The Idea of General Education

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The Idea of General Education  

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I do not know as much as I ought to about the University of Western Michigan and its program of general studies. I am told that many of you have had little or no previous experience in teaching general studies. It is to you that I intend to speak, and I hope old hands at the enterprise will forgive me if they hear nothing new. Since I lack knowledge of the particular features of your program it would be presumptuous of me to try to give you direct guidance with respect to them. I am convinced, however, that no program of general studies can succeed merely because of the competence and careful attention each member of the teaching faculty brings to the particular assignment he has. It is also essential that each instructor think about his task in the broad context of the program as a whole; and his thinking must be related to a conception or idea of general education.

What I hope to do is to stimulate your thinking about the idea of general education. It is an idea about which there seems to be considerable confusion. Back of this confusion there is nevertheless more agreement in principle than may be apparent. How there can be at the same time both confusion and important agreement about an idea is suggested by Immanuel Kant very late in the *Critique of Pure Reason*:

No one attempts to establish a science unless he has an idea upon which to base it. But in the working out of the science the schema, nay even the definition which, at the start, he first gave of the science, is very seldom adequate to his idea. For his idea lies hidden in reason, like a germ in which the parts are still undeveloped and barely recognizable even under microscopic observation. Consequently, since sciences are devised from the point of view of a certain universal interest, we must
not explain and determine them according to the description which their founder gives of them, but in conformity with the idea which, out of the natural unity of the parts that we have assembled, we find to be grounded in reason itself. For we shall find that its founder, and often even his latest successors, are groping for an idea which they have never succeeded in making clear to themselves . . . . It is unfortunate that only after we have spent much time in the collection of materials in somewhat random fashion at the suggestion of an idea lying hidden in our minds, and after we have, indeed, over a long period assembled the materials in a merely technical manner, does it first become possible for us to discern the idea in a clearer light, and to devise a whole architectonically in accordance with the ends of reason.¹

I believe that work in general education has been proceeding “in somewhat random fashion at the suggestion of an idea lying hidden in our minds,” and that it is becoming possible “for us to discern the idea in a clearer light;” and that we must discern it more clearly if our work is to become more effective.

Confusion about the idea is reflected in the problem of terminology. For a while, chiefly during the 1930's and early 40's, the term general education enjoyed a wide acceptance, even though there were various meanings attributed to it. During recent years there has been increasing uneasiness about the use of the term. Four years ago the Association for General and Liberal Studies was organized, and its name reflects an effort to get away from limitations which some people associate with the term liberal, when taken by itself. There have continually been efforts to distinguish between general and liberal education, and I shall be speaking about the distinction. But some educators (e.g. President Conant of Harvard) have found no difference between them. Even colleges that have programs that many would call general do not like the term. Lawrence College expressly rejects it, and St. John’s at Annapolis avoids its use.

The wide range of meanings that have been given to the term general education centers upon two closely related conceptions of generality. In the education of an individual person whatever he knows that is not a peculiar property of his special knowledge is his general knowledge. Or, with reference not to individuals, but to educated people as a whole, general knowledge is what all educated people share. Both conceptions are too broad to be very significant. A narrow form of the first conception reduces general education to the studies which are merely preparatory for special studies. This conception is capable of being degraded to the notion that general education really

belongs to the high schools, and that colleges become concerned with it only because they have to, in order to remedy deficiencies in high school preparation. This degradation is encouraged by the truth that the high schools should indeed be concerned with general education; but only an improverished conception of the idea of general education would confine it to the high school level.

What have sometimes been called the "tool subjects," English, mathematics, and foreign language have been related to general education in conflicting ways. Some argue that if they do not indeed constitute general education they at least are its core. For they are needed by students in general, if anything is. This view is rejected by others precisely because they object to the idea of "tool subjects." If a study is only a tool for the pursuit of other studies, they say, it may be general but it is not education; instead it is something like mere training. Accordingly, one who takes this position would say that if mathematics is to be a part of general education it is not because it is useful in the pursuit of other studies (which of course it is), but because it represents one of the highest achievements of the human mind. Similarly for foreign language. General educators have often defended it by claiming that its study enables one to gain understanding of the nature of that most characteristic human activity, linguistic communication. I think they have an especially strong point here, because the amount of language study that most students complete in college is hardly enough to make the language really effective as a tool; its study must be justified on other grounds.

There are nobler conceptions of general education than these. I will not try to formulate any now, because I hope they will begin to emerge in the course of the rest of my remarks. I will only say now a full conception requires the student to philosophically reflect upon his studies, a requirement that cannot be made at the high school level, and can hardly be expected even in the earlier years of college.

Kant published the first edition of his famous Critique in 1781. He dedicated it to Baron Karl Abraham von Zedlitz, who was Frederick the Great's Minister of Education. Shortly before this the Baron had written a letter to Kant, from which I am taking a passage as a sort of text for my sermon today:

Should your inventive power extend so far, suggest to me the means of holding back the students in the universities from the bread and butter studies, and of making them understand that their modicum of law, even their theology and medicine, will be immensely more easily acquired and safely applied, if they are in possession of more philosophical knowledge. They can be judges, advocates, preachers and physicians only for a few hours each day; but in these and all the remainder of the day they are men, and have need of other sciences. In short,
you must instruct me how this is to be brought home to students.
Printed injunctions, laws, regulations—these are even worse than bread and butter study itself.2

Von Zedlitz distinguishes between what he calls "the bread and butter studies," and "philosophical knowledge." I should confess that my own field is philosophy, that I think the humanities are the heart of general education, and that philosophy is the most general of disciplines. It is not for these reasons, however, that I now ask you to read the Baron's statement as though it said "general studies" instead of "philosophical knowledge." I ask you to do this because the whole statement makes sense for us if it is read in this way. Even if I were not to go this far, and were only to ask you to substitute the variable \( x \) for "philosophical," I would be groping toward the idea of general education in a negative way; and I would have a lot of good company. Von Zedlitz himself approaches our idea negatively by using the term "other studies" to refer to what he has in mind. Such negative forms of definition are by no means satisfactory, but they are far from worthless. And von Zedlitz is not merely negative. He relates the term "other sciences" to "philosophical," on the one hand, and on the other hand, to what a man needs to know as a man. And the term "other" is contrasted with "bread and butter," which means professional studies. The other studies are related to professional studies in two ways. First, their possession makes the acquisition of professional knowledge easier, and its application safer. Second, when a professional man possesses them they are at work even when he is practicing his profession; and when he is not practicing it.

These ideas about the things a professional man should know, besides those that belong to his own profession, are still applicable to the idea of general education. But they do not harmonize with all of the current conceptions of general education. In particular, any conception that confines general education to the first year or two of collegiate experience harmonizes only imperfectly with von Zedlitz's ideas. Although he views certain studies as a foundation for professional studies, von Zedlitz does not regard them as merely preparatory. Professional men themselves are seen as being philosophical, both while professing and while doing other things.

Von Zedlitz's remarks contain a feature which I think has special importance. He is especially concerned with finding a way to "bring his point home to students, and contrasts this with the use of "printed injunctions, laws, and regulations." He is asking Kant for the means of holding students back from the bread and butter studies; but he regards injunctions and regulations, if these were to be proposed as

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the means, as "even worse than bread and butter study itself." This has special importance for us, because we do tend to write up regulations whenever we want to hold students back from something, or—even to push them forward. Many people would expect a Prussian Minister of Education to rely strongly on rules and regulations. What a wise and enlightened man von Zedlitz must have been! It is because I agree with him so thoroughly on this point that I hope my remarks may provoke you to think about the idea of general education tonight, rather than about rules and regulations about the biology a student ought to have, or the distribution of his time between lecture, library, and laboratory. I do not mean that such problems are unimportant. But they labor in vain who concern themselves with injunctions and regulations, but not with the idea upon which they base their work. And, he who strives continually for a clear understanding of that idea will more easily grasp the schema which will enable him to make the best provisions of a more material sort. The full moral I would draw is not one which simply applies to us, the teachers, what von Zedlitz wanted to bring home to the students. It is on the students' conceptions of what they are doing that the greatest emphasis should fall. What might seem to be the finest program of general education conceivable is of no value except to students who grasp the idea behind that program. Even more, if they do begin to grasp that idea behind education will overcome weaknesses in their collegiate situations—they will become well educated in spite of us.

One reason I have chosen to consider von Zedlitz's remarks is that I hope they will help persuade you that the idea of general education is not a Johnny-come-lately on the educational scene; and even more, that it is not a mere fad that may have its day and be gone. Still it is worth taking note of some significant changes that have taken place in education since Kant's time. Von Zedlitz's notion of three learned professions, law, theology, and medicine, was a common idea of American education throughout much of the nineteenth century. Moreover, the classical curriculum that prevailed in American higher education in the earlier part of the 19th century did provide possibilities of general education—education that was valuable to lawyers, ministers, and doctors alike. It is interesting to ask which of these professions could best utilize the classical curriculum for the purposes of general education. That curriculum was surely least useful to the medical men, but this is all the more reason why it provided them with the general part of their whole education. It is not, however, very important for us whether the doctors or the lawyers derived more general education from the classical curriculum. Reflection on the question does, however, bring out one of the points I want specially to stress, and that is that there are not particular subject matters, nor even particular courses that constitute general education. General
education only makes sense in connection with a program of education as a whole. And it is individual persons who follow such programs. What is a constituent element of one person's general education is not necessarily so for another person. This point may be hard to prove, but I submit that the burden of proof is really on whoever would maintain the opposite—viz., that any given course of study must belong either to general education or to specialized education.

There have been two very important changes in American education that make a difference for the manner in which we grope for the idea of general education, and grapple with the problems of implementing it—though no real difference to the idea itself, which as Kant says, "lies hidden in reason." First, the expansion of natural science, and the development of the social sciences have made it impossible to hold to the classical humanistic curriculum. Second, higher education has been sought by more and more people, from a wider and wider range of our population. It would be ridiculous today to look upon college simply as a preparation for one of the three learned professions in von Zedlitz's mind. These two changes have of course had tremendous consequences for education, and I can only speak of some of them. The problem von Zedlitz spoke of would have been greatly complicated if the only change had been the expansion of knowledge. I do not see, however, that it would have made any change of principle, so far as general education is concerned. Problems of implementing the idea would certainly have mushroomed; and a large part of the problems general education faces today are due to this change. It could almost be said that the expansion of the sciences, natural and social, is what has made general education a really difficult problem. So long as the classical curriculum was adequate, many of the problems we now face simply did not exist. Most of all, there was time enough to do the job. Time is the most pressing of the problems that beset us now.

The change in the number and in the kinds of persons seeking higher education not only produced new problems in implementing the idea of general education; it also made a difference in the manner in which the idea has to be conceived. The main things to be noted is that, prior to the change I am speaking of, the colleges were to a large degree designed to prepare men for one of the three learned professions; and this has ceased to be so. They have had to extend their scope to serve students who were not intending to enter one of those professions, and along with this they have been under pressure to give greater attention to scientific subject matters. When the colleges were preparing men for professional training they were wholly devoted to education that could be called general. When non-professional students became an important factor and as the scope of disciplines became more and more difficult for a single man to get
even a good introduction to, a part of the curriculum began to take shape which was neither professional nor general. In opposition to what was professional it could be called—and was called—*liberal*. It could no longer be called general (and that term had been widely used during the 19th century), at least not in a sense which would suggest that *all* educated men would be expected to have it. Accordingly there developed the idea of a curriculum consisting of two parts. One was common to all students, and could certainly be called the general part. The other consisted of studies from which individual students might choose, according to interests which might or might not be vocational. This variable component was extended, later in the 19th and into the 20th centuries, by the elective system, so famous in connection with President Eliot of Harvard.

Thus began a history of increasing limitations of the amount of time students could devote to general education. It began in the name of individual freedom—freedom of the student to follow his own interests. It was continued by a contrary principle, which tended to deprive students of the freedom to study what they liked; the only freedom that remained was to choose what main interest they were going to follow; once that choice had been made, what they studied tended to be more and more fully prescribed. The learned professions, of course, continued to educate their members. There were many professions besides law, medicine, and divinity. By no means the least significant among the newer professions was the one we all belong to as academics. All of the professions began to make special stipulations about what students should study before they entered the professional or graduate schools. The result was that liberal education as a whole suffered severe retrenchment; and, if we can regard general education as a part of liberal education, it naturally has had to suffer its share of the same cutback.

Now we come to a fact that is so obvious that I am embarrassed to have to give it expression. Everyone must see it, so why should it have to be mentioned? My only defense is that people do not act as though they saw it. And it is so important that it must be shouted from the housetops year after year—day after day. It is this. *Unless the need for general education has lessened or ceased to exist, its curtailment or abolition must have the gravest consequences.* Can it possibly be said that the need has lessened? Or that it is easier to meet than it used to be? Again, I feel up against an idea that should hardly need assertion, let alone defense. The need is greater than it has ever been; and it is more difficult to meet than it has ever been.

It was the need for more and more time by the professional and pre-professional studies that made general education a real difficulty. I have suggested that it was no problem in earlier times, but even von Zedlitz saw a problem in “holding back the students from their bread
and butter studies." Bread and butter demands cannot be neglected, and there is a natural tendency to give them priority. As they required more and more time (and they really do require it—it does take longer than it used to take to make a doctor or a chemist), less and less time was available for general studies; and if these were no less important than they had been, education certainly faced a problem. This is why general education became a movement during the second quarter of our century. Some educational leaders became concerned with the problem, and thought that it could only be met if the attack upon it were organized as it had never had to be organized before. The movement entailed the drawing of a distinction that had not seemed necessary before—the distinction between liberal and general education. Before I speak about that distinction I want to mention another feature of the problem that began to appear in the course of the 19th century, and that is even more prominent now. This relates to the change that occurred in the persons who sought higher education.

The term preparatory school was very common not long ago, but seems to be going out of use. It indicated a distinction between two kinds of high schools, one that was designed for students who were going on to college, and the other for students who were not. I don't think there has been a parallel terminology at the collegiate level. But we do have college students who are preparing for graduate study, and even more who are not. In the early 19th century, colleges were definitely designed for students preparing for one of the professions. This is another reason why general education was "no problem" at that time. Roughly, it could be then the same for everyone, at least in its scope, and in the amount of time required for it. The expansion of the sciences did of course make a difference, but not the same difference that the expansion of the student body made.

As two types of students became more and more clearly distinguished, what might one have expected to happen in general education? It would depend on whether or not the educators recognized the difference between the two groups of students, and made different provisions for each group. If no different provisions were made the curtailment of general education that applied to preprofessional students would apply to the other students too. At the risk of over-simplification I shall say that that was just what happened. For the most part the students whose formal educations end with graduation from college (and even those who will never graduate) have been treated as though they were preparing for graduate study. (There have, of course, been notable exceptions—such as the General College at the University of Minnesota which definitely plans programs for students who may not even graduate.)

Students who did not plan to go on to graduate study were forced into the preprofessional mold in the following way. In addition to the
preprofessional programs there were programs designed for future scholars in the various disciplines. The collegiate preparation for their graduate study was what we call the major or concentration. As preparation for graduate study these majors (usually equivalent to about one year of college study) obviously made sense and still do. It is not so obvious that they make sense for the student who terminates his formal education at college graduation. How could the requirement of a major be justified for him? Its justification has required the distinction between general and liberal education.

By making use of this distinction it has been possible to argue that it is important for the terminal student (let me call him that in order to distinguish him from the future graduate student) to go into some particular subject in some depth. Such concentration should not be called a part of his general education, because it is in no important sense general. It can, however, be called part of his liberal education—and this is what is usually done; there is now very little disagreement about this. For about one decade the University of Chicago tried to work with another idea, which was to have its college students major in nothing at all; i.e., to devote all of their college education to general education. St. John's at Annapolis still does this, and will evidently continue to do so: although it prefers to avoid the term general education. Both of those programs have claimed to be liberal, and have thus denied that some concentration in a single discipline is an essential part of liberal education. But the University of Chicago has come back into line (except for a very small proportion of its students), and the idea of one year's concentration in a particular discipline is well established today as a component of a liberal education. I am not satisfied that the idea has been proved, and more thought should be given to it. I am by no means convinced that it is wrong; but, with respect to it, I am continually bothered by the rapid obsolescence of special knowledge. I wonder how valuable it can be for a student to concentrate a little in a field which he is not going to continue to study, where what he learns in college will be out of date in ten years or so. This even seems to be true in the relatively stable area of law. Robert Maynard Huchins has said, with reference to what he taught when he was in the Yale Law School, that the courts have overruled and the legislatures repealed most of what he knew.

Well, if it can be part of a liberal education for a terminal student to major in political science, can it be so for a student who is going on to graduate study in political science? Surely not, and much less could it be part of his general education. It might have been argued, for him, that the features of his education which are liberal could consist entirely of general education. The idea has been followed, but not widely. And in some cases where it has been followed it has not brought about any increase in attention to general education. Instead,
the preprofessional requirements have been extended, notably in the natural sciences, and especially in the physical sciences, so that for some students all that remains outside of preprofessional studies is less work in general education than is done by students in the social sciences and the humanities.

If the college education of future graduate students contains anything besides preprofessional studies and general education, it is elective work. The idea of elective work presents many problems which could be discussed at great length. I think we are a long way from having thought these matters through. They should be thought through, for they can have important bearings on the questions of general and liberal education.

In the extreme form in which the elective principle was defended by Eliot of Harvard, if all subjects were represented in the curriculum, and if they were all well taught, the choice of courses could be left to the student. In a less extreme form, which is most common today, the student may be required to distribute his time among several specified areas, but may be left free to choose among various courses within each area. It is as difficult to attack freedom as it is to defend sin. Although the principle of free election does not survive in its extreme form, it made a tremendous impact in the 19th century, and it has never lost it.

The elective principle can be applied within a general education program, and this is what is involved in so-called distribution plans: or it can be applied to what is outside both the general education program and the area of the student's major (just to be complete I should add that it can also be applied within the major). I am speaking now about election which is outside of the general education component and the major. If, as is very common, we divide the whole college program into three components, general education, the major, and electives, the elective component can be utilized either to strengthen the student's command of his major, or to round out and enrich his general education. There is a good deal to be said for using electives to strengthen general education, especially for anyone who thinks, as I do, that a general education is not provided merely by requiring a student to take courses labeled general education courses. On the other hand, by merely permitting a student to take whatever he pleases, provided that what he takes are what von Zedlitz calls "other sciences," does not in itself insure a general education. Here we face a genuine dilemma, for we can miss our aim in either of two contrary ways: either by requiring too much or by permitting too much. It is very difficult to know what to do about this. One possible device is that which gives the student a great deal of freedom, but requires that his choices be approved by some faculty official. The device can work only as well as that official understands and sym-
pathizes with the student's full needs. The thought brings me back to my main thesis, that the general education idea must be "brought home," as von Zedlitz says. It is not enough to try to get the idea of general education itself clear. It cannot be clear all by itself. The very fact that negative definitions have so often been resorted to in efforts to get it clear indicates this. We must get the idea clear by understanding what general education is not. This means that we must understand it in relation to other aspects of education: not simply other aspects of college education, but graduate education and high school education as well. Only if a student's faculty adviser considers this full range of educational programs, and is not blinded by his personal devotion to one aspect or another, can he be of real service to the students he advises.

There is another side to this. If the idea could really be brought home to students they would not need much advice. They could indeed be left free to choose their courses, and they would come out both generally educated and prepared for whatever special work they intend to do. The obvious difficulty here is to bring the idea home early enough for it to do any good in guiding his decisions about his own educational program. This is not as hopeless as it may sound. For one thing, he may lack some of the narrowness that you and I suffer as a result of the particular commitments we have so much more deeply made to one area of knowledge or another. And he may be helped to the extent that the college he attends has developed a tradition that is guided by ideas that have come home to its faculty as a whole. If they have thus come home the students, even though they will not understand them fully, will feel their presence, and not too dimly; and they will be influenced to seek the things that in fact they need.

In my efforts to stress the idea of general education I have only mentioned in passing some of the particular problems that are current today. Before I conclude I shall mention a number of these particular problems briefly, and just as briefly indicate how my attitude toward each of them would be determined by the general position I have tried to set forth.

Many of the questions that beset general education today arise in connection with the question about the extent to which certain particular courses should be required of all students, and the extent to which general education can be provided for by some sort of distributional plan. A distributional plan is one which requires students to distribute their time in certain ways among several broad areas of knowledge, so as to insure that their education will be broad and general. I think neither principle should be adhered to to the exclusion of the other. A program all one, or all the other, is no guarantee of good general education. Nevertheless, a program that did consist entirely of
courses all students were required to take would have one great advantage. It would establish a body of studies which, because it was common to all students, would provide a magnificent opportunity for students to carry their educational activities outside of the classroom. The University of Chicago did this for over ten years, and it did result in an amazing *esprit de corps* among the students, and a degree of education by bull session that could only be believed by someone who actually saw it. The advantage has an obverse side: a faculty that plans and carries out such a program is bound to develop a corresponding *esprit de corps*. If it is important for all those who participate in the planning and teaching of general education to communicate extensively with one another, then a program of required courses leads to that sort of communication better than any other kind of program.

But there are disadvantages to such a program. From the point of view of students it is surely to be doubted that the same program is good for all. From the point of view of the faculty I know from experience that strong *esprit de corps* can separate one faculty body from others it ought not to be separated from. The entire faculty of a college or university ought to be concerned with its general education program. Faculty organization should not be such as to set one faculty against another, or to permit any faculty to be indifferent to the general concerns which are not its own private property.

Colleges that use distribution plans that give students options within certain areas require that students distribute their studies in such a way as to include some work in all of the major fields of knowledge. But the distribution principle is applied in various ways, and the variety raises questions. There are differences of opinion about the classification of areas of knowledge, and these differences permit significant differences in general programs to occur. Some courses are said by some colleges to satisfy *either* a social science or a humanities requirement; others either a natural or social science requirement. The distribution principle usually goes along with another idea, viz., that one or two courses in a given area can give a student a sufficient experience in that area, for the purposes of general education. Is it not strange that a course that might be classified either as a social or as a natural science could be considered *typical* of either area?

It seems to me that the all-out supporters of the distribution and option principles face a dilemma. The distribution plan may allow few options or many. If few, it undergoes the risks just mentioned, with courses that must be accepted as options, even if they are not really typical of a major area. But, if many options are permitted, one advantage that the distribution principle could secure might be lost. It could enable a student to achieve some depth of understanding.
if it allowed him to take several courses in that subject. But this advantage would be lost if the distribution plan required him to take one course in political science, one in sociology, and one in psychology.

I hope that these doubts about a thorough commitment to the distributional principle suggest that there are great potentialities in general courses. Let me defend them by considering some of the objections that have been brought against them. A general course that is taught to a large number of students must either be a lecture course or a staff-taught course. If it is a staff-taught course it will be a failure unless there is a strong spirit of cooperation among the members of the staff. This is extremely difficult to achieve, and requires time-consuming staff meetings. Without such staff meetings the course can be a single course only if one or a few staff members are dictators to the rest of the staff. *Esprit de corps* cannot be achieved by dictation, so it is necessary to pay the price of the time-consuming staff meeting. I have nothing to say about this except that the price must be paid; by paying it good results can be achieved.

There is another closely related point. An instructor often hesitates to teach matters that are outside his own fields of special competence, and resents having his own field invaded by those who are not specially competent in it. And if he does teach outside of his own special field he resents being placed in the role of student in relation to some other colleague. These are indeed difficulties. And for the students a staff with a strong spirit of cooperation can bring dividends that cannot be obtained in any other way. General education is a shame if we must hold that a non-specialist in one science cannot be capable of understanding the relations between that science and some other which is closely related to it. To deny that this is possible can hardly give students much confidence in the values of general education. And, on the contrary, when students actually participate in a course which is carried on by a community of scholars representing several distinguishable kinds of expertise, the communication among the instructors can be in a way contagious, and spread to the students.

I will make very brief mention of one issue on which I think progress is being made. This concerns the level at which work in general education should take place. Most colleges still tend to plan the work for the first year or two of college. It should be evident that neither I nor Baron von Zedlitz would think it should be limited to that period in a student’s education. And more and more institutions are finding ways of encouraging the distribution of such studies throughout the years of college.

After this unsystematic series of comments upon some of the issues now prominent in general education, I want to conclude by returning to my main theme, the idea of general education, and to defend it. I shall turn once more to von Zedlitz, and in particular to his state-
ment that students in the universities "can be judges, advocates, preachers and physicians only for a few hours each day; but in these and all the remainder of the day they are men." What does it mean to be a man, as opposed to being a lawyer, doctor, chemist, mathematician, historian, or anything else? The question has the sort of stubborn simplicity that the questions of children often have, when we rather wish they would not ask them. We think we know the answer, and yet we can't find satisfactory expression for it.

I don't claim to have found a satisfactory expression for it, but I should like to make one point, and to express it first negatively. When we speak of being a lawyer for only a few hours, and a man for those hours and for the rest of the day too, it sounds as though the two things were different. When they are thought of as different the difference can be applied to education by saying such things as this: that general education is "a goal which unites a man with his fellow men; and it differs from that other goal which aims at the command of some limited field of knowledge because of the latter divides men according to their individual competences." The remark is a quotation from a book I admire very much, and which I strongly recommend to anyone who wishes to learn more about general education in the United States, Russell Thomas' The Search for a Common Learning. What I want to stress is that the idea of general education cannot mean that the special competences of individual men lie outside its scope. It is not really one thing to be a man and another to be a mathematician; to be a mathematician, or a physicist, dramatist, statesman, etc., are various ways of being a man. If we were to abstract from all the perfections the intellect is capable of, in our search for the essence of humanity, what would be left of man?

I think that the most difficult problem that general education must ultimately face is to discover ways of making men capable of sharing most fully their common humanity. It is already impossible for one man to become an expert in many disciplines; it becomes more difficult every day. Even in Aristotle's time it was impossible to be expert in everything, as he clearly saw. In the first paragraph of his Parts of Animals he makes a relevant suggestion by distinguishing two kinds of proficiency. One of these, he says, "may be properly called scientific knowledge of the subject, while the other is a kind of educational acquaintance with it. For an educated man should be able to form a fair off-hand judgment as to the goodness or badness of the method used by a professor in his exposition. To be educated is in fact to be able to do this; and even the man of universal education we deem to be such in virtue of his having this ability. It will, however, of course, be understood that we only ascribe universal education to one who in

his own individual person is thus critical in all or nearly all branches of knowledge, and not to one who has a like ability in some special subject.”