THE GREATNESS OF A UNIVERSITY

Remarks of

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The Carnegie Foundation for
the Advancement of Teaching

Delivered at the

1980 Pullias Lecture Series
University of Southern California
Fullerton, California

March 15, 1980

Introduction

I am delighted to be with you tonight

- not only because it brings me back to Southern California--but also because I can share the joy of seeing Earl Pullias and his friends.

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I understand very well that you have come tonight--not to hear another speech but to pay tribute to a most unusual person, Dr. Pullias--who throughout the years--has been a blend of intellect and inspiration.

- He has never been deceived by the false gods of arrogance and power,
- and because of Earl Pullias my own life has been enormously enriched.

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Over twenty years ago--

- when I was a very young dean at a very small liberal arts institution--Earl Pullias became my friend and mentor.
- And during those early days in my career he taught me that those who work in higher education must be concerned--not just about quality in education--but about the quality of lives as well.

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Earl Pullias is truly one of the most outstanding educators and one of the most inspiring leaders of our time.

And I am deeply honored to be asked to deliver the Earl Pullias Lecture on this campus.

I

This evening I'd like to talk about the excellence in higher education during what Mrs Thatcher called "the dangerous decade of the 1980's."

However, I should warn you at the very outset that I do not intend to complain about

- budgets
- or faculty unions
- or a decline in the enrollment,

a strategy which I know will be enormously disappointing to those who worship at the shrine of Chicken Little. Rather, I'd like to talk about the tension between vocational and liberal education--an issue which is powerfully related both to the content and the quality of higher education.

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During the past six months, I have been at many colleges and universities from coast to coast, and on campus after campus a dramatic shift in the priorities of students is taking place.

- College presidents and deans report that nearly two-thirds of all college graduates these days now are in career-related majors
  - -- accounting
  - -- business
  - -- journalism and the
  - -- health professions
- While only one-third of the students are in the more traditional liberal arts.

This ratio is doubly significant because on many of these same campuses the distribution of the faculty is just reversed

- with one-third of the faculty in career-related fields
- and two-thirds of the faculty in the sciences and arts.

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I've chosen to focus on these trends tonight

- not because this student push for practicality is "bad"
- but because it forced us to candidly confront some very fundamental questions.

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Specifically I believe it's time to ask:

- What are the purposes of a college education?
- Just what is the meaning of vocation?
- And is it possible for the two traditions of work and liberal education to be more fully joined?

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For years at many higher learning institutions

- we have suggested to our students
- that education and work were two very separate worlds
- and we've conveyed the feeling that it was somehow demeaning if education led directly to a job.

Work was quite alright

- if the students "laundered themselves" first in "graduate school study"
- and then became employed.

But direct employment--or at least the preoccupation with employment--was "a little bit off limits" at most of our arts and sciences colleges.

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And at campus after campus in a thousand separate ways our own prejudices have defined for students what kind of work they should and should not do--

- It's alright--we said--to be a doctor, but it's less alright to be a nurse.
- It's alright to be an engineer, but a computer programmer is less worthy.
- To prepare to teach in college is just fine, but to teach in elementary school is less acceptable.
- To read what is written in the past is great, but to write about the present is not quite "legitimate" at many arts and science institutions.

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I believe the time has come to stop.

- To recognize that work--for all of us--
  is absolutely crucial.
- And that the work we choose
  determines who we are and gives vivid
  meaning to our lives.
- It's time to recognize that formal education
  has always been a unique blend of inspiration
  and vocation.

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Several years ago, while on sabbatical at Cambridge, I read C. P. Snow's marvelous novel, The Masters.

- As you recall it's a story about the politics
  of selecting a master at a Cambridge College.
- As a kind of epilogue, Snow describes how
  Cambridge first began.
- He said that students came to study with the
  clerics and lived in poverty. They came, he said,
  because they wanted "jobs".

Education should prepare us for productive work, and this makes the university a very useful and essential place

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But there is another side to all of this. While everyone wants to have a job, we all know that life requires something more.

II

This brings me to my central theme. I am convinced that the greatness of a university is marked not just by its responsiveness to the needs of individual students but also by its commitment to broader goals as well.

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Many years ago Josiah Royce observed that

As a people we have become
more knowing
more clever
and more skeptical

but seemingly--
we do not become
more profound or
more reverent.

We now offer to our students a smorgasbord of useful and exciting majors and we have been less successful in introducing students

- to those themes of life which are universal and enduring,
- and to those ideas which--
  if properly conveyed to students--
  will give more perspective to the students
  and greater meaning to their work.

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My concern about the "breadth" of education was deepened several years ago while I "shuffled through" my third class mail.

- I saw a story in the Stanford student newspaper which reported that the institution was preparing a "required course" in Western Civilization.

In response, the student editorial said that:

- "This new report proposes to remove from students the "right" to choose for themselves. This is not to deny that courses in Western Civilization are "valuable" but to "require" students to take a course, carries a strong "illiberal connotation." It imposes a "uniform standard" on "non uniform" people.

Frankly, I was startled by that statement--to "require me" to take a course has a strong illiberal connotation.

It struck me as a staggering comment on our time that this student--after 15 years of formal education--

- rejected the idea of "relationships" with others.
- He did not comprehend the interdependent nature of the planet Earth,
- and he failed to understand that a common search for our common heritage is in no way to be confused
- with something he called "uniformity."

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The harsh fact is that today we expect students to follow their own interests--but institutionally we have no transcendent purposes of our own.

- And while we transmit "fragments of information," we fail to search out and highlight the "interlocking" threads of human knowledge.

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Speaking recently about the plight of graduate education, Professor William Bevan of Duke University said that

- "many of those who seek their causes in fundamental scholarship lack the properties that give rise to truly significant insights--these broader overreaching flashes of understanding that precede conceptual breakthroughs that move a science forward."

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The truth is that many of our students come to college with fundamental questions about the relationship among the disciplines.

- And yet rarely in the typical course of study are these transcendent issues met head on.

Somerset Maugham in the "Writer's Notebook" writes poignantly of the mountaineer

- who "struggled to reach the top of the highest peak" only to discover that instead of seeing the sunrise he found "only fog,"
- "whereupon" the writer suggests "he wandered down again."

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I'm suggesting that if we are truly honest with ourselves we must acknowledge that for the vast majority of our students their education is not as enlightening or as broadening or as integrating as it ought to be.

It was Tolstoy who, as a young man, troubled himself with such questions as

- "Why live at all?"
- "What is the cause of my existence and of everyone else's?"
- "What should be the plan of life?"
- "What is death; how can I transcend it?"

These may be heavy questions for the college campus. And yet we still must ask:

- How can students develop the art of wise decision-making which, as Walter Lippmann said, "cuts across all specialties."

And if this relationship is not established then students--regardless of their job--will live out their lives in quiet desperation.

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The point is clear enough.

- If we are to be more profound and more reverent--to use Joseph Royce's old-fashioned terms--we must see the "wholeness in life."
- And "unity," not the fragmentation of knowledge, is--I am convinced--the test of greatness on a college campus.

III

Second, the greatness of the university is measured by the degree to which students develop a profound respect for the "diversity of talents" and traditions in our midst and discover that people are important.

This statement--people are important--is so simple, it borders on the sentimental. And yet in our busy world

- of increased emphasis on
- increased technology,
- of pressures and problems on every side,
- of almost hourly crisis
- one of our most difficult tasks still remains--that of dealing humanely with each other.

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Surrounded, sometimes even mastered, by our inventions, it becomes all too easy in our work to put people into categories.

- We tend to speak of
- "engineers,"
- "professors,"
- "bus drivers,"
- "the middle-class,"
- "the silent majority,"

and on and on we go.

Even on campus we "classify" ourselves and colleagues, and here too we become

- "economists and deans and mathematicians
  and radicals
- and administrators and chancellors
- and students and "the office staff."

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We live out Eleanor Rigby--popularized in the Beatles' tune

- Eleanor, as you'll recall,
  waited at the window
  "wearing the mask she keeps
  in a jar by the door."
- We, too, wear our masks,
  acting out our roles as
  "two-dimensional" people,
  wearing a "face" we keep
  in a jar by the door.

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And as we pigeon hole, we distort, losing sight of the fact that we are talking about "people"--

- individuals who laugh, who love,
  who have unique talents and
  deep aspirations,
- who grow old and lonely,
- who have fears and doubts
  in the dark of the night.

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And--incidentally--this focus on the individual relates directly to the students interests in vocation.

- Several weeks ago I met with the executives
  of one of the nation's largest corporations
- and during that entire session I was struck
  by the fact that these business leaders
  spent most of the time talking
- not about profits or technology or inflation--
- they spent the morning talking about people
  and how to inspire relationships among their personnel.

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The point is this.

To be educationally and vocationally prepared we must understand that people are at the center of it all--

- people who are struggling together,
- living and dying on a single globe.
- Compassion, not destruction, must become a way of life and this has a lot to do with the purposes of liberal education.

Indeed I suspect that--in the end--the blending of vocation and liberal education is achieved not so much

- by the curriculum we offer,
- as by the attitudes of those who teach.

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Several years ago as I reflected on my own formal education, it occurred to me that--throughout all the years--from first grade to postdoctoral study--I had just four great teachers and professors. And these four individuals had several things in common:

- They were honest, open, and self-revealing.
- They not only taught their subject,
- they also taught themselves values, feelings, doubts, hopes, and developed some convictions.

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And I'm convinced that--in the end--the greatness of a university is established--

- o not just by its distinguished scholarly research but also
- o by the priority it gives to teaching
- o and by its capacity to sustain--through the relationship between faculty and students--integrity, civility and compassion on the campus.
- o And everyone who has known Earl Pullias knows that this is precisely why we call him "great".

Finally, a university is great only as it acknowledges

- o that education is a value-ladden process
- o and that all of us--regardless of vocation--must have intellectual and moral anchor points consistently to guide our lives.

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Now I recognize that, in our sophisticated world, a strange embarrassment seems to overtake us all whenever the discussion turns to values.

- o And we have deluded ourselves into believing that we can be responsible people without ever taking sides, without expressing firm convictions about fundamental issues.

Such a conclusion reflects great timidity and ignorance if a university refuses to acknowledge the central role that values play in education, its greatness will be lost.

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In his penetrating book, Faith and Learning, Alexander Miller commented rightly on this curious timidity when he wrote:

- "A decent tentativeness is a wholesome expression of scholarly humility.
- We seem to have a sort of dogmatic tentativeness which suggests that it is intellectually indecent to make up your minds."

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I happen to believe that we are beginning to discover once again

- that education divorced from values is a very dangerous illusion.

We are now beginning to realize, as George Steiner has reminded us,

- that a man who is intellectually advanced can--at the same time--be morally bankrupt.

We now know that such a man can

- listen to Bach and Schubert at sundown,
- he can read Goethe in the evening,
- and the next day go to his daily work at the concentration camp to gas his fellow man.

"What grows up inside literate civilization," Steiner asks, "that seems to prepare it for the release of barbarism?"

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A great university

- begins with the understanding that education does not inevitably humanize.
- And it rejects the childish notion that all education--regardless of its quality or thrust--will inevitably lead to virtue.

CONCLUSION

Well what does all of this have to do with education in the 1980's?

I believe that our greatest challenge--in the days ahead--relates

- not to enrollment--but to purpose.

And if the university hopes to be an institution of great consequence it must do more than serve the needs of isolated students.

The great university must have transcendent purposes of its own which include a curriculum that gives perspective to the student, a relationship between faculty and students that is authentic and a recognition that an education is a value-ladden process.

Dr. Lewis Thomas--author of the marvelous book Lives of a Cell--said recently that these are not the best of times for the human mind.

> All sorts of things seem to be turning out wrong, and the century seems to be slipping through our fingers here at the end, with almost all promises unfilled.

I cannot begin to guess (he said) at all the causes of our cultural sadness, not even the most important ones,

- but I can think of one thing that is wrong with us and eats away at us:

- We do not know enough about ourselves.

- We do not know our past or where we're going.

- And above all we fail to understand the marvelous and miraculous pattern of life which we are embedded as working parts.

Just think, two centuries ago we could explain everything about everything, out of pure reason, and now most of that elaborate and harmonious structure has come apart before our eyes.

We are <u>dumb</u>.

Well that may overstate the case a bit, but it conveys a feeling I endorse.

And in the end a university to be truly great must help students not only find productive work but live worthwhile lives as well.

Thank you for inviting me here tonight.