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Violence and General Education

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Violence and General Education

Americans are suckers. They are not born that way; they are made stupid by their parents, their priests, their politicians, their proprietors, and their pedagogues. Each of these, in his institutional role, desires control of people, and thus it is in his interest to make people controllably stupid. The chief ingredient in such control and such stupidity is ideology—about which I shall have more to say in a moment. Suffice it to say here that I value general education chiefly as an instrument for thwarting the ideological control of my students by the various institutional agents. And since “law and order” is lately a favorite phrase of proprietors, presidents, and professors, this is a good place to start thwarting.

By ideology I mean any expression that disguises a wish or command under a semblance of fact by the use of a metaphysical term. “Women were meant to be wives and mothers,” says Archie Bunker, that great repository of ideological expressions. “The policeman is our friend,” say Dick and Jane, another great repository. And Richard Nixon, surely the greatest repository of all, says: “We are ending the war.” Such formulae, properly internalized, are a very efficient means of social control, since the victim does not know he is under control. He thinks that he has knowledge, facts, education—that he is autonomous man making his own decisions based on the simple facts.

The language of law, crime, justice, and rights is so thoroughly ideological that I would reserve it for the training of professional casuists—lawyers, theologians, politicians, and used car salesmen—who would consciously adopt it for the purpose of deception. My general education student, however, would learn how the casuistic game operates and how to set up an isolated channel of decision-
making not based on casuistic language. This student will know that powerful people don't like certain actions—especially actions which threaten their power—and that they label such actions "crimes." He will understand why, when he kills people they want killed, he is a hero; but when he kills people they don't want killed, he is a criminal. That's ideology at work.

Ideology colors the perception of violence, so that the status quo is pictured as peaceful while change appears violent. In the utopian variant, the status quo is seen as violent but the future state non-violent. If I concentrate here on the violence of the status quo, it is because the dominant institutions, in socializing my typical state college student, have rendered this violence ideologically invisible.

I merely remind you of the violence of the status quo; I did not discover it. Many before me have noted the fact that if I support the bombing of the Vietnamese people I am called lawful, orderly, and peace-loving, no matter how many people I kill. But if I bomb the bombers, I am a violent outlaw.

On the domestic scene, I take part in the systematic and legal killing of 55,000 people each year by means of the automobile, and I do so gladly because the alternative is giving up my car. But I disguise my violence under the ideological word, "accident." Thus insulated, I can happily participate in the lethal automotive system. But if I were to kill 50,000 people in a campaign of terror to paralyze the automotive social system, that would be called senseless violence.

I am a relatively comfortable beneficiary of a system of health care delivery which systematically excludes and thereby condemns to early death a whole segment of the American population—that segment lacking power in wealth with which to demand health services. I am kept comfortable in my privilege by the ideology of property: I say, "I can afford it and they can't," and that makes death legal and peaceful and orderly. But if I undertake to redistribute the power to compete for medical services, by transferring wealth from the possessors to the non-possessors, the possessors will call the cops and brand my actions violent and illegal.

It is easier for us to see both the violence and the ideology in classic historical cases, such as that of slavery in the United States. Here is a letter from a slave-owner to her runaway slave:

... I write you these lines to let you know the situation we are in,—partly in consequence of your running away and stealing Old Rock, our fine mare. Though we got the mare back, she was never worth much after you took her;—and, as I now stand in need of some funds, I have determined to sell you, and I have had an offer for you, but did not see fit to take it. If you will send me a thousand dollars, and pay for the old mare, I will give up all claim to you ... . If you do not com-
ply with my request, I will sell you to someone else, and you may rest assured that the time is not far distant when things will be changed with you . . . . I would like to know if you read your Bible. If so, can you tell what will become of the thief if he does not repent? I deem it unnecessary to say much more at present . . . . You know that we reared you as we reared our own children . . . .

Today we find such ideological blindness so incredible that we don’t know whether to laugh or cry. But we have our own current refinement of the classic on our attitude toward institutional racism. Here we utilize our special historicist notion of the past, in which we readily admit past violence but note with relief that all that is over and done with. Today we start the race afresh: you on the bottom and I on top. As Archie Bunker put it to Sammy Davis, Jr.: “I want to tell you, I was always dead set against slavery.”

In this era when technology transforms the world at an accelerating pace, offering us ever-larger magnitudes of potential disaster, it is questionable whether my students can survive the next fifty years if they remain in the grip of the traditional orthodoxies, the folk knowledge, the myths which allow the same elites to retain control. Only if my students are trained to order their priorities and test their predictions free of the covert command and metaphysical traps of ideological language—only then can they see the alternative options open to them. The ambient status quo is, after all, merely one violent option. There are many alternatives—none without violence, perhaps, but also not necessarily suicidal. That’s the kind of alternative I want my students ready to see.

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THE QUESTION OF LAW AND ORDER IN SOCIAL SCIENCE EDUCATION

A. Methodology

Since the law and order syndrome is often a highly emotional issue in the United States today, “committed” teachers may be tempted to treat the subject more in the manner of indoctrination rather than education. This distinction is important because indoctrination propagates a one-sided point of view based upon one-sidedly selected data. Indoctrination tries to convert and commit people to a particular viewpoint. If we claim to pursue education, we must give our students
all the evidence needed and available: both the evidence which sup-
ports our personal point of view and the evidence which contradicts
it. Moreover, we must show all the principal alternatives for action and
leave the students free to draw their own conclusions. This does not
mean, however, that educators may not express their personal points
of view as long as they are labeled as such and do not take the place
of the crucial function of a reasonably comprehensive and objective
analysis.

B. Steps of Analysis

1. Clarification of Terms

In analyzing the relationship between law and order, we find
that a free society can have neither order without the rule of law, nor
law without orderly processes of government. The extent, moreover,
to which a free society may achieve law and order is closely dependent
upon its commitment to justice and peace.

In searching for the essential characteristics of law without which
it ceases to be law we find that law always produces a status quo
which only new legislation can change and that law must be obeyed by
all individuals in the lawmaker’s jurisdiction including those who are
dissatisfied with the law or even suffer disadvantages from it.

2. Empirical Evidence

In applying the fairness principle to our inquiry into law and order,
we should first confront our students with an overall account of the
record of crime and disorder in our country. Thereafter, as comple-
ment and corrective, we should also explain the intricate problems
involved in accumulating accurate crime statistics. The dimensions
of the evidence are bound to impress students and to elicit questions
about causes and remedies.

3. Causes

The causes for law violation can be found in the behavior of the
violators, in the law, in its enforcement, or in combinations of these
factors.

a. Types of Law Violators

Among those who violate the law, several principal types of moti-
vations can be distinguished:

(1) those who do not claim to be opposed to the law but whose
offenses are due to socially harmful behavior, such as hate,
greed, lack of self-control, negligence, etc.;

(2) those who defy the law when it puts them at a disadvantage
and, therefore, consider their violations as corrective or even
necessary acts;
(3) those who oppose the law in principle and therefore view their violations as acts of protest;
and
(4) those recidivists who claim that the prevailing correctional practices do not permit them to reintegrate themselves into society and thus force them into renewed offenses.

b. Types of Dissatisfaction with the Law
Dissatisfaction with the law is usually caused by one or a combination of the following grievances:
(1) that the law has been imposed against the wishes of the majority;
(2) that it favors one segment of the people over another;
(3) that it is too difficult to revise or repeal it;
(4) that it is not enforced even-handedly among all segments of society;
and
(5) that the penalties imposed upon violators impede rather than promote their rehabilitation.

History has abundantly shown that the patience of the disadvantaged has too often been strained to the point where they ignored or openly violated the law even though the odds were hopelessly stacked against them. The extent, however, to which different individuals and groups have been willing to tolerate what they conceived to be injustice varied greatly.

c. The Social Climate for Law Violation
In the United States, a combination of national characteristics seems to make it somewhat more likely than elsewhere that the disadvantaged and dissatisfied militate against the law.
(1) Compared to most other developed countries, the United States suffers from particularly wide disparities between the most advantaged and the most disadvantaged groups.
(2) Our political system provides for relatively slow processes of adjustment in all phases of government, legislative, executive, and judicial.
(3) Our laws are often enforced selectively in favor of the advantaged groups. In addition, white-collar criminals are considerably more difficult to detect than blue-collar criminals.
(4) Our correctional practices are still failing, in the majority of all cases, to rehabilitate the criminal law violators and to reintegrate them into life outside prison walls.
(5) From the colonial rebellions, the Revolutionary War and the Civil War, through race riots and violent labor unrest,
to the burnings, bombings, and the non-violent disobedience of our time, victims and foes of the social system have used law violation as a deliberate show of opposition. While the growing complexity of the decision-making process tends to discourage lawful opposition, modern techniques of mass organization are bolstering large-scale civil disturbances and hit-and-run terrorism against the establishment.

4. Remedies

How can societies best achieve an optimum of law and order? The answers to this question vary greatly.

On the most superficial level, we hear that social order depends simply on the inculcation and enforcement of obedience to the existing laws. Others insist that the response to the law depends largely on its fair and equitable administration. Many social scientists find that the laws themselves must first be fair and equitable before all groups of society will equally respect it. Marxists deny the possibility of law and order in any society which does not conform to their design. To them, law and order in capitalist societies cannot emerge from the gradual amelioration of the laws and their enforcement but only from a radical revamping of the economic and political power structure.

In comparing these approaches to law and order, it can easily be shown that each of them has some validity and could help lessen the incidence of crime and disorder. In contemporary America, however, the need for the revision of unfair laws and the reform of law enforcement seems so urgent that it may merit the highest priority among the various measures needed.

Although we do not know how far institutional change can contribute toward the reduction of crime and disorder, the available evidence indicates that "good laws make it easier to do right and harder to do wrong" (William E. Gladstone). The highest crime rates in the United States are in the urban slums where housing is sub-standard, unemployment high, education insufficient, and poverty endemic. Black people have long constituted the most disadvantaged group in American society and show the highest rates of crime against persons and property.

The Committee for Economic Development, a businessmen's organization, recently described the relationship between law and justice in America as follows:

"Much bitterness and dissatisfaction stem from the widespread conviction that American criminal codes and their administration are unfair, inequitable, and—in a word—unjust. The sense of justice is a basic human need. Any society rests upon insecure foundations if it contains major elements that believe its
laws and the manner of their administration are unjust. Yet, injustice does exist; there is discriminatory enforcement of unpopular laws, police corruption, inordinate court delay, and brutality in the prisons."

Nobody has yet disproven that injustices and other inadequacies in our social order constitute the main cause of crime and disorder. The national response, therefore, would call primarily for changes in the law and only secondarily for disciplinary action against the violators. For a society which is to be built upon justice rather than force, the first priority in the pursuit of social order must necessarily be the development of just laws justly administered, including correctional methods which aim at rehabilitation rather than retribution.

It seems to be one of the most pervasive paradoxes of the human condition that people are quick to denounce crime and disorder but slow to recognize and combat the underlying causes. Very often the necessary adjustments require substantial sacrifices which do not find majority support. Governments all over the world have less trouble raising billions of dollars for the fight against individual and international aggression but usually find it impossible to get the same sums for preventive measures.

Social science knows that antisocial and antilegal behavior is learned. Hence, the fundamental remedy for crime and misdemeanors must be sought in education and the institutions which contribute to it. Nobody, however, can facilitate the work of education as much as the law because it embodies "the moral sentiment of the people" (William Blackstone).

Three assumptions underlie the thoughts which follow. The first is simply that law and order must prevail or civilization will cease to exist.

The second assumption is that law and order is a changing, dynamic element in a culture. An element which may, to a degree, be constant in its basic characteristics, but very much different in its specifics from time to time and from place to place.

The third and most important assumption is that law and order must be sustained by a willingness on the part of the people to live
by it. The alternative is a form of police state within which democracy and freedom cannot exist.

Accepting these assumptions, one might then conclude that a democratic society must be founded on a system of law and order which can be changed by orderly process and which is willingly accepted by the people as the guide to and standard of a healthy co-existence.

With this as the objective, what then should general education do to contribute to realizing that objective?

First of all, general education—which I consider to include all levels of education—must satisfy a very practical and of the moment necessity . . . namely that of teaching and sustaining obedience.

In the early years of life one must learn what law is and one must learn to obey it—if even blindly. Obedience must be demanded in many situations and education must serve this end.

As one grows older, however, what once may have been blind obedience must be converted to thoughtful respect and understanding. Even a minimally educated man in our complex civilized society will not long support or live by that which restricts his freedom and for which there seems to be no explanation. For developing this understanding and respect the burden will increasingly fall to education, and the colleges and universities must assume their share of that responsibility.

At this point one might ask if making good citizens should not be the business of the elementary and secondary schools and that general education in college should be a cut above this in purpose. To that I would respond in the negative. To convert childlike obedience to mature compliance requires the cultivation of understanding and respect on an adult level and that is no small task even for higher education.

A second major role of general education regarding the question of law and order is one of providing the machinery for the changes which must be made. If the law and order of today is very much changed from what it was in our grandparents day—and I believe it is—how did the changes come about? To answer by saying our legislatures changed the laws, our enforcement agencies function differently, and our courts interpret the law differently would be to see only the top of the iceberg. Vast, complex machinery for change lies below this surface. Our political party system, our courts, our law making bodies on many levels, and our enforcement agencies, all are major wheels in this machine. But, in addition, there are the many social agencies, business interests, public and private concerns in countless numbers, all of which provide some small or large measure of the push and pull which affect the workings of that machine. It is not sufficient to prepare the professionals as functionaries of change, we
must also prepare an educated people who, if they are to be participants in their government, must have some understanding of how this machine was built and how it can be made to operate in the best interest of society.

The third major role for general education is to provide the cultural base upon which law and order is established.

The laws which govern a society must be threads in the fabric of that society—they must grow out of the accepted values and standards held by the people. We see many laws which, for one reason or another, are not expressions of social values and these laws are inevitably forgotten or commonly violated by a major segment of society. The later years of that great experiment called prohibition stands as a classic example of widespread violation of a law no longer in accord with the public attitude of what is right and wrong.

Many of the laws which are being violated or questioned today are those which are most deeply rooted in the White Judeo-Puritan heritage which formed their base. Could it be that we are a somewhat less White Judeo-Puritan society and those laws are no longer threads in our social fabric?

If general education is a major contributor to the weaving of the cultural fabric—and it certainly is or we are wasting our time here—then it most assuredly contributes to the formation of the cultural base upon which order is built and from which laws emerge. It is here, in that third role, that general education performs its most important function and it is here that we can speculate on the long range results of the decisions we make in developing general education programs.

We might ask what would happen if our general education excludes that which would help us understand the needs, customs, and values of other racial or ethnic groups. Will we someday again be legislating to the disadvantage of these groups or at best, be fighting a losing battle to enforce the laws which uphold their rights? Such a battle is bound to be lost if those laws cease to be a thread in the cultural fabric.

What would happen if general education leaves out the study of our heritage? Will history degenerate—in the minds of the majority—to a set of vague tales and fables, no longer clearly able to provide us the guidance which many claim it must provide if we are to bring order into the lives of man. Without this guidance will a less well informed and less mature public support precipitous changes in our system of law—a kind of legalistic situation-ethic which, carried to sufficient extreme, is comparable to no law and order at all.

What would be the reward for provincialism in our general education? Can urban society ignore the rural and still survive? Can we bus our problems from one national neighborhood to another and claim to have solved them?

What would result if our general education neglects to expose the
student to the arts? Will government support for the arts—which seems to be their only chance for survival—drop to the bottom of our list of priorities? Lacking the sense of balance which the arts provide in a culture, can order long prevail? What would result from the loss of opportunity for individual and collective expression or the decline of the value of that expression to society?

What has been the effect of ignoring the applied arts—that realm of human activity so often thought to be unworthy of inclusion in general education? We now have a race of supposedly educated people, living in a world saturated with business, industry, the home, physical recreation and activity, practical and applied skills, about which we know little. This is a major segment of the picture of modern living over which higher education has placed a veil. Is this not also a part of our cultural base—a thread in the fabric?

I will not attempt to answer these questions I have raised, that is not my purpose. I only wish to use them to suggest that their answers affect general education which in turn significantly influences the future development of values and standards. And it is from those values and standards that our system of law and order will emerge.

We have then, three ways in which general education should approach the issue of law and order: It should help educate people to live with it as it is—good or bad—lest they destroy themselves in lawlessness and chaos. It should help educate people to be participants in the processes whereby laws are changed, for without change they cannot express the true values of a changing society. And, finally, general education must help educate the people which make up the culture—the collective conscience—from which will flow the kind of law which need not be forced on them, but which they will live by willingly.

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Although the phrasing has varied, the major question raised by liberal education has always been the question of identity: who am I? The question is as old as human history, but that is no reason to go on answering it in the old way. That is exactly what we have done, however; hence it should not be surprising that the ideal of a liberal education has become attractive to fewer and fewer persons.
The question of identity is too important to be left up to a mediev­al approach to human nature, an approach that elevates thought at the expense of feeling. Look at the sacred phrases used by proponents of liberal education and this bias becomes clear: "life of the mind," "intellectual culture," "rational discourse." These are not bad concepts, but they are not the whole story. People, especially young people who are between 18 and 23, do more than think. Phrases like "life of the mind" keep alive a mind/body dichotomy that may have worked for Aristotle, Aquinas and Newman, but which is no longer appropriate as a model of human nature. It withers when examined in light of recent advances in psychiatry, psychology, sociology and anthropology.

Unfortunately, nothing in the antiquated process which certifies persons to teach at the college level has anything at all to do with advances in those fields, unless one happens to be taking a Ph.D. in one of them. Graduate education is modeled on an outdated view of human nature, a view which lauds intellect but fears emotion, which celebrates order, neatness and symmetry but fears their opposites. So naturally undergraduate institutions act the same way.

Armed with these perceptions, it is easy to explain the current disaffection from the aims and practices of liberal education: they do not connect to the student personally. As a person, he has more needs than can be satisfied by cognitive learning. He is a person—someone who thinks—but also someone who falls in and out of love, who worries about what others think of him, who fears his father, who experiences anxiety and loneliness, who wonders which values to pick up and which to discard. He is, in sum, fairly complicated. These concerns I have enumerated need to play a role in our learning strategies if we are serious about the riddle of identity, the riddle of liberal education. The answer to it is liberating, but how can we answer it?

Harold Taylor has raised the same concern recently in How To Change Colleges (1971):

It seems to me to be odd that in all the recent concern shown by government commissions and educational study groups with the existence of student unrest it seems not to have occurred to the educators to see what could be done by the simple device of taking the education of students in all the dimensions of their need—political, aesthetic, intellectual, social, and personal—with a seriousness at least equal to theirs. (70)

Sadly, we are not prepared to deal with students on these new levels. Our training had nothing to do with those concerns. But here are some suggestions for getting us going in the right direction:


156
A pressing question for our universities, which had better start at least thinking about feeling before they are engulfed by anti-intellectualism coming at them from two sides—from their own students and from the philistines: Why is this country so open to one set of emotions and their expression—rage, hatred, scorn, put-downs, vituperation, vicious criticism, character-killing; and so suspicious of, so hostile to, another—love, kindness, generosity, forgiveness, trust, praise, encouragement? (36)

2. Admit that courses have their limitations, and that development of the whole person—a hallowed phrase if ever there was one—may require more than curricular gimmickry. It may have more to do with living conditions and governance patterns than with what goes on in a classroom. We will probably have to take ourselves less seriously as classroom persons.

3. Learn to live with the fact that one’s whole person is not done developing at the end of four years. In that sense, a liberal education is only a beginning, and, like all growth processes, will require attention now and then.

4. Faculty, like students, are capable of continued development; hence there ought to be arrangements made so this will take place, not simply because faculty stand to gain, but because students will gain too. The key to student growth is faculty growth. Curricular development must involve faculty development. Many curricular revisions fail because too little was done in the way of faculty development before the new program began.

Joseph Katz has spoken recently about faculty development in an address entitled “The Challenge to ‘Body of Knowledge’ Learning From Person-Centered Advocates”:

Professors have rarely received, in graduate school or through in-service training, the kind of preparation that they need for the pedagogical task of facilitating and assessing student learning. But perhaps the ultimate reason why professors cannot respond to the challenge of inducing learning is that they have no adequate sense of how this is to be accomplished. (Liberal Education, May, 1972, p. 144.)

My colleagues and I recently completed a research project involving in-depth interviews with 24 faculty in three midwestern liberal arts colleges. Sponsored by the Buhl Foundation, the investigation gave us a close look at the learning/teaching repertoires of the sample faculty. The faculty interviewed were remarkably alike in the ways they learned to teach. For some, an undergraduate or graduate professor had served as a model. For others, the trial and error method was emphasized. Others insisted teaching was an extension of their
personality, not subject to external influence. In most cases, however, this was a difficult topic to discuss initially because they had never talked about it in any depth. Equally obvious was their interest in exploring the subject further once the ice had been broken. Time and time again, the interviewers were struck by the faculty's openness in answering the questions on learning and teaching. Several persons, for example, told us that they had never gone as deeply into these matters before, and that they found the interview very helpful personally. It was as if their feelings had been bottled up until we came along. Their own institutions had usually not given them assistance in improving their teaching. Their colleagues had not been particularly helpful either. While they were not able to say what should be done, many of the faculty said they thought something should be done. We agreed.

5. If the whole person is to be developed, alterations in governance structures may be in order. Charles Frankel stated in *Education and the Barricades* (1968):

Students desire to have an education whose character and purposes they can understand. And students believe they would have a better chance to get such an education if they had more chance to take part in designing it, and more chance to understand, through the hard, practical experience of active participation, how the institution to which they belong is governed. This desire and this belief are both reasonable. To want to have something to say about the conditions under which one's community lives is an impulse that educational institutions should wish to encourage. (88-89)

6. New learning models, especially models that feature groups of students working together at tasks, will have to spread to more institutions. Ask anyone who has made extensive use of group-oriented learning strategies: something special happens; students and faculty enjoy themselves and they learn. Not a bad combination. The riddle of identity is surely not solved by individuals working apart from one another. Group learning allows the individual to borrow the strengths of other people. It also gives persons who need extra support an opportunity to find it in the people around them.

Other models—interdisciplinary courses, problem-oriented approaches, cluster colleges, off-campus programs, and the like—are by now fairly widely used, although they are by no means universal.

7. Liberal education requires a coherent philosophy of education where none exists now. Harold Taylor has pointed that out in *How To Change Colleges* (1971):
What is wrong with the university as a teaching institution is precisely this: it has no philosophy of education, no unifying principle around which reforms can be made, either to meet the problems of student unrest or to engage the students in their own learning.

It has instead a system of administrative conveniences. The whole apparatus of departments, divisions, institutes, lectures, research, grades, examinations, academic credits, classes and faculty appointments is based on an administrative plan for dealing with student and academic subject matter, not on a philosophy. (67)

That new philosophy is education for human development. It takes the broad view of human nature and finds man's intellect only one of his distinguishing marks. It takes human nature too seriously to try to stuff it into an old uniform where all the ribbons were earned for thinking. It borrows heavily from recent advances in the social sciences and points to Nevitt Sanford's The American College as the earliest attempt to view the college itself from those vantage points. In the words of the Hazen Report, The Student In Higher Education (1968):

By the very fact that it presumes to inform the minds of the young, the college becomes involved in the development of the whole person, of which the intellectual faculties are but a part. The time has come for the college to realize the extent of its power to influence personality development and to take full responsibility for the way this power is executed. (6)

Here are some of the things the developmental philosophy of education says, if I may borrow the useful summary made recently by Joseph Katz:

1. Students learn if their studies connect both with motivation and with aspirations, among them achievement of personal identity, occupational identity, a satisfactory life style, a sense of competence.

2. There must be self-direction in the student's process of learning and he must have autonomous participation in the planning and execution of what he does.

3. The student's learning must issue in a product that has its own self-contained integrity and must be more than make believe or a testing hurdle.

4. The student's work must be useful to himself and, wherever possible, useful to others. This contrasts with situations in which the primary product for the student is a grade which
may or may not be an ornament on his record and a career
token but which has few other consequences.

5. Learning is facilitated when students learn in groups which
are oriented to a common task and in which what is found
out is mutually complementary.

6. The professor or other adults must be interested in the stu-
dent's work and convey this through task-minded encour-
agement and evaluations.

7. The professor himself must treat the subject matter in an
inquiring mood and he must be interested in the subject
matter he is teaching.

8. There must be no neglect of other developmental tasks that
students face during their passage through college—such
tasks as the achievement of self-esteem, of competence, of
acceptance by and integration with others, and many
more. If obstacles are put in the way of the achievement of
these tasks, the effect is one of depressing the student's
willingness to learn. (*Liberal Education*, May 1972, p. 142)

What better way is there to approach the question of identity
posed by liberal education?

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