My subject is liberal education, and today more than ever the term requires definition, especially as to the questions: What is a liberal education and what it is for? From Cicero’s *artes liberales*, to the attempts at common curricula in more recent times, to the chaotic cafeteria that passes for a curriculum in most American universities today, the concept has suffered from vagueness, confusion, and contradiction. From the beginning, the champions of a liberal education have thought of it as seeking at least four kinds of goals. One was as an end in itself, or at least as a way of achieving that contemplative life that Aristotle thought was the greatest happiness. Knowledge and the acts of acquiring and considering it were the ends of this education and good in themselves. A second was as a means of shaping the character, the style, the taste of a person—to make him good and better able to fit in well with and take his place in the society of others like him. A third was to prepare him for a useful career in the world, one appropriate to his status as a free man. For Cicero and Quintilian, this meant a career as an orator that would allow a man to protect the private interests of himself and his friends in the law courts and to advance the public interest in the assemblies, senate, and magistracies. The fourth was to contribute to the individual citizen’s freedom in ancient society. Servants were ignorant and parochial, so free men must be learned and cosmopolitan; servants were ruled by others, so free men must take part in their own government; servants specialized to become competent at some specific and limited task, so free men must know something of everything and understand general principles without
yielding to the narrowness of expertise. The Romans’ recommended course of study was literature, history, philosophy, and rhetoric.

It was once common to think of the medieval university as very different, as a place that focused on learning for its own sake. But the medieval universities, whatever their commitment to learning for its own sake, were institutions that trained their students for professional careers. Graduates in the liberal arts were awarded a certificate that was a license to teach others what they had learned and to make a living that way. For some, the study of liberal arts was preliminary to professional study in medicine, theology, or law and was part of the road to important positions in church and state.

The seven liberal arts of the Middle Ages consisted of the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and logic) and the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music). The discovery and absorption of Aristotle’s works in the twelfth century quickly led to the triumph of logic and dialectic over the other arts. They were the glamour subjects of the time, believed both to be the best means for training and disciplining the mind and to provide the best tools for successful careers in both church and state. The dominant view of knowledge and truth was that they both already existed. They needed only to be learned, organized, and harmonized. There was nothing still to be discovered; knowledge and truth had only to be systematized and explained. An ambitious scholar could hope to achieve some semblance of universal knowledge. This was good in itself, for to the medieval men God was the source of all truth and to comprehend it was to come closer to divinity. They also placed great value on the practical rewards of their liberal education, and rightly so, for their logical, dialectical, mathematical, and rhetorical studies were the best available training for the clerks, notaries, lawyers, canons, and managers so badly needed in the high Middle Ages.

That was not quite enough for the humanists of the Renaissance, who made a conscious effort to return to the ideas and values of the classical age. As Christians they continued to study the Church Fathers but rejected the commentaries of the medieval schoolmen and went directly to the sources themselves, applying the powerful new tools of philological analysis. Their greatest innovation and delight, however, was the study of classical texts by the pagan authors whose focus on the secular world and elevation of the importance of mankind powerfully appealed to them. Their idea of a liberal education, the *studia humanitatis*, continued to include grammar and rhetoric from the old curriculum, but added the study of a canon of classical authors writing poetry, history, treatises on politics, and moral philosophy.

They thought these studies delightful in themselves but also essential for achieving the goals of a liberal education: to become wise and to speak eloquently. The emphasis was on use and action. The beneficiary of a humanistic liberal education was meant to know what is good so that he could practice virtue. Baldassare Castiglione’s *Book of the Courtier* set forth the ideal of the well-rounded man who united in his person a knowledge of language, literature, and history with athletic, military, and musical skills, all framed by good manners and good moral character. These qualities were thought to be desirable in themselves, but they would also be most useful to a man making
his way in the courts of Renaissance Italy.

The civic humanists looked to the liberal education of the humanists to train good men for public service, for leadership in cultural and political life. Such humanists as Coluccio Salutati, Leonardo Bruni, and Poggio Bracciolini served as chancellors of Florence and used their skills and abilities to defend it against aggression. They also found time to write histories of their city meant to celebrate its virtues and win for it the devotion of its citizens, a no less important contribution to its survival and flourishing.

Pietro Paolo Vergerio, another of the Italian humanists close to the Florentine circle, summarized the group’s idea neatly:

We call those studies liberal which are worthy of a free man; those studies by which we attain and practice virtue and wisdom; that education which calls forth, trains, and develops those highest gifts of body and mind which ennoble men and which are rightly judged to rank next in dignity to virtue only, for to a vulgar temper, gain and pleasure are the one aim of existence, to a lofty nature, moral worth and fame.

For the Italian humanists, freedom meant putting aside concern for gain and instead devoting oneself to the training of mind, body, and spirit for the sake of higher things. No more than the ancients did the Humanists think that liberal education should be remote from the responsibilities and rewards of the secular life of mankind. Their study should lead to a knowledge of virtue, but that knowledge should also lead to virtuous action in the public interest, and such action should bring fame as its reward.

The idea of liberal education came to America by way of the English colleges and universities, where the approach of the Renaissance humanists gained favor only in the eighteenth century. In the seventeenth century, the study of a broad range of classical texts on a variety of subjects had no institutional home.

In Georgian England, however, the humanists’ education took hold. But the English version of a humanistic liberal education showed little interest in the hard training that turned philology into a keen and powerful tool for the critical examination of primary sources and the discovery of truth. Nor was it meant as preparation for an active life of public service. It was an education of one of Castiglione’s courtiers rather than one of the civic humanists’ chancellors. The result was an education that suited English society in the eighteenth century, one where the landed aristocracy was still powerful and where connections and favor were very important. A liberal education was one suitable to a free man, who, it was assumed, was well-born and rich enough to afford it. It was to be a training aimed at gaining command of arts that were “liberal,” “such as fit for Gentlemen and Scholars,” as a contemporary dictionary put it, and not those that were servile—“Mechanick Trades and Handicrafts” suited for “meane People.” It was not an education meant to prepare its recipients for a career or some specific function but an education for gentlemen. The goal was to produce a well-rounded man who would feel comfortable and be accepted in the best circles of
society and so get on in the world. It placed special emphasis on preparing young men to make the kind of educated conversation required in polite society.

There was no fixed canon of authors on which one was examined at school or university. Their main contribution to the current idea of liberal education was to give their students the opportunity to make the right sort of friends. “Friendship,” as one schoolmaster put it, “is known to heighten our joys, and to soften our cares,” but no less important, “by the attachments which it forms . . . is often the means of advancing a man’s fortunes in this world.”

Such an education prized sociability above the solitude of hard study. It took a dim view of solitary study aimed at acquiring knowledge for its own sake, which was called pedantry, a terrible term of abuse at that time. Pedants were thought to be fussy, self-absorbed, engaged in the study of knowledge that was useless. We find fathers writing to warn their sons at the university against the dangers of working too hard and becoming pedants, ruining their health, and damaging their social life. Education was meant to shape character and manners much more than intellect.

In the first decade of the nineteenth century the number of undergraduates entering the universities grew rapidly. Though the new generation came from the same social class as its predecessors, its members thought and acted differently, for the world had changed. The long years of war against France, the arrival of the radical ideas of the French Revolution, the vogue of romantic individualism, and the revival of serious interest in religion that came in their wake unsettled the easy-going society of eighteenth-century England and its emphasis on polite behavior. The pressure of war made the government take at least a few steps toward filling important posts on the basis of competence instead of connections. The response of the university faculties was to revive a medieval device that had fallen into disuse—competitive examinations.

These examinations had the desired effect, absorbing the time and energy of the undergraduates and turning their minds away from dangerous channels. They also enhanced respect for the universities and the teachers in them. The idleness of the eighteenth century was replaced by hard teaching and learning. For most students, a liberal education came to mean the careful study of a limited list of Latin and Greek classics, with emphasis on mastery of the ancient languages, but it was now justified on a new basis. This kind of learning, it was said, cultivated and strengthened the intellectual faculties. Commissions investigating Oxford and Cambridge in the 1850s concluded that “It is the sole business of the University to train the powers of the mind.”

This new definition, the defined curriculum, and the examination system that connected them greatly improved both the performance and the self-confidence of university faculties. Before long, however, they came under attack from two new directions. The growth of industry and democracy led to a demand for a more practical schooling that would be “useful” in ways that the Oxbridge liberal education was not. It would train its students for particular vocations, on the one hand, and it would provide the expertise the new kind of leaders needed in the modern world, on the other. At the same time, critics in the mid-nineteenth century complained of the loss of the old values of
liberal education undermined by the limited classical curriculum, the sentence-parsing and fact-cramming imposed by the examinations. Liberal education, they insisted, must not be narrow, pedantic, one-sided—in short, illiberal. It must be more than merely useful in a pragmatic sense; it must train the character and the whole man, not merely the mind. But the restless, tumultuous, industrial society of the nineteenth century, increasingly lacking agreement and a common core of values, needed leaders trained in more than style and manners. Such leaders must understand the magnitude of the new problems: “by an effort of speculative imagination, based on a solid understanding of the meaning of industrialism in the context of world history, [they] would be able to give the turbulent society a proper sense of its character and its mission, directing it towards the realization of its uncommon potential.” Liberal education must become general education, including languages, literature, history, and the natural sciences. In the words of one writer, “A man of the highest education ought to know something of everything, and everything of something.”

The answer of some was “universal knowledge.” They urged a broadening of the field of learning to include all that was known and an attempt to synthesize and integrate the information collected by discovering the philosophical principles that underlay it all. As one Victorian put it, “The summit of a liberal education . . . is Philosophy—meaning by Philosophy the sustained effort . . . to frame a complete and reasoned synthesis of the facts of the universe.”

The new universal education remained intellectual and academic, not practical and professional. It aimed at broad understanding rather than special expertise, but its champions insisted that although it was not purely useful, it was nonetheless useful. Cardinal Newman was the most famous proponent of the new program, but he resisted the idea of usefulness entirely. “That alone is liberal knowledge,” he said, “which stands on its own pretensions, which is independent of sequel, expects no complement, refuses to be informed (as it is called) by any end, or absorbed in any art, in order to present itself to our contemplations. The most ordinary pursuits have this specific character, if they are self-sufficient and complete; the highest lose it, when they minister to something beyond them.” Newman was an intellectual, an academic, and an Aristotelian and he defended the ancient idea of the value of learning and knowledge for their own sake at a time when the tide was running against it, as it usually does.

The result was the same one that awaited Canute. In the last decades of the century, Newman’s idea of knowledge for its own sake and the whole concept of universal knowledge for the purpose of philosophical understanding were swept away by a great tidal wave from across the channel, whose chief source was Germany. All the educational ideas we had considered to this point had this in common: They regarded knowledge as something that existed already. There was little thought of discovering anything true that had not previously been known.

By the nineteenth century, however, the power of natural science and the scientific method to discover new knowledge had become so obvious that it could no longer be prevented from influencing universities. At its core was the German idea of academic freedom, a freedom to
investigate new questions and old in new ways, with a bold willingness to challenge accepted opinion unhampered by traditions from the past. Originality and discovery became the prime values. The idea of the university as a museum, a repository of learning, gave way to the notion that it should be dynamic, a place where knowledge was discovered and generated.

Scientific method and the new values were not confined to the natural sciences but were applied to the old humanistic studies, as well. The new methods and the new zeal for research invigorated the study of history, literature, and theology. The Classics, symbol of the old order and chief target of reformers, flourished more than most disciplines, making great progress in the technical fields of linguistics and philology, broadening the limits of their studies to include all the humanistic disciplines and even the new social science of anthropology. The content and meaning of classical texts became more important than the construal and composition of the classical languages.

These gains, however, exacted a price. The new knowledge required specialization—hard, narrow training at the expense of broad, general education for the purpose of philosophical understanding aimed at by the advocates of “universal knowledge.” Champions of the new order, therefore, changed the definition of liberal education. An Oxford classical philologist put it this way: It is “the essence of a liberal education that it should stand in constant relation to the advance of knowledge. Research and discovery are the processes by which truth is directly acquired; education is the preparation of the mind for its reception, and the creation of a truth-loving habit.” He believed that knowledge obtained by rigorous research would produce truth and that only truth could lead to morality. Research, therefore, would provide a new basis for morality. Useful knowledge, good examples, and wisdom were not to be sought in the past but in the future. That required the application of scientific method to all subjects, which, in turn, demanded specialization. New knowledge, moreover, did not fit neatly into the small number of old packages that made up the traditional university organization. Science and social science kept creating new fields and subfields, all of which had equal claim to attention and a place in a liberal education, since all employed the correct method and all claimed to produce new knowledge and truth. No one could or dared to rank subjects according to an idea of their intrinsic value or their usefulness. Practitioners in each field came to have more in common with their fellow investigators in other universities than with their colleagues in other fields at their own. Both they and their students became more professional in their allegiance and in their attitudes. Preparation for and advancement in a career became the chief concern of both. The distinction between a liberal and a professional education became ever more vague. These developments seem to me to have been the forces that have shaped our own universities and remain dominant today.

I have rehearsed this inadequate capsule history of the idea of a liberal education because I think it may be a useful basis for examining the status of liberal education today and for considering what directions it might need to take in the future. I am struck by the fact that every claim ever made on behalf of liberal education is still being made at some college or university at least some of the time; at some places and some times all the benefits are claimed at the same time.
In evaluating the performance of major American universities in meeting the various goals of liberal education sought over the centuries, I came to conclusions that surprise me. It seems to me that the education provided at a typical liberal arts college today comes closest to achieving the goals sought by English gentlemen in the eighteenth century. To be sure, success in that world did not require any particular set of studies or any specialization. If it had done so, I am sure the training then would have contained some equivalent of our modern departmental major. In most other respects, our curricula today—with their lack of any collection of works or even subjects studied in common, the absence of agreement on any particular method of training the mind, the lack of a culminating examination testing the acquisition of a fixed body of knowledge, the emphasis on well-roundedness (defined only as the opposite of narrowness and achieved by taking a few courses in some specified number of different fields)—fit the model nicely. If we examine the full reality rather than only the formal curriculum, the similarities seem even greater. I submit that in America today the most important social distinction, one almost as significant as the old one between gentle and simple, is whether or not one has a college education. Within the favored group, finer distinctions place a liberal education, as opposed to a vocational or merely professional one, at the top of the social pyramid. Graduates of the better liberal arts colleges are most likely to marry the most desired partners and hold the best positions and appointments in business, their professions, and government. That this is true and widely understood is shown by the fact that each year there are great numbers of applicants for every place in the freshman classes of such colleges at a cost of perhaps $60,000 each year, a phenomenon otherwise inexplicable. Apart from any pre-professional training they may obtain, successful applicants gain about the same advantages as those sought by young Englishmen from their somewhat less formal eighteenth-century education. They sharpen useful skills in writing and speaking, they pick up enough of subjects thought interesting in their circle and the style of discussing them to permit agreeable and acceptable conversation. They learn the style and manner, political opinions and prejudices to make them comfortable in a similarly educated society. They have excellent opportunities to make friends who may be advantageous to them in later life. This education, of course, is purely secular. There is, moreover, no attempt to shape good character, for the better universities lead the country in the direction of a kind of relativism, even nihilism. The message that seems to get through is: “Do your own thing, and demand that everyone else in the world behave according to the strictest possible moral code (as it is currently understood in the halls of the most favored colleges).” No doubt, the absence of religion and the failure to shape character would disappoint an eighteenth-century gentlemen, but in other respects I think he would not be dismayed by what is called a liberal education today.

Other definitions and objectives are, I think, less well served. The search for general, universal knowledge and for the philosophical principles on which it may be based has long since been abandoned. In truth, I think it never had much hope or support. Nor do I think that most modern attempts at liberal education encourage the pursuit of learning and knowledge as an end in itself. I doubt that many students were ever deeply impressed by that goal, but when there was general agreement that there was a core of knowledge worth learning, one that all educated people
could share, and one, therefore, that could readily serve as the basis for serious discussion of
important questions and thereby, perhaps, yield wisdom, there was a far greater chance of success
than there is today.

It might be thought, at least, that those values produced by the study of the natural sciences, of
research, and of scientific method flourish in today’s version of liberal education; I mean the
rigorous training of the mind, the inculcation of a “truth-loving habit,” and the universal triumph
of the scientific method. I am inclined to think otherwise. In liberal arts colleges today, the study of
mathematics and the natural sciences is separated from other studies in important ways. The study
of the hard sciences is committed to rigorous training of the mind in a single method, the scientific
one. Teachers of science continue to believe in the cumulative and progressive character of
knowledge and in the possibility of moving toward truth. Students who major in these subjects are
likely to acquire the method and to share these beliefs. Though teachers and students are interested
in the practical uses of science, I think many of them come to value learning and knowledge as
good in themselves. But only a minority of students in liberal arts colleges major in mathematics or
natural science. In some programs, students who do not major in these subjects are required to
study neither; in others, there is a minimal requirement that rarely achieves the desired goals.

But hasn’t the scientific method made its way into other disciplines, and can’t its benefits be
obtained through them? Where the attempt has been made most seriously, in the social
sciences, it has been a failure. It is increasingly obvious that trying to deal with human beings,
creatures of independent will and purpose, as if they were objects like atoms, molecules, cells, and
tissues, produces unsatisfactory results. The social sciences, far from producing a progressive
narrowing of differences and a growing agreement on a common body of knowledge and of
principles capable of explanation and prediction, like the natural sciences, has seen each generation
undermine the beliefs of its predecessors rather than building on and refining them. What we see is
a war of methodologies within and between fields. In fact, the fundamental idea of the whole
enterprise, the attempt to remove values from the consideration of human behavior and simply to
apply the scientific method, now seems most implausible.

To me, however, the greatest shortcoming of most attempts at liberal education today, with their
individualized, unfocused, and scattered curricula, is their failure to enhance the students’
understanding of their role as free citizens of a free society and the responsibilities it entails. Every
successful civilization must possess a means for passing on its basic values to each generation.
When it no longer does so, its days are numbered. The danger is particularly great in a society such
as our own, the freest the world has known, whose special character is to encourage doubt and
questioning even of its own values and assumptions. Such questioning has always been and still
remains a distinctive, admirable, and salutary part of our education and way of life. So long as
there was a shared belief in the personal and social morality taught by the Judeo-Christian
tradition and so long as there was a belief in the excellence of the tradition and institutions of
Western Civilization and of this nation, so long as these values were communicated in the schools,
such questioning was also safe. Our tradition of free critical inquiry counteracted the tendency for received moral and civic teachings from becoming ethnocentric complacency and intolerance and prevented a proper patriotism from degenerating into arrogant chauvinism. When students came to college they found their values and prejudices challenged by the books they read, by their fellow-students from other places and backgrounds, and by their teachers.

I suggest to you that the situation is far different today. Whatever the formal religious attachments of our students may be, I find that a firm belief in the traditional values and the ability to understand and the willingness to defend them are rare. Still rarer is an informed understanding of the traditions and institutions of our western civilization and of our country and an appreciation of their special qualities and values. The admirable, even the uniquely good elements are taken for granted as if they were universally available, had always existed, and required no special effort to preserve. All shortcomings, however, are quickly noticed and harshly condemned. Our society is judged not against the experience of human societies in other times and places, but against the Kingdom of Heaven. There is great danger in this, because our society, no less than others now and in the past, requires the allegiance and devotion of its members if it is to defend itself and make progress toward a better life.

Traditional beliefs, however, are not replaced by a different set of values resting on different traditions. Instead, I find a kind of cultural void, an ignorance of the past, a sense of rootlessness and aimlessness, as though not only the students but also the world was born yesterday, a feeling that they are attached to the society in which they live only incidentally and accidentally. Having little or no sense of the human experience through the ages, of what has been tried, of what has succeeded and what has failed, of what is the price of cherishing some values as opposed to others, or of how values relate to one another, they leap from acting as though anything is possible, without cost, to despairing that nothing is possible. They are inclined to see other people’s values as mere prejudices, one no better than another, while viewing their own as entirely valid, for they see themselves as autonomous entities entitled to be free from interference by society and from obligation to it.

Because of the cultural vacuum in their earlier education and because of the informal education they receive from the communications media, which both shape and reflect the larger society, today’s liberal arts students come to college, it seems to me, bearing a sort of relativism verging on nihilism, a kind of individualism that is really isolation from community. The education they receive in college these days, I believe, is more likely to reinforce this condition than to change it. In this way, too, it fails in its liberating function, in its responsibility to shape free men and women. Earlier generations who came to college with traditional beliefs rooted in the past had them challenged by hard questioning and the requirement to consider alternatives and were thereby unnerved, and thereby liberated, by the need to make reasoned choices. The students of today and tomorrow deserve the same opportunity. They, too, must be freed from the tyranny that comes from the accident of being born at a particular time in a particular place, but that liberation
can only come from a return to the belief that we may have something to learn from the past. The challenge to the relativism, nihilism, and privatism of the present can best be presented by a careful and respectful examination of earlier ideas, ideas that have not been rejected by the current generation but are simply unknown to them. When they have been allowed to consider the alternatives, they, too, can enjoy the freedom of making an informed and reasoned choice.

The liberal education needed for the students of today and tomorrow, I suggest, should include a common core of studies for all its students. That would have many advantages, for it would create an intellectual communion among students and teachers that does not now exist and would encourage the idea that learning and knowledge are good things in themselves. It would also affirm that some questions are of fundamental importance to everyone, regardless of his origins and personal plans, that we must all think about our values, responsibilities, and our relationships with one another and with the society in which we live. The core I would propose would include the study of the literature, philosophy, and history (in which I include the history of the arts and sciences) of our culture from its origins. It would be a study that tries to meet the past on its own terms, examining it critically but also respectfully, always keeping alive the possibility that the past may contain wisdom that can be useful to us today. It would be a study that was consciously and deliberately moral and civic in its purposes, eager to examine the values discussed, private and public, personal and political. Such an education would show the modern student times and worlds where the common understanding was quite different from his own—where it was believed that man has capacities and a nature that are different from those of the other animals, that his nature is gregarious and that his flourishing requires an ordered beneficent society, that his nature can reach its highest perfection only by living a good life in a well-ordered society. It would reveal that a good society requires citizens who understand and share its values, which includes examining it and them critically, and accept their own connection with it and dependence on it, that there must be mutual respect among citizens and common effort by them both for their own flourishing and for its survival. Students enjoying such an education would encounter the idea that freedom is essential to the good and happy life of human beings but that freedom cannot exist without good laws and respect for them.

Aristotle rightly observed that, in matters other than scientific, people learn best not by precept but by example. Let me conclude, therefore, by making it clear that the colleges who claim to offer a liberal education today and tomorrow must make their commitment to freedom clear by their actions. To a university, even more than to other institutions in a free society, the right of free speech, the free exchange of ideas, the presentation of a variety of opinions, especially of unpopular points of view, the freedom to move about and make use of public facilities without interference, are vital. Discussion, argument, and persuasion are the devices appropriate to the life of the mind, not selective exclusion, suppression, obstruction, and intimidation. Yet in my time our colleges and universities have often seen speakers shouted down or prevented from speaking, buildings forcibly occupied and access to them denied, different modes of intimidation employed with much success. Most of the time the perpetrators have gone unpunished in any significant
way. These assaults typically have come from just one section of opinion, and they have been very successful. Over the years few advocates of views that challenge the campus consensus have been invited, and fewer still, sometimes victims of such behavior, have come. Colleges and universities that permit such attacks on freedom and take no firm and effective action to deter and punish those who carry them out sabotage the most basic educational freedoms. Yet to defend those freedoms is the first obligation of anyone who claims to engage in liberal education.

Ever less can students benefit from different opinions and approaches offered by their teachers, for faculty members with atypical views grow ever rarer on the campus. For some years now I have been asking students to name professors who seem not to share the views common among the faculty. There are some seven hundred members of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, but the largest number ever named in these inquiries was ten to fifteen. This year the highest number I heard came to three. This has no small significance for the chance at a liberal education, for the opportunity not only to put uncomfortable questions to the teacher, but also to challenge him on the authority of one of his peers is vital to that end. That is how things were early in my career. In the critical fields of history and government there were a few teachers who did not conform to the standard opinions, but they had a great effect, for the students regarded them so well as teachers that they filled their classes in great numbers and challenged other teachers with their ideas.

Once, my late student and friend Alvin Bernstein was teaching a course in the history of Western civilization the same semester that Allan Bloom was teaching his famous course in political philosophy. Al was discussing Plato’s Republic when the subject of some of Socrates’ less pleasant recommendations came to hand. A student objected that Al’s presentation was incorrect, that Plato did not mean for these to be taken at face value, that there was a deeper, ironical, in fact opposite meaning to the dialogue that was not for the ordinary reader but for the more intelligent and worthy people. Al asked, “Who told you that?” “Professor Bloom,” the student answered. “Ah,” said Al without missing a beat. “That is what he told you, but his deeper ironic meaning is not for the ordinary reader but for the more intelligent and worthy people.”

Alas, few faculties have great teachers like Bernstein or Bloom in any number, but colleges must work hard to acquire and keep such talented teachers with such diverse opinions if there is to be any hope for a truly liberal education.

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