which the seminar is central. It's not that everything focuses on the seminar, but rather that it is the speculative mode of the seminar which really dictates the intellectual mode of the whole college. Maybe I should say that it is that pervading mode and that underlying question of the whole, in Mr. Loomis's sense, which is the principle of the college's unity. That is the sense in which we really are very different from the university.

## Second Day

To try to relate what I've just said to the proposal Mr. Bart made to Mr. Tussman a few minutes ago, it is our mode to be always finally turning the question back to the student, to be asking him, not telling him. That is true even when we are being very careful in a tutorial to build an elaborate argument which has an order of propositions and conclusions. Always in the end the argument comes back to the student as a question. And we really mean that. All we as teachers can do for him is help him pose the question much more carefully. Even when we study a shorter text over a longer time, as in a tutorial, we still are posing questions and still turning them back to the student in the end. In this way it comes out as a more structured question, but a question nevertheless.

*Mr. Steadman:* Then, to put the issue directly, it is the graduate schools of the university who are primarily guilty of leaving the sting of falsehood in their students. For, as Mr. Dragstedt has said, they are sure that there is no problem with their foundations, and that they can generate meaning out of unexamined terms. It is precisely that sort of assumption that a college has to avoid if it means to provide a liberal education. We must try to free the student rather than imprisoning him in some kind of trap—or in some kind of meaningless trappings.

*Mr. Tussman:* I won't argue with you about that; I could provide you with arguments. But people would object to saying that educating someone in physics is a form of entrapment.

*Mr. Steadman:* But what are the foundations of physics?

*Mr. Tussman:* Physicists are as aware as anybody of the problematic nature of their own foundations.

*Mr. Steadman:* But are they really?

*Mr. Tussman:* I think they are.

*Mr. Steadman:* I would agree that there are some

## Second Day

physicists, like Heisenberg, who are concerned about the foundations of physics. That is true. But for the most part, physics departments are not concerned.

*Mr. Tussman:* Even so, to habituate a person to the concepts and the procedures in the life of a physicist is not a form of imprisonment, it's a form of power.

*Mr. Steadman:* Perhaps it is a form of imprisonment. That's what I can't be sure of.

*Mr. Tussman:* I said I wouldn't argue with you about physics, but I easily could find people who would. And I would reject in general the notion that the special departmental disciplines are a form of intellectual entrapment. Take any of the departments—and I'm not a friend of university departments insofar as they are the enemy of the colleges, but that's a different issue. Take the language departments, for instance. In creating and developing skills they teach they are *empowering* people. They are communicating arts that give people powers, not imprisoning them.

*Mr. Simpson:* It seems to me, Mr. Tussman, that you should not say the questions about the intellectual foundations of the departments are the ones that can be set aside. I think we are now very close to the real issue. The notion that one can departmentalize the underlying questions in this instance is taken to mean that the language departments, of all places, can somehow or other set aside the questions about words and concepts. I do think that this way of departmentalizing knowledge is very likely to end up as a mode of imprisonment.

Seriously, isn't it appropriate in the language department to worry about the problem of meaning?

*Mr. Tussman:* Every department rests on the assumption that there are some things it will not worry about.

*Mr. Simpson:* Right! That's exactly what I mean. It is the departmental dismissal of the central worries that is the real problem.

Second Day

*Mr. Steadman:* It can imprison you in falsehood.

*Mr. Tussman:* I object to saying that the physics department imprisons you in falsehood. The physics department begins with physicists who share a fellowship that begins with Copernicus and includes Oppenheimer and Teller and whoever else my colleagues are. It's a continuing enterprise.

*Mr. Steadman:* I don't think so. I understand perfectly well that in one sense the modern physics departments are building on the work of their predecessors, but I wouldn't want to say they are a part of that fellowship, because I don't think they worry much about how Ptolemy was trying to understand the world or how his work differed from Kepler's, or what the significance of those differences is. I say they are not really fellows of Ptolemy and Kepler because they are not in real communication with them.

*Mr. Tussman:* Yes, they are. When living physicists look at the world and come up with a new set of physical notions, they are following their own direction and doing in their own way the same things their great predecessors did. There is a fellowship of physicists. They have developed a kind of knowledge and a kind of power. To be sure, it does not provide the answers to many other sorts of things. And of course, I agree that departmentalization and specialization entail some adverse consequences. Even so there is a real sense in which knowledge is power, and the modern world rests upon that kind of knowledge.

I am perfectly prepared to agree that a quick initiation into that departmentalization and specialization is an educational disaster. The principles which will provide coherence to the mind in the development of the person should be operative in the college, not in the university. I would have expected to discover some of those principles here, but so far you have been using the language of the university in ways that don't illuminate me as I look for the essential genius of the activity a college should be engaged in.

Second Day

*Mr. Steadman:* What we're trying to do right now is get some of those principles stated.

*Mr. Tussman:* I think you're going about it in the wrong way, if you're forced to say that the physics department and the history department and the philosophy department are all entrapments, and leave their stings of falsehood behind them.

*Mr. Steadman:* I still want to dispute the fellowship you believe the physics departments share with the great physicists of the past. It is certainly true that a number of contemporary scientists really are fellows in the fullest sense of Kepler and Galileo. And it is also true, exactly as you said, that a too quick initiation into that tradition is a disaster, because it cuts you loose from that fellowship by cutting you off from the antecedents of what you are trying to think about. It does not at all lead you to become a fellow of Kepler and Galileo, but permits you to be a fellow only of those who are right around you. And that's the trap.

*Mr. Tussman:* I just don't understand that. The physicists around you are doing the same things that Kepler and Galileo did.

*Mr. Steadman:* Even if that's what they were doing, they wouldn't know it. I am very familiar with one physics department in a great university. There, physics belongs in the physics department, the history of physics belongs in the history department. Galileo, Kepler, Maxwell belong on the history shelf. Everybody in the physics department is told to read them. Nobody reads them.

*Mr. Tussman:* But it's not a question of history. I thought we were beyond talking about the history of these things. The point is that we are continuing their work in a powerful current mode. You are objecting to the fact that they are doing physics and not paying any attention to the history of physics.

*Mr. Simpson:* No, not at all. The point is that what there is to do they are not really reflecting on. One way to reflect on it is to read somebody like Newton or Maxwell.

## Second Day

*Mr. Tussman:* Not when they are being physicists. If they were being philosophers about physics, then what you say would be true.

*Mr. Bart:* I thought Mr. Simpson touched very deeply on your question, Mr. Tussman. Newton simply wouldn't have understood anyone's objecting, "But that's philosophy." He put the word *philosophy* right on the title-page of his book, probably to the embarrassment of modern physicists. *The Principles of Natural Philosophy* is what he called it.

There may be a very fundamental difference between us here. I do not at all question your point that once one sets about becoming a professional physicist he probably had better set aside those philosophical questions for awhile and, in the ordinary sense of the word, learn physics, *do physics*. But those of us who are thinking about undergraduate education and carrying out the special task of what you are calling "the college" as being specifically different from "the university", must not make that compartmentalizing distinction. The reason we mustn't do it is because once the physicist has mastered the arts and sciences of physics, if he is going to be intellectually responsible to his practice, he must at some time remember to go back and, as Mr. Dragstedt has said, in his thought simply level that entire structure. It is the business of his preliminary liberal education to prepare him to understand the possibility and the necessity of making that effort.

Now of course you can't do that beforehand except in a very childish way. But I wouldn't want to departmentalize undergraduate studies and then say to the graduate physicist who is rethinking what he knows, "But that's philosophy and no affair of yours." And I don't think you'd want that either, would you?

*Mr. Tussman:* I don't want to departmentalize when it comes to what I call the college. But I think it is inevitable that what we call the university, by its very nature, does departmentalize. For me the interesting problem is what we



## Second Day

can do about the education of a student in the college in order to relate it to his studies in the university where, in many cases, he is going to become a professional pursuer of knowledge. The problem of what to do with the student before you let the department initiate him into a particular art is the one I thought you had solved in an interesting way by your practice.

*Mr. Bart:* I think the central principle of our teaching practice is this: we try to ask our students with respect to whatever they think about, What are the elements? and What are the foundations? I really think that is our universal practice. It consists, first, of finding the central terms of a discipline and then of not allowing the students to "go current" as though everybody understood the terms. (I should say that I'm speaking here mainly in the context of the study of physics which we have just been discussing, but what I say is really universal.) By probing in this way it is true that we do, in a sense, elevate our students above the specialists for awhile. And with great dangers. But we do it, and they do ask those fundamental questions.

*Mr. Tussman:* Questions are important, but they are secondary. A question can only fruitfully be asked after you have first acquired habits.

*Mr. Bart:* Help me to understand that. What do you mean?

*Mr. Tussman:* Questioning is a secondary art. It presupposes a prior activity. Initiation into the activity is prior to asking the significant questions about it. Premature questioning is the destruction of everything.

*Mr. Bart:* I'm really not understanding. In practical terms, we take eighteen-year-olds into our college, and they sort of know something or other. They really do. They do know some things. They read a book, and, I confess, the thing I want to do is ask them questions about their responses to it. Now what is it you are meaning? You might say, "They have to respond to it first," and I agree with you about that.

## Second Day

*Mr. Tussman:* I mean they have to get the habit of reading before you can ask them about the significant principles of reading, in the same way that a child acquires the habit of speaking before he is capable of raising, and before we are capable of raising with him, questions about the nature of language.

*Mr. Bart:* Certainly.

*Mr. Tussman:* The dilemma in such cases is that you don't, for instance, invite them to ask questions about physics before they have done some physics. Even in our university philosophy department I am impatient with students who want to know about the nature of philosophy before they have abandoned the questioning attitude and taken the leap of faith and done some philosophy without understanding why.

*Mr. Bart:* I don't think we disagree entirely. But I think that on the first day and in the first class on Euclid it is of the greatest importance for them to ask why we should begin with definitions, and whether the definitions Euclid proposes are any good. Of course, we don't stay there.

*Mr. Tussman:* I would argue that asking them why you start with definitions is exactly the wrong way to begin. They cannot possibly give you an intelligent answer to that.

*Mr. Bart:* Oh, but unfortunately they have very sophisticated answers to the question.

*Mr. Steadman:* That is exactly the difference between the fellowships that I was talking about before. That's the best example we've had. Because they've studied a lot of mathematics, beginning students think they understand very well all the sorts of things Euclid is thinking about. That is to say, they are the fellows of the modern mathematicians and know the mathematics that dates roughly from the beginning of this century. When they begin to read Euclid, they have all sorts of sophisticated and wrong things to say about it. For example, they think it's obvious that his proofs aren't rigorous and need this or that axiom.

## Second Day

They think he seems to be referring to the diagram in an unrigorous way, and so on. Now if Euclid were a modern mathematician and had come after Hilbert, they'd be right. But the fact is that Euclid is doing something that is radically different from what Hilbert was doing, and modern mathematicians have lost their fellowship with Euclid. Most mathematicians can't read Euclid and see mathematics in the way he did.

*Mr. Tussman:* But Mr. Steadman, the question before us is the question about the right relation between habits and questions. I regard that to be the most significant of our pedagogic problems.

Now, Mr. Bart, whereas you are putting questioning as the prior activity, I find that what is necessary for learning is humility. The biggest problem with students is not to get them to question, but to get them to abandon immature questions and do some reading. For example, you cannot possibly discuss the question, Why are we reading Hobbes now? until you have read Hobbes. And there are many other questions of the same sort, like What is the significance of this book? Why do we use this method? Those questions are not reasonable in the circumstances.

*Mr. Bart:* They are certainly premature, and I thought we were agreed about that. And I certainly do agree with you on the question of habits and the questionings about the habits. But the pedagogical problem is that in our students we are confronting people who have quite a lot of habits already and quite a large repertory of preconceptions. It seems to me that, while inviting them to read and do other things, one must right away question those pre-suppositions of theirs.

*Mr. Tussman:* For my part, I think you have to ignore all their previous information which, as a matter of fact, amounts to nothing. In my experience, freshmen can't talk, can't read, can't write. So you have to start almost fresh. They come to you, and you give them something to

## Second Day

read. You ask them to get involved in an activity. The questions to be raised about what you have set them doing can be raised legitimately and profitably only at a point fairly far along and after they have become committed to a way of behaving.

Mr. Steadman: I don't think that. For example, the very first question I'd like to see raised in a seminar on the *Iliad* is the question, Is this the kind of life I ought to be leading? Or, Should our life be a search for honor, because we are all mortal?

I think it is important that the question should be immediate to them. It should ask them, Is this, right here in the seminar, the kind of life I should be leading? They should think, "Perhaps I shouldn't be sitting at a table talking about the *Iliad*, but should be going out and doing something glorious."

Mr. Tussman: That seems to me a strange way to begin to respect a book in its own terms. I would have supposed that, when you read the *Iliad*, the interesting questions about why anyone should read it emerge rather slowly, and when they do, it is with tremendous impact. When I read the *Iliad*, it gradually dawns on me that we are still on the plain of Troy—or something of that sort.

To come at the *Iliad* with the kind of question, Is this the kind of life I ought to be leading?, seems to be a strange imposition upon it. You surprise me.

Mr. Steadman: I confess it's not the question I do ask at the first seminar, because the students don't know yet how to talk together in a seminar. It takes time to learn that. But I think it's the question I'd like to see raised right off, if it were possible. I think it's the right kind of question.

Mr. Darkey: Gentlemen, once again our time has run out and we must stop for today.

To attempt to summarize a seminar is a risky business; and yet, under the force of Mr. Loomis's proposition that the method appropriate to the seminar (if there is any

## Second Day

such method) is to attempt to recall what happened, I feel that I should make that attempt.

I do not see how to make a narrative summary of what happened, except to observe in the most general way that there seemed to be two chief movements in the conversation. The first was a debate about what kind of ordering principle is possible and appropriate for a curriculum of liberal studies. In this context the question of art and method was raised.

The second movement followed upon a challenge by Mr. Tussman to abandon the somewhat arcane discussion that had been going on and try to address the broader issue of the relation of the undergraduate college of liberal arts to the modern university. I believe the response offered was that it is the business of the college to put the student on his guard against the university by teaching him the habit of inquiring into the foundations of the special disciplines.

It is obvious that we have not arrived at answers but at questions more sharply focused. On the other hand, a number of principles were advanced, sometimes as bases for positions and sometimes simply as statements of an insight occasioned by what was being thought and said. I shall try to recall some of them. I hope my phrasing will not seem altogether unfamiliar or unacceptable.

1. Liberal education must be based on some view that the world is whole and that the enterprise of understanding it and living in it is therefore whole as well.

2. One mark of a great book is that it is permeated by a vision of the wholeness of things and that it adumbrates that vision to its readers.

3. A sort of antimony:

(a) Each discipline has its own proper methods, and a liberally educated person is one who possesses the methods of the primary disciplines. These are the liberal arts.

*Second Day*

(b) Inquiry into the fundamental order of things is the task of the liberal arts, which cannot be reduced to any method.

4. Liberal education must become general if our civilization is to survive.

5. The mission of the undergraduate college of liberal arts and the mission of the modern university are essentially different.

6. The truth to be learnt—or taught—is in the student, and not in the teacher.

7. The main task of the undergraduate college is to teach its students how to ask with respect to whatever they think about, What are the foundations?

8. Another apparent antimony:

(a) Learning must begin with questioning.

(b) Learning must begin in humility with the acquisition of habits.

I believe all these propositions were brought forth in the course of our conversation with one another. They seem to me to be important propositions. I wonder how many of these brain children of ours we would all acknowledge as legitimate?

Let us meet again at ten o'clock tomorrow morning.

## THIRD DAY

*Mr. Darkey:* The topic we mean to propose for this morning's discussion grows out of our first two conversations, and, as a matter of fact, several of you have suggested to me that this ought to be our business today. My immediate difficulty is that I'm not sure how best to frame it as an opening question. The topic concerns the role of one particular kind of great book in liberal education, and the trouble is that I don't know the right name for that kind. I suppose the difficulty is not altogether surprising, since we have already confessed our common experience that truly great books refuse to be classified comfortably and that they won't stay put in the academic pigeonholes we provide for them. Let me try to explain.

At first I was tempted to frame the question this way: What is the place of Poetry in liberal education? I hoped that thinking of Poetry with a capital "P" might indicate a very broad category. But even with the capital letter I think the term is too restrictive for what, clearly, we have in mind. For I think we mean to include in our question such works as the great histories and biographies, the dialogues of Plato, certain books of the Bible, and perhaps many others that do not seem simply to be poetry—or even Poetry. "Works of the imagination" suggested itself, but that also is too restrictive, though in another sense, for

### Third Day

surely many works of philosophy, mathematics and natural science manifest great powers of what we could reasonably call imagination, and yet they do not seem to belong to the class we have in mind. And "Literature," which in some contexts is a standard term for getting around the difficulty, is surely too imprecise to serve our purpose.

May I propose for our working purposes a category of "works which represent the human image"? Although the term is a bit clumsy, I think it is what we intend. Let me, then, put the question this way. What is the role in liberal education of those works which represent the human image?

Our common experience ought to throw some light on this question. And I should add that it is a question of practical import, at least for us at St. John's, seeing that over the years our continuing curricular revisions have regularly eliminated more and more of such works from our reading lists to make room for other kinds of books.

To repeat the question, then, In liberal education, to what ends do we study those works which represent the human figure acting and suffering? Or, alternatively, what is the special role of such works in bringing about the student's intellectual awakening?

Mr. McArthur: What if you made the question more concrete and took a book, say, the *Iliad*, and then asked, What good is reading the *Iliad*? What happens to people when they read it and discuss it?

Mr. Darkey: All right, let's try it that way. Shall we ask this? In the light of our experience, why do we think that what happens to our students when they read the *Iliad* is so good that nobody would think of dropping it from the curriculum?

Mr. McArthur: Something like that is what I meant. What would it be like if nobody read the *Iliad*, but read other things and left it out? Maybe the question would be



### Third Day

more discussable if we were to put it in terms of a concrete example.

(Pause)

Mr. Darkey: Let me try a shorter answer. If our students never read the *Iliad*, they would never know Achilles. Would that matter?

Mr. Bart: That's a great deal. But could I revise that to say they would never know the *story* of Achilles. I make that change with Aristotle to guide me.

Mr. Steadman: But is there a difference?

Mr. Bart: Well, since I don't follow Leibnitz in my own views of the human person, I think there is a difference.

Mr. Nicgorski: I think the first formulation—that we'd never know Achilles—in some circles would invite the simple suggestion that in order to be initiated into the Western tradition, you should have to know who Achilles was. But I think to say "the story of Achilles" opens up much more than that. Reading the *Iliad* leads to discussion of the human character in its various excellences and defects that we see represented to us in the different people of the story.

Mr. McArthur: That's right. You could say that. You could say that if you didn't know Achilles, you would not know something which has become a significant part of the Western tradition. But if you did say that, you'd have to add, "However, there must be something striking about the thing itself for it to become such a prominent part of that tradition." Then you'd have to ask, "What is it that's so striking?" So leaving aside the consideration that it's become a significant part of the tradition—because students by and large don't know that and don't care—maybe you just ask, Is there something intrinsic to the *Iliad*, which we can see from our experience of having read it and talked with our students about it that we can say to justify its inclusion in our curriculum?

Mr. Nicgorski: I agree with you that students are not

### Third Day

usually aware of the first consideration, but since it is widely read—

Mr. McArthur (breaking in): Yes, you're right. We could talk about it that way. But it would sidetrack us. Actually, the fact that students don't care about what we call is "importance in the tradition" is really a boon when you read it with them. It would make the reading more difficult, because they'd think they *ought* to care.

Mr. Tussman: Would it be going too far to say they ought to read the *Iliad* because if they haven't they can't understand Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*; and if they haven't read Thucydides, there's an important sense in which they don't know what Plato is talking about?

Mr. Simpson: I'd say it would be conceivable to choose the *Iliad*, if you were only going to read one book and even if you didn't live in the West, though I'm not really sure about the last. I don't like to resort to justifying the reading of the *Iliad* in terms of something later or of something else. It does seem to me that to read the *Iliad* is of enormous intrinsic value. One's confrontation with Achilles seems to me to be an immense experience; and even if you were going to have only one occasion to do a seminar with a group of people you'd never see again, it would seem perfectly reasonable to me to choose the *Iliad* to read and talk about.

But to go back to something that was said at the beginning, I didn't understand the distinction between Achilles and his story. I need help with that. It seems to me the two go together in such a way that I can't take them apart.

Mr. Bart: I'll take them apart very simply. If you take away everything after the Tenth Book, you certainly know Achilles.

Mr. Steadman: No you don't.

Mr. Bart: You say that because you already know the whole story.

*Third Day*

*Mr. Steadman:* I think you don't know Achilles until you have seen his funeral games and his meeting with Priam.

*Mr. Simpson:* Mr. Bart, did you mean that what happens in the end of the *Iliad* is all implicit in the Achilles we know in the beginning? Is that what you meant when you referred to Leibnitz? I didn't catch what you said about Leibnitz.

*Mr. Bart:* What I said about Leibnitz was only that he does understand that the definition of Achilles consists of everything that happens to him. And I think Mr. Steadman, willingly or not, is saying that.

*Mr. Simpson:* I was thinking of Leibnitz in a different sense. I thought maybe you would say you had only to see a little of Achilles and, in a certain sense, you're prepared to write his story.

*Mr. Bart:* That would be even more Leibnitzian. I don't espouse that.

*Mr. Simpson:* You might not be quite up to it. But would you mean that in principle?

*Mr. Bart:* We're understanding Leibnitz in exactly the same way. But all I really mean to be saying is that I think character and story are inseparable, and that, for my part, I care more about story than about character, although I'm very interested in character. The character of Achilles seems to me rather well given in the First Book and fully given in the Ninth Book. After that point something happens to Achilles, and he does things contrary to what we would be led to expect from his character alone. So after I have read the Twenty-fourth Book, it seems to be part of the story of Achilles that he could be moved by what happened to his friends to do certain unexpected things.

*Mr. Simpson:* That's really Homer taking a better measure of Achilles than we can.

*Mr. Bart:* Then you really do mean to be saying that there's no difference between character and story, while

### Third Day

that's what I meant to reject a little, although it doesn't seem to me we're disputing. I'm willing to yield, if you really feel that knowing the person is identical with knowing everything that he does—although I do question that premise a little.

*Mr. Simpson:* But a person's story isn't everything he does.

*Mr. Bart:* It's everything we know of him.

*Mr. Simpson:* It's the way Homer chose to tell us about Achilles. One could argue that Homer, through the story, finally brings us back to a confrontation with an enormously problematic and exciting character.

*Mr. Starr:* Isn't it the case that even though the story presents a careful description of Achilles' virtues and vices and habits and inclinations and powers and weaknesses, still, without the arrangements of the events of the narrative, it would lack the interest and the power that the *Iliad* actually does have? Is that what you're seeing?

*Mr. Bart:* Yes, I suppose it was. I welcome that addition. And I don't know whether or not I disagree with Mr. Simpson. I don't want to.

I guess I wanted to say something like this. It is of the greatest importance to me—and I imagine to a good many other people—that they have never managed to put forth into the world all of what is in themselves, and that they can honestly say, "Nothing I have said and done does justice to what I am." I mean this in the sense that one might say, "I have sinned and will always sin." Or, "I have made endless mistakes, and I condemn everything I have done as somehow wrong or misguided, but even so, there is something within me that is I, and that is different—visibly different—from my story."

*Mr. Steadman:* I think what you say is right and we don't need to dispute that. But I've been trying to find a bridge between the problem of whether the person is his story and the opening question, which asked why it's prof-

### Third Day

itable for our students to read the *Iliad*. In that connection, it seems to me we could say that what we generally know about other people is their stories. Usually, though, with real people there are no actual stories, but only pieces of possible stories that somehow never jell into actual stories with beginnings, middles and ends, never become significant. One of the striking things about being able to read stories like the *Iliad* is that they make it possible for us to meet these functional people and get to know them, become acquainted with them in very much the same way we get acquainted with our friends, but with the added advantage that we possess their stories whole, not only in fragments.

I don't want to insist on any of these formulations because I'm not very clear about them. But my central point is that I think the great benefit the students derive from reading the *Iliad* is that they know the whole story of this remarkable person, Achilles, whom they'd never come to know in any other way.

Mr. Bart: I don't think our lives are stories. And I find what you have said is very valuable, because I too doubt that our lives have any wholeness in the sense that stories have.

And I must say that I hope you're right about the value to students of reading stories. My impression is that what most people get out of reading stories—or of experiencing a piece of what you're calling the story—is a sense of the characters of the persons in the story, a sense of the virtues and vices they manifest. I think that's what we mostly know in other people; and, for the most part, we tend to dismiss people when we feel we have a catalogue of their virtues and vices, or when we've found which particular vice we don't like in them. So in that sense it's very hard to hear someone's real story, which often has a "twenty-fourth book" hidden in it that almost nobody knows or bothers to know.

### Third Day

*Mr. Steadman:* I think it's exactly true that we ourselves as individual persons don't have stories—that real people don't have these separate accounts, and that, often the "twenty-fourth book" never happens. But it seems to me that when we're actively trying to understand the world around us what we're doing is trying to construct stories for ourselves, trying to make intelligible wholes out of the various scattered pieces we find lying around.

*Mr. Bart:* I don't want to lose the point on which I thought we differed. I think there is a great tradition that would say our virtues and our vices are what we know about ourselves and about others, that these are what is intelligible in us and the measure of a man. So I'm not at all sure, as you were saying, that we are mostly engaged in knowing the stories of people. It may be that what we want to know about a person is what is intelligible, namely, his character.

*Mr. Steadman:* That bears directly on our main question. It seems to me that the educational value of reading books of the kind we're discussing is exactly that they do attempt to make a story. They try to make an intelligible and meaningful whole out of the piecemeal appearance of human lives. To do otherwise would be to reduce a person's life to a list of the elements that compose his character.

*Mr. Simpson:* I have difficulty with what's being said about the intelligibility of stories. It isn't at all clear to me that Homer himself understands Achilles or that he expects us to understand him either simply or fully. I thought maybe the distinction between the man and his story was important in relation to the opening question, because I suspected Mr. Darkey was reminding us of the ease with which a seminar discussion can leave the man behind altogether and go on to "higher" things—to the gods and to those other more abstract things that we find easier to handle. We seem to find it easier to talk about the story and its schematic structure and various kinds of formal prob-

### Third Day

lems than to be responsive to the people in it. To find a way to talk about the people themselves and to give them real attention as individual persons may be very difficult for us.

I wonder if this is true? Do we find it easier to talk about stories and their ethical and social implications than to look at the images of men?

Mr. Darkey: You're certainly putting your finger on one of the difficulties we often encounter in our seminars where, having read *Richard II*, we may right away find ourselves engaged in discussing the play as an illustration of Machiavellian political theory, and unless we take our business pretty firmly in hand, we may never get back to King Richard and Bolingbroke.

Mr. Tussman: I wonder if the clue isn't provided by the term you did select after rejecting *Poetry* and *Literature*, which was *images*. Doesn't that suggest the Platonic Cave? For in a strange sense, if liberal education is leading people out of the Cave, the *Iliad* and these other works you have been talking about are, in a way, images on the wall of the Cave which we try to understand through the use of other material. We are constantly and naturally being led from the representation of the images to the understanding of them. I think that is the place of the Homers and the historians. The coherence of their works is the coherence of a story or narrative, but that is not necessarily the order of the understanding.

Mr. Darkey: I think I have half an objection to putting it that way. It seems to me that there are two main kinds of books—and maybe a third which is both kinds together. One kind is made up of works which present principles; the other is made up of works which present instances. I think this indicates a basic rhythm of the mind. For as soon as we are given a principle, we try to think, What would be an example of that? And as soon as we are presented with an instance, we try to think, What principle is operating there?

### Third Day

It's my own experience that when one makes either response he always doubts whether he has fully conceived or fully imagined the implications of the thing given. He has to ask himself, Is this principle that I have managed to formulate abstractly really adequate to the concrete case I've been given? For instance, I can't help wondering if my abstract formulation of ethical or political or psychological principles really gets at what I seem to see going on in the *Iliad* or *Oedipus Rex*. And on the other side, take Kant's formulation of the Categorical Imperative. One must ask, I think, What would it be like to act that way? Do I, or does anyone, ever really act on such a principle, which of course, in the abstract statement, is highly intelligible?

Something like that, Mr. Tussman, is what I meant when I said I thought I had half an objection to your application of the metaphor of the Cave. I think that understanding the images in terms of abstract formulations may be only part of the business.

*Mr. McArthur:* Which is to say, then, that the imaginative works really serve some other purpose for us, and it's that other purpose that's more important than the books themselves?

*Mr. Darkey:* I'm not sure I follow you. What other purposes do you mean?

*Mr. McArthur:* Well, take your case of the Categorical Imperative. Suppose you ask, What would it be like if we really did act that way? Maybe someone has difficulty in seeing that. But if we had a character someplace in a story that would illustrate the attempt to put that principle into practice, then we'd have in front of us a singular, an image of a possible person. That might help us to talk about the notion of the Categorical Imperative and the import of that principle in one's own life.

*Mr. Darkey:* Yes, I think I did mean that. I think such works do provide us with a kind of experience—or quasi-experience—that we find relatively intelligible. And I do believe that if one has an accumulation of this kind of



### Third Day

experience, he can make use of it in trying to understand human actions. Maybe it's even necessary that one make use of such examples and models as are given in literature, because it is exceedingly difficult to make up really good examples for oneself. At least the examples I make up for illustrations usually let me down.

Mr. Simpson: But the imaginative works you confront don't really *exemplify* things, either. As soon as you look hard at the supposed example, it turns out to be a more complicated thing that draws you into unforeseen dimensions. Certainly we do draw on imaginative works and refer to them. But surely we shouldn't imagine that Socrates or Achilles or Natasha or any such a one is going to be an example of anything, or that it's our business as readers to solve the implicit riddle, or that the author intended us to do that.

And it doesn't seem to me that the dialogues of Plato are like the account he gives in his *Republic* of the images on the wall of the Cave. And, for all that's said there of the philosopher-poet's illustrating for us from a higher wisdom, the people in the dialogues, people like Socrates and Meno and Crito, really don't resolve themselves as instances of something.

Mr. Starr: One thing I'm having trouble seeing right now is this: the opening questions suggested that we may read these works with our students with a view to bringing about an intellectual awakening in them. It has struck me that Mr. Bart's reference to the intelligibility of character, Mr. Steadman's choice of plot as the principle of the intelligible wholeness of a story, and our more recent consideration of the moral as the principle of the intelligible were all ways of attempting to say, "Yes, these works contain or point to or illustrate something *intelligible*; and, therefore, they contribute to the student's *intellectual* awakening." But I'm wondering if there isn't some other end than a strictly *intellectual* awakening? Is that other end what

### Third Day

we might call the development of a sensibility or moral discernment or sensitivity?

*Mr. Simpson:* It seems to me that's trite.

*Mr. Starr:* If it is, I'm sorry. But I don't think it is insignificant, if at certain places in our curriculum we take up business that is not strictly intellectual. Perhaps it's right that we do. Maybe we really ought to try to do that other thing.

*Mr. Bart:* That was my whole intent in resisting the notion that Achilles might be understood as an intelligible character as over and against the story of Achilles, which may indeed have a whole, but not a whole that anybody can reduce to merely intelligible terms. I completely subscribed, however, to what I thought Mr. Simpson was saying. And I do see that all that has been said has been used both ways. I do want to come down on your side, Mr. Starr, but I share Mr. Simpson's concern.

You were saying very well, I thought, Mr. Darkey, that when we read these books we can run away from the story by turning the story into a case of some principle. And I share your desire to have students encounter human beings. What's more, I don't mind at all developing their sensitivity. (Why should we not talk of sensitivity?) I have been interested in those concerns the 18th Century tended to deal with in terms of sentiment. People then did think that an education of the sentiment was possible. I confess I share that opinion, and I suspect the 18th century was better at such education than we are.

But I'm digressing. The main point with which I want to agree is Mr. Starr's, that something not strictly intelligible takes place when we read such works as we are now discussing, and I think it should take place.

*Mr. Berquist:* The difficulty I feel with this sort of books is this. When you treat Euclid's *Elements* in a class, you're pretty confident that the use you're making of the book is the use Euclid intended. But when you talk about

### Third Day

the *Iliad*, it's not so clear you're using it as Homer intended. Even when you read the *Iliad* preparing for a class, I wonder if the very activity of thinking up questions that might be raised and about discussions that could come up might not actually put obstacles in the way of what the poet is trying to accomplish.

Mr. Simpson: Yes. And even to speak of "using" the *Iliad* feels so wrong. We feel that Homer couldn't have intended it to be "used", and we know he didn't.

Mr. Ascher: May I make another suggestion about the educational function of these books. I think it is different from anything that has been proposed so far, though I don't deny the points that have been made.

When I teach a course in 19th Century Russia, I assign readings in Turgenev and Gogol and Dostoevsky. Now I believe that one of the most important uses of these works of the imagination is that they provide a way for students to learn about societies different from their own. I find that the most difficult effort for the students to make is to transport themselves out of their own society and into another one. It is very important to learn to do that. They need to confront problems which are different and a social order which is entirely different from the ones they are accustomed to. I try to find such readings as will involve my students in considerations and circumstances as different as possible as from anything they have ever experienced in their own lives. This engages them with questions about the social orders and the implicit moral problems. I find this an enormously beneficial way to make use of works of the imagination.

Mr. Darkey: Mr. Ascher, I wonder if you would be willing to generalize your formulation and say simply that such works as these help our students and ourselves to enter into worlds that are totally different from our own? By making the substitution I'm trying to avoid an exclu-

### Third Day

sively sociological context which may be an unnecessary restriction.

Mr. Ascher: I gladly accept that formulation.

Mr. Haggard: That is connected with Mr. Dragstedt's remarks day before yesterday about *aporia*, although now it's in a very different context. To see the world suddenly in a way that is totally unlike what you ordinarily take for granted is to be stopped dead in your tracks, to be really at a loss.

The conversation so far appears to me to have been saying that a poet like Homer, by raising the image of Achilles and holding it there before you, opens the possibility for you to see the world in a way you've never seen it before. And not primarily by theorizing about notions of justice, either. Just to confront that huge person, Achilles, there at the heart of the story can make you re-examine all sorts of ideas about the way the world is.

Mr. Darkey: If we put what you've just been saying, Mr. Haggard, together with the movement Mr. Starr and Mr. Bart have been making, I'd want to add that we really do *enter* the world of the work, we don't just see the possibility of that world. Somehow we experience actually being in it. It's hard to talk about that experience, but I think we've all had it. Being immersed in the world of a book has something of the nature of immediate experience, certainly while you are reading, and usually for some time afterwards. Sometimes I find myself lingering, or as we say, *dwelling*, in that world even as I go about my daily affairs in this one.

Mr. Bart: I would very much agree about that. The difficulty is how to talk about it. And I'm uneasy about Mr. Starr's separating what this experience is from intellectual awakening. And yet at the same time I feel, as he does, that I would rather refer to something like the sensibility. I don't mean to put words into Mr. Starr's mouth,

### Third Day

but what I have in mind is that our intelligence really manifests itself in more than one way.

I have often noticed how perfectly uninteresting and even unintelligent Tolstoy is in *War and Peace* when he talks about theories of history, or when he tries to represent two philosophers discussing a profound problem. In fact, Tolstoy seems quite incapable of discovering what an interesting intellectual question is. And yet, on the other hand, as I have been working on *Anna Karenina* this year I have been simply struck by the immense intelligence with which he observes individual persons. Without such intelligence I do not believe he could create any kind of effective experience for us to move into. By this kind of intelligence I mean his power to observe utterly individual persons. It's a faculty I don't know the right term for. Popularly it's called *sensitivity*, but maybe that is abused. Maybe *sensibility* would be better.

*Mr. Simpson:* In *War and Peace* Natasha fits into the prolonged investigation of a revised conception of history which Tolstoy explores through the plot of *War and Peace*. He may at times talk badly about that new concept, but when he sets out to write an essay about it at the end of the novel, somehow that does help us to see what Natasha means to history.

*Mr. Bart:* He certainly wants somehow or other to bring her under the concept of life; and that word is not useless to me when he talks of Natasha. But it is significant for the point at issue that it is more to his purpose to give us Natasha singing and make us understand what singing meant to her.

*Mr. Simpson:* That does mean something very much; doesn't it, that event, that moment when she sings at the Uncle's?

*Mr. Bart:*—Yes. And I want to insist that it has meaning—is intelligible—without being reduced to concepts. I'm not fond of that word.

*Mr. Darkey:* But however one puts it, doesn't it seem

### Third Day

inescapable that somehow our noetic faculty is involved in what we experience at that place in the novel? Don't we grasp something—see something?

Mr. Bart: I want to insist on that for myself.

Mr. Starr: Incidentally, my reason for stating the problem in terms of a bifurcation was that there does seem to be a *prima facie* difference between those two modes of understanding. So I put it that way in the hope that we might struggle a little to bridge that gap by trying to say how the things we've been talking about are intelligible.

Mr. Simpson: If you want to take them apart, I agree it can be done. But I think it is more interesting to see the way they can come together. And sometimes in seminars I think I've seen them come together. When that happens the gap between the two modes of understanding is bridged. In such a moment, all that may have been said about the story, about the gods, about faith, about moral choice, and so on, may come back to an insight about one character. Then, all of a sudden, one experiences the excitement of that discovery. I think that is an intellectual moment.

Mr. Bart: Now I can say in a word why I didn't like the word *character*. I would rather say "that person at that moment." I don't want to force any terminology, but it's precisely a question of how to talk about the individual. It does not seem to me that individuals are totally unintelligible to us; but at the same time, the way individuals are intelligible to us is obviously very different from the way universals are intelligible.

Mr. Simpson: This is what I wanted to say at the outset, that somehow the kinds of stories we are talking about are hugely complex, subtle, fascinating in ways which, mysteriously, are able to take a measure of the individuality. That is what helps us to come back to the individual, to the moment of perception of the individual—or of sensibility towards him.

Mr. Bart: I completely agree.

### Third Day

Mr. Lyon: I wonder if the problems about the intelligibility of the individual are related to the fact of expression in different verbal media—I mean oral discourse as opposed to written. I wonder if concepts are in any sense functions of the written word? I don't know. But the *Iliad*, with which we started, comes out of an oral tradition and only subsequently was written down. It would seem to be concerned more with individuals than with types of things like causes and effects which come to be central to the kinds of discourse we have in the Platonic dialogues. And of course Plato recognizes in Homer a great enemy.

Mr. Starr: Plato also recognizes that the written word presents a great problem. I don't know whether I'm understanding you, but I thought you were pointing to the difference between narrative discourse, on the one hand, and argumentative or thesis-proving discourse on the other. I'm not immediately persuaded that hearing and reading is the main difference between those, but I'd like to hear more.

Mr. Lyon: A colleague of mine whose literary skills I greatly respect is very harsh with us for reducing literature to ideas. When we read *War and Peace*, for example, he has students read their favorite passages aloud—simply read them aloud without giving reasons for their choice. And of course no one ever reads Tolstoy's essays on history aloud. I suppose it would be absurd to do that.

Mr. Haggard: Are we saying that sensibility is a faculty of the intellect? And if so, are we saying that we include such works in our curriculum of liberal education to train or cultivate this faculty? I myself don't for a moment question that we should read them, but what part of liberal education is such reading if we have that purpose in mind? I agree that Shakespeare's plays mean something, and I even agree that reading passages from the plays aloud means something. But what does this kind of meaning have to do with the intelligibility we've been trying to talk about so far?

### Third Day

*Mr. Darkey:* Haven't we been led by the discussion so far to admit that our response to works of the imagination does have something to do with what is intelligible? And aside from the discussion, whenever we have trouble approaching a novel or a play or a poem, we say we "don't get it" or simply that we "don't understand it." So it does seem to us that it is a question of our intellectual grasp.

*Mr. Bart:* But in the notion of imaging aren't there some elements that we're going to have a very tough time talking about? I mean the medium and the existence of the medium and the relationship of the medium to whatever might be reduced to expressible ideas. In the *Timaeus* I believe Plato at least suggests that the medium is absolutely inaccessible to reason, and that, whereas it can be dominated and even ordered to reason, the medium as such is utterly unintelligible. On the other hand, I believe the dialogue really says that the medium is material that is made up into the world we have and, in that sense, exists for us only in its unity with the intelligible and has no other existence apart from that unity. I would want to insist that this is so.

I would also want to say that my example of Tolstoy was a rather isolated one among the artists and poets we read. Most of them seem to be much more manifestly and expressly intelligent, whereas Tolstoy's intelligence does seem to be almost entirely embedded in particulars.

*Mr. Starr:* There is an intermediate kind of discourse that it might be helpful for us to think about. As we have been talking about Tolstoy, it has occurred to me that the intermediate between the narrative, which he does so well, and the theoretical, which he does so poorly, is to come up with an occasional metaphor, which I think he doesn't handle as well as he does the narrative, but better far than he does the argument.

For instance, after the death of Platon Karataev, Pierre has a dream of the world as a kind of globe with God at



### Third Day

the center and each person striving to reflect as much of that divine center as possible. Plato does the same sort of thing in his dialogues, but far better. Myths, like the one in the *Phaedrus* and the one in the *Timaeus*, take a sort of narrative form. I don't know whether to see those as instances of what we have just now been calling imaginative literature (which in our discussion has been limited exclusively to narrative literature), or as attempts to put forth what one might call metaphysical theses. In truth, it seems to me to fall somewhere between those two, and I think if I could grasp that intermediary use of the imagination, I think perhaps I could better understand narrative.

*Mr. Nicgorski:* An author ordinarily uses those figures to make sense out of particulars. But to return to Mr. Haggard's question, I'm wondering if one can't ask whether the sensibility is really a part of the intellectual faculty at all? And, if so, how does it relate to that faculty as a whole?

I think what imaginative literature does, at what may indeed be the lowest level, is extend our perception. Now perception isn't a wholly unintellectual act, and it's certainly going to be the basis for subsequent intellectual acts. At least that much seems to be implied by what we've said. For instance, Mr. Simpson talked earlier about our "returning to the characters with insight after we had seen their whole story." So it seems that to have our perception extended by means of imaginative literature, whether it be in terms of understanding the human situation in another society, or simply of understanding our own society better by having viewed it through the eyes of a particularly keen observer; is at the very least a condition for intellectual apprehension and for a better understanding.

*Mr. Haggard:* I'm having trouble locating the center of our discussion. We seem to be on the verge of suggesting that the familiar opposition between the discursive and the poetic or imaginative modes of thought is a false op-

### Third Day

position. But what do we mean to be suggesting? What implications does it have for our teaching practice?

Even if we believe that there is a kind of intelligibility in imaginative literature, what relation does that literature have to the other sorts of writing that we prescribe for study? Within our curriculum at St. John's, for example, I wonder whether the progressively diminishing emphasis on imaginative literature that Mr. Darkey mentioned does result mainly from our inability to teach it well? Or is it simply that we're unwilling to make room for it at the price of eliminating philosophical readings that we believe are important? Or, instead of these purely pragmatic reasons, is our actual practice really rooted in a theoretical presupposition that there is a proper balance between the different faculties of the human intellect which it is the business of liberal education to be training?

I think it has to be asked whether poetry is a real alternative to philosophical inquiry. It seems to me that our culture today commonly supposes not only that it is a real alternative, but also that it is a better one. It is not at all clear that philosophy has any place in our culture any more, and I think the opposition we are engaged with now has a lot to do with that view.

*Mr. Bart:* Aren't you pointing to the perennial quarrel between Poetry and Philosophy and demanding that the question be resolved? The question, though, is whether there is in fact any resolution or no resolution at all.

*Mr. Haggard:* But in our teaching practice we do actually resolve it in some sense.

*Mr. Bart:* But can't we avoid getting entangled in the complex details of our curriculum and stay with the question on a philosophical level? I would hope we could. Our conversation has suggested that although Plato seems to inveigh against poetry, the *Dialogues* themselves manifest that he is a great poet in giving us the figure of Socrates and half a hundred other figures that are an inescapable

### Third Day

part of our inheritance. That very fact suggests to me that it is natural in a discussion to formulate the quarrel between Poetry and Philosophy in discursive terms and in favor of the discursive, or even the noetic, intelligence, at the same time leaving wide open the question of what their real relations are.

The dialogues we have are all the works that Plato chose to send forth into the world. So we are really asking ourselves—Mr. Simpson has raised the question very seriously, and so has Mr. Starr—whether it is true that the individual is merely the exemplar of some principle; or whether, to take your first answer to the opening question, Mr. Darkey (an answer I then rejected and now embrace), to meet the figure of Socrates is not just as important a part of reading Plato as to understand the particular arguments that are set forth, or even to understand the structure of the Platonic way of thinking about the world. This is what I think we are really asking ourselves.

Now for myself I have to answer that the figure of Socrates is set there as something I cannot go beyond. And this is part of the quarrel of Poetry and Philosophy. Philosophy seems to say, "Well, Poetry is for children. We must begin teaching courses in poetry so that we can move on to higher things." But as for me, I can't go beyond Socrates. Or if I do, I will go beyond Socrates to Jesus Christ. But I will go from one figure to another figure, not to a principle.

For me that presents a profound problem as to how we should arrange our curriculum.

*Mr. Darkey:* To speak about our curriculum as having any moral content always makes us uneasy, because that seems to imply some claim to be teaching virtue. And I think we are right to be wary of that. But at the same time there is an undeniable moral content to liberal education, a real pervading concern with morality, however cautious we are in the way we talk about it. I wonder if the sense of

### Third Day

that moral presence does not radiate primarily from the figures we have encountered and come to possess?

For the figure of Socrates, as you say, Mr. Bart, is inescapable and unforgettable. I'm sure that most of our students will live all their lives remembering Socrates—remembering the figure of Socrates—even though they may not remember very much that he said, except, "I know that I don't know," and "The unexamined life is not worth living." And so too for other figures, though perhaps less compellingly—Alcibiades, Augustine, Don Quixote, Natascha, a dozen others. So I wonder whether, quite apart from any explicit intention we may have as teachers, these figures are not at least one powerful source of the moral dimension that properly belongs to liberal education as opposed to, say, purely technical education?

*Mr. Loomis:* A few minutes ago Mr. Starr made a distinction between two different kinds of discourse, namely, narrative discourse and thesis-proving discourse. I've been thinking of another distinction that might fit with his. Maybe there are two ways to say what learning is like. The one I prefer and would be willing to argue for is that learning is like a narrative. Learning is like a story in which some things happen at the beginning and then other things happen afterwards. The other view would be that one begins with postulates, or with something like postulates, and that all the rest unfolds out of these. I think the second is very different from the story of Achilles. I'm not sure how universally I want to propose what I'm about to offer, but it seems to me that in at least very many books of the narrative kind one learns what learning itself is like.

For instance, when Don Quixote is in the cage, Sancho Panza goes to him and says, "I think one of the men over there looks like the barber from our village. Are you sure you believe everything they told us?" And Don Quixote answers, "Sancho, don't distrust what people tell you. If you do, you enter into a labyrinth, and there's no way out

### Third Day

of it. It leads to darkness." Now I think that's a story about learning, and even about a principle in learning. When you read the story, you're forced to think about it. You have to decide, or at least try to decide, whether Don Quixote has said something absurd or something that is true. I don't know anything quite like that in works that aren't stories, works in which figures do not appear.

*Mr. Townsend:* The way I read the lesson Mr. Loomis teaches us from *Don Quixote*—if we believe in the truth of that book, and I, for one, do—is that understanding may really not be possible without pathos. Are we willing to entertain the possibility that apathetic understanding of any kind of patterned energy, whether of Achilles or Quixote or Ptolemy or anyone whatever, is possible? Does any of us think that it is possible to be apathetic and still understand? I think this connects with what has been said. I think you have to enter into the story, as Mr. Haggard was saying. We want our students to be inside the works we give them to read. That's what we're really trying to teach. We're trying to teach people the way in, because to remain outside is finally not to understand at all. There is something really false about the notion of "objective understanding."

*Mr. Simpson:* What you say certainly does bear on what we were trying to put our finger on in our first day's discussion, when we were asking what it is that seems to be special about a good seminar conversation. For me, one criterion is that it can't be completely objective, those taking part can't be completely uninvolved. The student is moved to think there is really something interesting at stake. That initial motion, the engagement of our interest and our desire to understand, already assure that discussion won't be altogether apathetic.

I don't think that would distinguish one kind of book from another at all; in any case, we do find ourselves

### Third Day

caught up in a real motion in relation to these things because they are intrinsically and simply exciting to the intellect.

*Mr. Townsend:* I said what I did because it seemed to me that opposing understanding and sensibility might be creating a false difficulty.

*Mr. Simpson:* That way of putting it would make understanding different from sensibility, wouldn't it? I agree that the opposition may not be right; but I think we separated them because we proposed that sensibility has to do with a certain kind of response to the individual which is somehow noetic, and yet not discursive as it is with universals.

*Mr. Haggard:* But how do we get on the inside? Students often react to a Platonic dialogue by saying, "These are just a lot of silly or fallacious arguments that Socrates has used." I think we respond by saying, "Well now, let's start reading at line 347b, and see if we can make out what the argument is really saying." And we sometimes discover that the arguments do rest on what seem to us to be very strange foundations indeed. Nevertheless, we want to be "on the inside" in the sense that we know we are really addressing ourselves to the steps that Plato has actually taken. And we want to see the shifts of ground that take place and we want to think about what the dramatic interludes mean for the argument. The reading process has all the aspects Mr. Bart was speaking of, including our encounter with the figure of Socrates. In such a case I don't think we're making any simple separation of understanding and sensibility.

*Mr. Townsend:* At the very beginning of today's discussion I don't think I understood the distinction between the person or the character of Achilles, on the one hand, and the story of Achilles on the other. What I didn't understand was whether I could approach both of these with

### Third Day

pathos. It seems to me that I can enter into the story of Achilles, but I don't know if I can really be present to his character.

Mr. Bart: What you are saying, Mr. Townsend, helps me very much, so let me say a little more about why I made that distinction. I was reluctant to say in answer to the opening question that if we had never read the *Iliad*, we'd never know Achilles in the sense of knowing his character, in the sense of knowing what sort of man he is. I was reluctant because in the *Poetics* Aristotle argues powerfully that story is central to tragedy, and that you only want enough character to justify the story. But I very much doubt that a dose of character administered like that would move me at all. To say, "Put in just enough pride and just enough quickness and just enough intelligence to have the hero end up in the requisite situation" doesn't move me at all. On the other hand, when I see Oedipus get angry, believe me, I am moved.

Your remarks just now help to say that I wanted to have the story of Achilles, because I thought it would be his story that would move me, not his character. And I think it came out in the discussion when we said that not knowing Achilles turned out to mean not knowing what was moving about Achilles.

I do understand, of course, that at an early stage of considering the *Iliad* there may perfectly well be discussions about what a hero ought to be, and so on, and that these are rather abstract and probably not very moving. But I do agree with you, Mr. Townsend, that one ought to be moved.

As for the other side of the matter, I confess that, despite a certain penchant for metaphysics, I'm not clear whether abstract formulations can mean anything without seeing that one would be moved this way or that by a certain metaphysical decision and a certain metaphysical consequence. What could it mean for us unless we were moved by it?

### Third Day

*Mr. Darkey:* I don't think I followed the last things you were saying about metaphysical understanding. Can you help me?

*Mr. Bart:* Well, I thought Mr. Townsend and Mr. Simpson were moving us once again to get our understanding of the work of literature that is concerned with the human figure utterly divorced from other uses of the intelligence. Some of us, I think, don't finally want to go that way. In the *Symposium* it seems to me that Plato proposes to move us tremendously by the highest intellectual insights. One can't possibly be apathetic about that. That would be a dreadful mistake.

*Mr. Haggard:* I thought Mr. Ascher meant something like that too when he spoke of trying to enter into the world of 19th century Russia by means of its literature, though I don't know whether he'd see the matter as having to do with metaphysics. But it seems to me it's a very simple kind of thing: one really wants to get into another world and see what it's like to be there.

*Mr. Darkey:* Mr. Starr, I wonder if this is related to remarks that you and Mr. Dragstedt made in an earlier discussion. As I recall, you said that a seminar rightly understood always begins a fresh metaphysical inquiry. I wonder if the situation is not analogous whenever we take up a work like the *Iliad*. Then too we are embarking upon a fresh metaphysical inquiry, because a new world is simply given to us whole and existent, as simply being there, and one must always make a fresh beginning in a new world. Would you agree, Mr. Starr?

*Mr. Starr:* I think so. But to tell you the truth, as I have been following the conversation, I have been moved to think about being moved. I suppose each time we read something really good we are moved afresh in some way. What strikes me now in thinking about this is that one speaks of narrative literature as the sort of writing which, if it is well done, is most moving. And yet Aristotle says



### Third Day

at one point that the ultimate object of metaphysical speculation is the most moving thing of all, namely, the Prime Mover. I wonder if there isn't some need to think of this, though as you say, each seminar is a fresh start.

I think I'd now hesitate to use the word "metaphysical" as the kind of inquiry on which one is started afresh each time; for now it seems to me that there must be some continuity between the understanding of individuals and the understanding of principles, and surely one ought to be able to talk about that continuity without reducing narrative to illustrations of moral or metaphysical principles, and yet see a real continuity between the two modes of thought. Is it the case that each one leads to the other? Is each perfect and complete in itself, but in such a way that both belong together in some greater whole?

*Mr. Darkey:* And would it, then, be our human condition that we are caught between the two modalities?

*Mr. Starr:* It might be.

*Mr. Bart:* To say simply that that is the way things are would be a bolder statement, though more problematical. Not to say that it is our misfortune to be "caught" between the two modalities, but to say, on the contrary, that our very "betweenness" may reveal the way things are.

I well understand that that is a rash statement, but it might be true.

*Mr. Dragstedt:* The word *narrative* has been used by a number of people. I recently had an aporetic experience with narrative.

A book I had been reading on Darwin and speciation made the proposal that the best causal account, the most scientific account, could only be a story. For example, given the density of causal relationships affecting a given population, a likely story would be that the species population had been split geographically by a rising mountain range, so that a selection process came about as it was pressed in certain ways. And all one would ever have would be this

### Third Day

kind of *eikos logos*—this kind of likely story—without experimental controls. The book claimed that you'd never be able to put forth a more scientific account than that.

Now I had been thinking that narrative was something of imaginative literature. I was completely wrong about what imagination is. All my assumptions really were based on my failure to be oriented towards the liberal arts as I should have been. I should have seen that there is no reason in the world why persuasion shouldn't be involved in Darwinism. All of my assumptions, that is to say, were precisely the kind of ontological presuppositions that go with the construction of academic "majors" and what not. In terms of method, I wonder if we shouldn't try to keep from creating categories that serve to legitimate "majors," categories like "Imaginative Science" or "The Human Image"?

The task of accounting for, say, Achilles, is in a certain sense one for the liberal art of Rhetoric. Of course, as Mr. Bart suggests, it would be scurrilous to propose Achilles as an artifact, a mere rhetorical construct; or as just that kind of character that would get Homer through twenty-four books so that he could then collapse exhausted. Nevertheless, there is a rhetorical task in ending a poem. If you mean to end the whole with the resolution of this living contradiction, Achilles, who has decided that although he knows Ajax is right, even so, he is not going to do the thing he plainly should do, it is really only in terms of relentless attention to rhetoric that one can clarify one's understanding, and not by looking merely towards psychology or characterology.

My own errors about Darwin stemmed from my failure to take the liberal art of Rhetoric seriously.

Mr. Bart: Mr. Starr helped me very much by reminding me of the account Aristotle gives which seems to propose that being is concerned with moving and being moved. That is being itself, and that is what I meant by

### Third Day

my last comment to Mr. Darkey: that since being itself is concerned with moving and being moved, we are not "caught" between the two modalities, as he was putting it, but rather our betweenness reveals the way things are. I think we should be bold and not be afraid of that highest power we possess of moving and being moved. We should not be afraid of supposing that there is a divine rhetoric in that sense implicit in everything.

For, after all, there is a sense in which you can use a story to illustrate a principle. Not on the first reading while you're being driven through it by the plot; but afterwards, the second time through, the order of propositions does dominate you. You have gained a freedom with respect to it, and you are free to go back and contemplate that order.

In my own mind I have been comparing it to looking at a statue. Classically, there was a tendency to produce a work of sculpture that had a preferred point of view. When you walked into the room where the statue was, it was simply natural to move around to that point of view first, and then, gradually, to move around the statue. A primary point of view was given, but the more secondary ones you could assimilate, the better off you were. All this is to say that even in the case of an apparently static art there is the invitation—even the necessity—to break free from any preferred position of beholding it. Even a statue, then, tells a story, at least in the sense that motion is necessary to one's perception of it.

Mr. Darkey: I like your example of the statue. But I wonder if that case may not be more applicable to the reading of Euclid than of the *Iliad* in that the propositions of geometry seem just to stand there, and it is we who move through them, inventing sequential connections—a sort of story—and perhaps we attribute to the work itself the motion that is really the movement of our mind?

I understood Mr. Dragstedt to be suggesting that there are some accounts that can be given only in a story, only in

### Third Day

the motion. I think of an analogy with music, which I take to be an essentially temporal art. One can make a sort of architectural diagram of a musical work and use it to grasp the intelligible structure of the whole, but it seems to me that what one has got in the diagram is not the *music*. You don't have the music until you go through it in sound and in time. I wonder if that is not a case analogous to narrative which is also a temporal art?

*Mr. Starr:* You seem to be suggesting—and the notion appeals to me—that there are some objects, perhaps the highest, perhaps the most intelligible objects, which one wants to think of as being immutable. And one wants to think that we have contact with those things through such books as Euclid's *Elements* and perhaps through works of metaphysics. On the other hand, the most evident objects of poems and stories are changing things.

The issue seems to be whether it is indeed possible for human beings to confront immutable things that have immutable parts, or whether our best contact and most perfect union with these things (to use strange language) isn't in being moving pictures of them, or in producing moving pictures of them. I honestly don't know, but it seems to me that that is the question you are asking.

*Mr. Steadman:* I'm having trouble getting hold of the last part of the metaphor about the Prime Mover and the sense in which we are moved by Euclid and metaphysics, and relating that to the earlier part of the discussion, which I thought was focused very nicely by Mr. Darkey when he talked about the moral content of our curriculum as emanating from the human figures, as from Socrates and Christ. But when we talk about mathematics and metaphysics, as we've been doing just now, it seems to me that we are talking about the discursive or thesis-proving part of the dialogue; and it seems to me that we are talking as if that were the same kind of thing as the figures who have the power to move us.

### Third Day

Now I'm still not able to understand just exactly what it is about the figure of Socrates that has this moving moral power, but it does seem to me an altogether different kind of thing from the power mathematics has to move one, and I don't think I know how to say what that difference is. But I wonder if there isn't still something more than we have been able to say about the persons themselves? I'm going back to the very beginning where we were thinking about what it is to meet Achilles through his story and to see his wrath again as the source of his story. And where is the source of the power in the figure of Socrates?

I don't know if what I'm about to say will be helpful or not; but for me the clearest case of such a meeting with a figure comes in the *New Testament*, where the most powerful moving force is the man Jesus. The central thing that the writers of the gospels are saying is that they are witnessing exactly *that man*. They say to you, "Look, I knew that man myself, and I can testify that you should trust him." It's not exactly a doctrine they are testifying to, nor an argument; but they are testifying to the response that they made, and that we are supposed to make, *to a person*.

Obviously this is a very special case. Even so, it may be an extreme case of the sort of response we have, or ought to have, to other works of narrative literature.

*Mr. Darkey:* And maybe a crucial case. The traditions of both the Old and the New Testaments choose to put their truth, that highest truth which they claim to witness, in the narrative mode. I don't think we can avoid pondering the efficacy of that rhetorical mode to teach the truth they wish to impart.

*Mr. Ault:* Isn't there a sense in which all those figures—Christ, Socrates and the rest—have the power to move us because their images contain opposites? Possibility is in them. They are attractive. They pull us into themselves and into their own oppositions. Isn't that really what moves us in reading about Christ and Socrates and those other

### Third Day

figures of power? We are drawn into the tension of their opposing dualities and into the struggles they wage within themselves. And that makes them instructive.

*Mr. Simpson:* I have been thinking something very much like that. Once I tried to figure out and diagram the argument of the *Meno*. I got so lost in its metaphors and ironies and complications of level, and in questions of who said what and in what subjunctive mood and so on, that I couldn't find any way out. But the narrative of the dialogue moves through all these complications and all these accumulations of metaphor, while the metaphors themselves reflect on the dialogue in ways that bring you back to the argument; so that after you have been through all these perplexities, you are finally brought back to the fundamental perplexity about the nature of learning. And I think one might say that all of those perplexities seem to coalesce in the irony and amazement of Socrates. Maybe that is something like what you were saying, Mr. Ault.

I believe there is a sense in which the intellectual enterprise is one, and that it always comes back to its essential unity—to some insight which may focus on the individual in the moment understood in context after you have been through that whole context in all its complexities and perplexities. This kind of return also happens for a person reading. At one moment you are moved one way by the dialogue, and at another time another way, so that you become a part of the motion the dialogue is showing you. You are caught up in its motion, drawn into it.

I want to say too that I am still thinking about our discussion on the first day and the difference between "major" and "great." A book that is great is one which causes that motion to happen. Its reader becomes part of the motion, and I think most of all when he is looking at the individual person in that moment.

*Mr. Darkey:* I am sorry that I must once again interrupt to say that our time is up for today's discussion and

### *Third Day*

for the conference. But it seems to me a happy circumstance, Mr. Simpson, that what you have just said should turn out to be the end of our discussion. Not only have you returned to the subject of our first day, but it seems to me you have included that of the second day as well. I think it is an altogether appropriate final speech. I shall certainly not try to add to it.

I do, however, want to extend the thanks of St. John's College to all of you for coming here and being part of this conference on liberal education. And, Mr. Ascher, I am quite confident that I speak for all of us in expressing our gratitude to The National Endowment for the Humanities for making the conference possible.

## AFTERWORD

Any reader of these *Three Dialogues on Liberal Education* familiar with current writing about American education may well think that what has been said here is mainly irrelevant to the topic. He might think this because the fashionable terminology of educational discussion is altogether lacking and because the topics addressed are not the ones regularly alleged to be critical—mass education, the education of minorities, educational finance, the preparation of preprofessional students, educational adjustment to the present or future job market, and so on. The absence of these terms and topics from our discussions, however, is not inadvertent. Rather it is a sign of a deep—indeed of a radical—difference about educational principles. These principles are so fundamental that in our view their omission from the public debate renders that debate itself largely irrelevant to the real issues that American education now faces.

It is characteristic of the present educational situation that the principles in question, although they are in no way esoteric, should seem obscure and unfamiliar. Therefore, I have thought it might be a useful service for the editor of these dialogues to attempt to say here in a brief Afterword what these principles are.



## Afterword

1

Two main educational principles seem to underlie the conversations. One concerns the relation of the undergraduate college to the university in our educational system, while the other has to do with the nature of learning itself. With respect to the first, the persons of our dialogues take the position that the only activity proper to the undergraduate college is liberal education, often termed general education. The second is more difficult to state succinctly. One way of putting it is to say that learning can only be the act of the learner. Learning may be assisted by a teacher, but it is never the necessary result of the teacher's act. Put another way, learning is not a passivity of the student before the teacher who informs him, but an activity of the student in which the teacher may be able to help him.

Both of these views are profoundly opposed to the present theory and practice of American education. If they were generally adopted, they would without doubt be subversive of our educational status quo. But since almost everyone finds some faults in our educational institutions, the consideration of a radically conservative position may be of some value.

The principle stated first, that the proper and essential business of undergraduate colleges is liberal education, is, of course, fundamentally critical of our schools, our colleges and our universities. Most of these are organized on the view that the proper and essential business of the undergraduate colleges is to get their students into either a good graduate school or a good job. As a people we have always had a strong bias towards what we like to think of as the practical. For this reason we have increasingly shaped our undergraduate-curricula either towards preprofessional training, as in the cases of premedical or prelegal training, or else towards a kind of quasi-professional training in less technically demanding professions. For the most part, how-

## Afterword

ever, such college training is "preprofessional" only in the sense that the undergraduate courses imitate graduate courses and so are understood to give their students a sort of preview of the real thing which they will encounter in graduate school. That is to say that the colleges are offering their students a selection of specialized courses rather than a general education. Further, the colleges feel constrained at present also to offer remedial courses in basic skills that should have been learned in high school, such as reading and English composition. Neither activity, however, is *liberal*, and neither is preprofessional preparation in any proper sense of the word. For it is clear that the proper work of the college cannot be to teach those skills which the high schools should have taught but have failed to teach. On the other hand, the colleges cannot legitimately be regarded as a mere downward extension of the graduate schools, for in that case it would be much more sensible for the latter to add a few years to their curricula and do their own teaching. If the undergraduate college has a work of its own, surely that is the work it ought to be doing and not somebody else's.

The radical position taken in our discussions agrees that undergraduate education ought indeed to prepare its students to undertake graduate studies, if they wish to prepare for a profession, but in neither of the trivial senses just outlined. Especially it would insist that college education must not be a watered-down version of graduate study. The reason for insisting on this point is that it seems to be the common view held by the colleges themselves, and it is reinforced by the downward pressure of the graduate schools which regularly stipulate specialized undergraduate courses as prerequisite to graduate study.

There is no need to document the claim. This state of affairs seems altogether normal to us, and is simply assumed to be the right one. High school students, for example, may agonize throughout their latter two years trying to decide on a life career in order that they can elect

## Afterword

a college major. The colleges are dominated by departmental structures, and it is normal to carry out most college functions departmentally. Indeed it may seem hard to imagine any other way of proceeding. The "best" colleges are commonly assumed to be those able to offer the richest variety of specialized departmental courses. In their occasional efforts in the direction of general education, like the recent one at Harvard, the colleges have no practical way to conceive their problem except in terms of departmental resources and departmental diplomacy. Naturally, the most that can issue from such efforts are those hybrids known as "interdepartmental" or "cross-disciplinary" programs. Such programs have very little to do with general education in the fundamental sense. They rarely consist of more than a variety of specialized elective courses which were never conceived as having any integral relation to one another or in which there is an ordering principle of wholeness. Of course, if the student can discover any such relationships for himself, so much the better, but it is not conceived to be the college's responsibility to help him do so.

Liberal education in the proper sense is concerned with the whole range of human knowledge and of human experience. That is to say, it is concerned with *wholes*, with *genera*. For this reason it is a very different thing from any specialized discipline and also from any agglomeration of such disciplines, for these are by definition concerned with *species*. With respect to the ends of genuine liberal education, the fallacy of specialization lies in its assuming that the whole of human knowledge and experience can really be divided tidily into departments. Such divisions are at best hypothetical, and they tend to lapse into unexamined conventional arrangements. At worst, they become merely arbitrary conveniences empty of serious intellectual content. It is perfectly obvious, for example, that ethics, poetry, politics, science and mathematics have profoundly important relationships to one another, and

## Afterword

yet their normal curricular disposition tends to insulate them from each other.

The counter argument that one person cannot learn everything, cannot master all disciplines, does not address the problem; for it assumes that any whole is essentially the sum of its parts and can be responsibly approached only by accumulating competence in each of the virtually infinite specialized disciplines that comprise it. It is an argument of despair, because it ultimately implies that there is no knowable wholeness. In practice, it is an eristic argument intended to demonstrate that general education is impossible, on the ground that self-evidently no one person could, even in a whole lifetime, master all of the special disciplines offered by a great modern university.

Liberal education in one aspect may be said to concern itself with the consideration of ends, of means towards ends, and of the relationships of ends and means. Graduate (or professional) education, on the other hand, is with equal propriety concerned with means alone, appropriate particular ends having been presumed by the discipline itself. To recognize this is to grasp the full sense in which liberal or general education is prior to professional or specialized education. The two are complementary to one another and are never in competition except when they become confused and try to usurp one another's functions.

This point is so fundamental that it will be useful to put it in its clearest form. As long ago as Aristotle, the perfectly common sense principle was enunciated that the arts, or what we term practices and professions, do not judge of their own ends. A medical student, for instance, studies to learn the art of healing sick people. An architecture student studies how to design buildings. The former is not taught to think whether a sick person should be healed, nor is the latter taught to reflect upon whether a building ought to be built, for the very good reason that such considerations are no part of the arts of medicine or architecture.

## Afterword

And yet, to stop there leaves us with a difficulty. Are we to say that a physician has no business reflecting upon the ends of his art, upon what means are appropriate to it, or upon the relation of his art and its practice to social or political issues? Surely not. But where, if not in medical school, should he gain any educational experience that is relevant to so necessary a kind of thought? Or are we to say that a medical education will of itself qualify him to reflect competently upon these sorts of issues? Again, surely not. Where, then, is he to learn how to address them?

The answer, obviously, is that the foundations for such kinds of thinking should be laid in undergraduate liberal education. And it can be added, a consideration of equal importance, that if the physicians and the lawyers and the architects and the engineers and ultimately all citizens shared a general education in common, it is just possible they could talk to one another and to the rest of us about matters of common and pressing concern, a sort of discussion which is manifestly impossible under present circumstances.

The particular conclusions are these (1) Unless professional training is preceded by liberal education, professional men and women will have no educational opportunity that will equip them to reflect upon and to regulate what they do in the practice of their professions. (2) Neither will they possess common intellectual grounds for communicating with others within their own professions nor yet with those to whom their work relates. The larger conclusion is that since specialization is necessary and proper for the acquisition of professional skills, liberal education is an absolutely essential preparation for professional studies in order that the professions do not become blind and isolated practices. This part of education is the proper work of the undergraduate college.

## Afterword

### ii

The second root principle underlying these three conversations concerns the nature of human learning itself. The position held is that human learning is an act which can only be performed by one's own act, out of one's own desire, and for oneself. Learning cannot be enacted upon a passive recipient by some other person. This view seems to have been stated rather cryptically on the First Day when it was said that the truth is in the student, not in the teacher. To say this may seem to be insisting on a point so obvious to common sense that it is scarcely worth emphasis. But common sense notwithstanding, the statement goes against our almost universal view of education which assumes that a teacher is the one who knows the truth of the matter to be learnt, and that his business is to transfer the knowledge he possesses from his own head into the heads of his students. The process is taken to be this: the teacher who knows, tells the students, who don't know. They listen to what he tells them, and, if they remember what he says, they have come to know what he knows about the matter at hand.

Such an idea of learning is false and contrary to everyone's experience. Nevertheless, it seems to be the accepted view. Hundreds of thousands of teachers are earnestly engaged in telling millions of students at all levels from grade schools through universities the truth about millions of things, and immense computerized testing systems probe as they can to find out how much the students have remembered of what their teachers have told them. On that basis, it is decided whether or not they have been educated sufficiently to receive more education. We are plainly aware that this is not working very well, since everyone says so. Yet we are reluctant to admit that the process of teaching and learning is not really like pouring water from one bucket into another.

## Afterword

A part of the difficulty, no doubt, is that we are obsessed with the importance of information and easily slip into a way of talking as if we meant that to be educated is to be in the possession of a great deal of information or, as we are pleased to say, of many important "facts." There are only a few very obvious things to say about why this view of education cannot possibly be right. For one thing, most alleged facts are not true at all and will shortly and usually without acknowledgement be replaced by other facts. Anyone even ten years out of high school will have experienced this deterioration of facts. Still we would hardly be willing to say that a person who once was educated had ceased to be so because his facts had deteriorated.

More importantly, even an alleged fact must be understood in order to be significant. Its terms must be grasped, and it must bear an intelligible relationship to other facts. Now everyone, including teachers, knows that terms and relationships are very often not grasped in response to the mere telling. A student may quite simply fail to grasp the meanings, or, worse, he may grasp them partially and hold them in one of those familiar frustrating tangles of understanding and misunderstanding that we all experience. This may be the case even if he wants to understand. And he may not want to.

This is where teaching begins. The student, if he is to learn, must first be brought to recognize that he really does not know the truth of the matter at hand and must, as a result of recognizing his ignorance, begin to want to understand. Understand for himself. Not in order to please the teacher, not to please his parents, not to get a good grade. Just to understand because he knows he does not understand. If he comes to such a state, he will begin to inquire.

A teacher can do only three kinds of things to help a student learn. First, the teacher may be able to purge the student of complacency, of the false conceit of knowledge.

## Afterword

Second, he can sometimes bring a student to want to learn because he has been brought to view knowledge as a desirable possession. Third, he may be able to guide and to encourage the student's inquiry once he is ready to undertake it. But, there is nothing the teacher can do, there is no "teaching method", which must infallibly result in the student's learning. A teacher may indeed be a necessary condition if learning is to take place, and it seems probable this is so; but no teacher can ever be a sufficient cause of that learning.

Especially, the teacher cannot cause his students to know anything by simply telling them the "right answer", by telling them the "truth" about the matter in question. For in such case the most the students could come to possess would be the memory that their teacher had said that a certain answer was right or true. But to remember and to understand are very different acts of the mind.

Nevertheless, it is altogether clear that in our schools, our colleges and even our universities an enormous proportion of what is called the "teaching effort" is expended in trying to get students to remember what the teacher said or what a book said in order that they may give it back on examinations. It is also clear that a very great part of our collective teaching effort is aimed at getting the students past the canonical testings. These do not in fact reveal much about the education of the understanding, but instead test the training of the memory. Memory is an important faculty, but its training does not constitute education in the basic sense of learning how to think for oneself. Education is an altogether different thing from the ability to repeat what other people have said.

The plain empirical fact known to everybody is that learning is an individual and personal activity of the learner. A good teacher can often help the learning process to take place. Such help—what properly is called teaching—as often as not consists of encouraging the student



## Afterword

not to give up his struggle to understand, and of prodding him, pointing out his errors, providing him with examples and references. And of openly and frankly learning from the student, for in real teaching and learning the roles are often interchanged, and few things are as helpful for a student as to see his teacher learn and to share in the activity. Never does the teacher's act consist of "giving the student the answer," because understanding is not the sort of thing one person can give to another in the form of an answer. Not even if one does happen to possess the understanding himself. The possession of any truth, even of hypothetical truth, is the activity of the possessor. It is never a passive taking in as a vessel receives what is poured into it, or as wax receives a stamp, or as a computer accepts a program.

### iii

These two principles have profound implications for our present educational system. We have argued that conversational exchange between student and teacher is an essential condition for learning. This implies that educational institutions are obliged to provide conditions in which such conversations can occur. In present circumstances this would mean that our schools, colleges and universities would have to find such ways of dealing with their gargantuan proportions as to permit and foster within themselves communities of students and teachers where conversation, and hence teaching and learning, would be possible. To create the requisite physical conditions would be problem enough. Even more essential, however, would it be to bring about the moral and intellectual conditions that are prerequisite to discourse. Among these would be recognizable grounds of common concern and interest, a common universe of discourse, and above all a common willingness for conversation rooted in the shared conviction

## Afterword

that discourse is vitally important. In short, educational institutions would have to become what they naturally tend to be, communities of friends. The essence of such community in a college can and should spring from the integrity and generosity of its central intellectual purpose.

To take both of our principles seriously in the undergraduate college might well imperil the departments. On the other hand, it might also generate new and revitalizing ways to teach. And it might be at least the beginning of a search for intellectual wholeness, a reversal of the accelerating movement towards specialization and the continuing fragmentation of knowledge.

To propose such a thing is not to dream of conditions utterly impossible to achieve, though to any student, professor or administrator now overwhelmed by the magnitudes and multitudes that are his daily bread they may seem so at first statement. Nevertheless the institutions represented in our conference have found comparatively efficacious ways to approximate at least some of these conditions. To make a beginning, the first step is to recognize the necessity of doing so.

In the Foreword it was remarked that Plato's dialogue *Meno* provides the underlying theme for a large part of what is said in our *Three Dialogues on Liberal Education*. This is especially true of the second principle here discussed, the theory of teaching and learning. The reader who has read as far as this page is once again most earnestly referred to that very much greater dialogue.

Finally, it may perhaps be pointed out that the two principles here argued—the first, that undergraduate education ought to be liberal, and the second, that learning is essentially a personal activity of the one who learns, even though an essential condition of that learning may be the maieutic participation of a teacher—are at bottom one principle. For to desire to understand the truth of any matter is to enter by at least one step into the kingdom of ends.