CHAPTER FIVE

Liberalism against Liberal Arts

Before the advent of liberalism, culture was the most pervasive human technology and the fundamental locus of education. It was the comprehensive shaping force of the person who took part in, and would in turn pass on, the deepest commitments of a civilization. As the word itself intimates, a culture cultivates; it is the soil in which the human person grows and—if it is a good culture—flourishes.

But if liberalism ultimately replaces all forms of culture with a pervasive anticulture, then it must undermine education as well. In particular, it must undermine liberal education, the education that was understood as the main means of educating free persons by means of deep engagement with the fruits of long cultural inheritance, particularly the great texts of antiquity and the long Christian tradition. To the extent that a fully realized liberalism undermines culture and cultivation into liberty as a form of self-governance, an education for

a free people is displaced by an education that makes liberal individuals servants to the end of untutored appetite, restlessness, and technical mastery of the natural world. Liberal education is replaced with servile education.

Liberalism undermines liberal education in the first instance by detaching the educational enterprise itself from culture and making it an engine of anticulture. Education must be insulated from the shaping force of culture as the exercise of living within nature and a tradition, instead stripped bare of any cultural specificity in the name of a cultureless multiculturalism, an environmentalism barren of a formative encounter with nature, and a monolithic and homogenous "diversity." Its claims to further multiculturalism only distract from its pervasive anticultural and homogenizing impetus.

Liberalism further undermines education by replacing a definition of liberty as an education in self-government with liberty as autonomy and the absence of constraint. Ultimately it destroys liberal education, since it begins with the assumption that we are born free, rather than that we must learn to become free. Under liberalism, the liberal arts are instruments of personal liberation, an end that is consistently pursued in the humanities, in the scientific and mathematical disciplines (STEM), and in economics and business. In the humanities, liberatory movements based on claims of identity regard the past as a repository of oppression, and hence displace the legitimacy of the humanities as a source of education. Meanwhile, the subjects that advance the practical and effectual experience of autonomy—STEM, economics, and business—come to be regarded as the sole subjects of justified study. The classical understanding of liberal arts as aimed at

educating the free human being is displaced by emphasis upon the arts of the private person. An education fitting for a *res publica* is replaced with an education suited for a *res idiotica*—in the Greek, a "private" and isolated person. The purported difference between left and right disappears as both concur that the sole legitimate end of education is the advance of power through the displacement of the liberal arts.

LIBERALISM'S ATTACK ON LIBERAL ARTS

The phrase "liberal arts" contains the same root as the word "liberty." The liberal arts have their origins in a premodern world, hence are rooted in a premodern understanding of liberty. We who are the heirs of the liberal tradition are conditioned to believe in a definition of liberty that equates with the absence of external constraint. The social contract theories of thinkers like Hobbes and Locke, who defined the natural condition of human beings as one of prepolitical liberty, tell us that we begin as creatures who are free, and we submit to the external and artificial contrivance of law only in order to achieve a measure of security and social peace. In Locke's understanding, we submit to law in order to "secure" our liberty and "dispose of [our] possessions or persons as [we] see fit."

The liberal arts precede this understanding of liberty. They reflect, instead, a premodern understanding—one found in the teachings of such authors as Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, and in the biblical and Christian traditions, articulated not only in the Bible but in the works of Augustine, Aquinas, Dante, More, and Milton. It is no coincidence that at the heart of the liberal arts tradition was an emphasis on classical

and Christian texts by these authors. For all their many differences, they all agree that liberty is not a condition into which we are naturally born but one we achieve through habituation, training, and education—particularly the discipline of self-command. It is the result of a long process of learning. Liberty is the learned capacity to govern oneself using the higher faculties of reason and spirit through the cultivation of virtue. The condition of doing as one wants is defined in this premodern view as one of slavery, in which we are driven by our basest appetites to act against our better nature. It was the central aim of the liberal arts to cultivate the free person and the free citizen, in accordance with this understanding of liberty. The liberal arts *made* us free.

For many years, this conception of knowledge lay at the heart of liberal education. It derived its authority from the faith traditions and cultural practices that one generation sought to pass on to the next. One sees it today on most campuses as a palimpsest, a medieval vellum whose old writing was erased to make room for new writing, but from which a trained eye can still read the ancient teaching. In the gothic buildings, the name "professor," "dean," and "provost," the flowing robes that are ceremonially donned once or twice a year—these and some other presences are fragments of an older tradition, once the animating spirit of these institutions, now mostly dead on most campuses.

One sees this older tradition—evidence of this palimpsest—perhaps most vividly in the aspirational mottos and symbolic seals that educational institutions adopted as goals for themselves and their students. One representative motto is that of Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, which was founded as

American University in 1804, one of the first universities in what was then the unsettled West. Its original motto is still found on the university seal: *Religio, Doctrina, Civilitas, prae omnibus Virtus:* Religion, true learning, civility; above all, virtue. On the Class Gateway on one of the main approaches to campus is inscribed a sentence taken verbatim from the Northwest Ordinance of 1787: "Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged." These sentiments guided the founding of the nation's public universities, which, in addition to contributing to the advance of science and practical knowledge, were above all charged with fostering virtue and morality.

Another public university, the University of Texas at Austin, has emblazoned on its seal the motto *Disciplina Praesidium Civitate*, which is translated as "A cultivated mind is the guardian genius of democracy." These words are drawn from a statement by Texas's second president, Mirabeau Lamar: "A cultivated mind is the guardian genius of democracy and, while guided and controlled by virtue, the noblest attribute of man. It is the only dictator that freemen acknowledge and the only security that freemen desire." This fuller statement, with its stress on the relationship of virtue, authority, and liberty, and with the overtones in the word *disciplina* not only of "cultivation" but of discipline, points to the conception of liberty as the achievement of hard-won self-control through the discipline of virtue. The image on the seal includes an open book on the shield's upper field, showing the means by which this discipline of liberty is to be won: through education in the wisdom, the lessons, and the cautions of the past. The aim of

such an education is not "critical thinking" but the achievement of liberty governed by the discipline of virtue.

As these mottos attest, the older tradition sought to foster an ethic of restraint. It recognized that humankind was singular among the creatures in its capacity to choose among numerous options, and so in its need for guidance in that condition of liberty. This liberty, the ancients understood, was subject to misuse and excess: the oldest stories in our tradition, including the story of humankind's fall from Eden, told of the human propensity to use freedom badly. The goal of understanding ourselves was to understand how to use our liberty well, especially how to govern appetites that seemed inherently insatiable. At the heart of the liberal arts in this older tradition was an education in what it meant to be human, above all how to achieve freedom, not only from external restraint but from the tyranny of internal appetite and desire. The "older science" sought to encourage the hard and difficult task of negotiating what was permitted and what was forbidden, what constituted the highest and best use of our freedom, and what actions were wrong. Each new generation was encouraged to consult the great works of our tradition, the epics, the great tragedies and comedies, the reflections of philosophers and theologians, the revealed word of God, the countless books that sought to teach us how to use our liberty well. To be free—*liberal*—was an *art*, something learned not by nature or instinct but by refinement and education. And the soul of the liberal arts was the humanities, education in how to be a human being.

The collapse of the liberal arts in this nation follows closely upon the redefinition of liberty, away from its ancient

and Christian understanding of self-rule and disciplined self-command, in favor of an understanding of liberty as the absence of restraints upon one's desires. If the purpose of the liberal arts was to seek an instruction in self-rule, then its teaching no longer aligns with the contemporary ends of education. Long-standing requirements to learn ancient languages in order to read the classical texts, or to require an intimate familiarity with the Bible and scriptural interpretation, were displaced by a marketplace of studies driven by individual taste and preference. Above all, the liberal arts are increasingly replaced by "STEM," which combines a remnant of the ancient liberal arts—science and mathematics—with their applied forms, technology and engineering, alongside increasing demands for preparation for careers in business and finance.

The American university slowly changed from the teaching of this older science to a teaching of the new. In the nineteenth century, a growing number of universities were established or began to emulate the example of the German universities, dividing themselves into specialized disciplines and placing a new stress upon the education of graduate students—a training in expert knowledge—and placed a new priority upon discovery of new knowledge. Slowly the religious underpinnings of the university were discarded and discontinued; while the humanities continued to remain at the heart of the liberal arts education, they were no longer guided by a comprehensive vision afforded by the religious traditions whose vision and creed had provided the organizing principle for the efforts of the university. In the middle part of the twentieth century, renewed emphasis upon scientific training

and technological innovation—spurred especially by government investment in the "useful arts and sciences"—further reoriented many of the priorities of the university system.

Liberal education came to be seen as irrelevant for the pursuit of modern liberty, particularly as understood as that liberty secured by military power, science, and technology, and the expansion of capitalist markets to every corner of the globe. The idea of the university was passing out of existence, declared the chancellor of the University of California, Clark Kerr, in his 1963 Godkin Lectures, published later as *The Uses of the University*. In place of a form of education that was guided by a teleological or religious vision of what constituted an education of the best human being, he announced the inevitable rise of the multiversity, a massive organization that would be driven above all by the radical separations of the endeavors of the various members of the university aimed at providing useful knowledge to the military and industrial demands of the nation. He declared that "the multiversity was central to the further industrialization of the nation, to spectacular increases in productivity with affluence following, to the substantial extension of human life, and to worldwide military and scientific supremacy."[1] The aim of the new "multiversity" was to advance the Baconian project of human mastery over the world.

Following upon this redefinition of the aims of the university, the incentives and motivations of the faculty were brought increasingly into accord with new science's imperative to create new knowledge: faculty training would emphasize the creation of original work, and tenure would be achieved through the publication of a corpus of such work

and the approval of far-flung experts in a faculty member's field who would attest to the originality and productivity of the work. A market in faculty hiring and recruitment was born. Faculty ceased to be committed to particular institutions, their missions, and even their students, and instead increasingly understood themselves to be members of a profession. Moral formation ceased to be a relevant criterion in one's job description; such concerns were not only irrelevant to professional success but opposed to modern notions of liberty.

The university structure was reoriented to stress innovation and the creation of "new knowledge." The guiding imperative of education became progress, not an education in liberty derived from a deep engagement with the past. One can valuably contrast the commitments of the seal designed at the time of the founding of the University of Texas with the mission statement devised in more recent years and found on the main web portal of the university.[2] Articulated beneath a picture of the old seal—following the obligatory verbiage about a dedication to "excellence" in education—one finds a statement about the contemporary purpose. The current mission of the university is "the advancement of society through research, creative activity, scholarly inquiry and the development of new knowledge." The stress in this updated mission statement is upon the research and scientific mission of the university, notably the aim of creating "new knowledge," not "the cultivated mind that is guided by virtue." One searches in vain for a modern rearticulation of the sentiments of the older motto; one finds, rather than the inculcation of virtue, only the emphasis upon research in the service of progress—

particularly that progress that contributes to that centuries-old ambition to subject nature to human will. This change of emphasis is to be found in the updated mission statement of nearly every university in America.

As a practical effect, the insistence by students no longer to be required to take a sequential education in the liberal arts, in the belief that they should sooner begin study of something "practical," aligns perfectly with the interest of faculty to focus on the "creation of new knowledge" and the concomitant focus on research and graduate students. Students and faculty alike mutually abandon a focus on the liberal arts, essentially out of the same imperative: service to the conception of freedom at the heart of the liberal order. Amid their freedom, students increasingly feel that they have no choice but to pursue the most practical major, eschewing subjects to which native curiosity might attract them in obeisance to the demands of the market. Unsurprisingly, the number of majors in the humanities continues to decline precipitously, and a growing number of schools are eliminating disciplines that are no longer attractive within the university marketplace.

Those best positioned to defend the role of the humanities at the heart of the liberal arts—members of the professoriate—on the one hand lament this collapse but blame it on administrators and "neoliberalism." They fail to see how the treatment of the humanities is more deeply a reflection of the liberal order than a stance of resistance. The professoriate in the liberal arts has failed to contest, let alone resist, the dominant liberal trends because of a pervasive incapacity to correctly diagnose the source of the forces arrayed against the liberal arts.

LA TRAHISON DES HUMANISTES

Humanities and more humanistic social science faculty—predominantly progressive—sought instead to conform the liberal arts to dominant liberal subcurrents, mainly by turning against the very thing they studied, the "great books," and calling for a stance of progressive interrogation of the object being studied. Conservative faculty largely opposed the campus left by demanding devotion to the study of the Great Books without recognizing that many of these books were the source of the very forces displacing the study of old books. Both sides allowed the liberal transformation of the academy to proceed unopposed.

The left's answer was unexamined acquiescence. In response to these tectonic shifts, those who labored in the humanities began to question their place within the university. Their practitioners still studied the great texts, but the reason for doing so was increasingly in doubt.[3] Did it make sense any longer to teach young people the challenging lessons of how to use freedom well, when the scientific world was soon to make those lessons unnecessary? Could an approach based on culture and tradition remain relevant in an age that valued, above all, innovation and progress? How could the humanities prove their worth in the eyes of administrators and the broader world?

These doubts within the humanities were a fertile seedbed for self-destructive tendencies. Inspired by Heideggerian theories that placed primacy on the liberation of the will, first poststructuralism and then postmodernism took root. These and other approaches, while apparently hostile to

the rationalist claims of the sciences, were embraced out of the need to conform to the academic demands, set by the natural sciences, for "progressive" knowledge. Faculty could demonstrate their progressiveness by showing the backwardness of the texts; they could "create knowledge" by showing their superiority to the authors they studied; they could display their antitraditionalism by attacking the very books that were the basis of their discipline. Philosophies that preached "the hermeneutics of suspicion," that aimed to expose the way texts were deeply informed by inegalitarian prejudices, and that even questioned the idea that texts contained a "teaching" as intended by the author, offered the humanities the possibility of proving themselves relevant in the terms set by the modern scientific approach.[4] By adopting a jargon comprehensible only to "experts," they could emulate the scientific priesthood, even if by doing so they betrayed the humanities' original mandate to guide students through their cultural inheritance. Professors in the humanities showed their worth by destroying the thing they studied.[5]

In an effort to keep pace with their counterparts in STEM disciplines, the humanities became the most conspicuously liberative of the disciplines, even challenging (albeit fecklessly) the legitimacy of the scientific enterprise. Natural conditions—such as those inescapably linked to the biological facts of human sexuality—came to be regarded as "socially constructed." Nature was no longer a standard in any sense, since it was now manipulable. Why accept any of the facts of biology when those "facts" could be altered, when identity itself is a matter of choice? If humans had any kind of "nature," then the sole permanent feature that seemed acceptable

was the centrality of will—the raw assertion of power over restraints or limits, and the endless possibilities of self-creation.

Ironically, while postmodernism has posed itself as the great opponent of rationalist scientism, it shares the same basic impulse: both rose to dominance in the university in conformity with the modern definition of freedom. In the humanities, this belief today takes the form of radical emancipatory theory focused on destroying all forms of hierarchy, tradition, and authority, liberating the individual through the tools of research and progress. A special focus of the modern academy is sexual autonomy, a pursuit that reveals how closely it ultimately sides with a scientific project aimed at mastering all aspects of nature, including human reproduction.[6] The humanities and social sciences also focus on identity politics and redressing past injustices to specific groups, under the "multicultural" and "diversity" banners that ironically contribute to a campus monoculture. The groups that are deemed worthy of strenuous efforts to redress grievances are identified for features relating to their bodies—race, gender, sexual identity—while "communities of work and culture," including cohesive ethnic and class groupings, receive scant attention. Thus while students' groups grounded in racial or sexual identity demand justice so that they can fully join modern liberal society, cohesive ethnic groups resistant to liberal expressive individualism like Kurds or Hmong, persecuted religious minorities such as Copts, nonurban nonelites such as leaders in the 4-H, and the rural poor can expect little attention from today's campus liberals.[7]

As Wilson Carey McWilliams has noted,

> Notably, the groups that [liberal reformers] recognize are all defined by biology. In liberal theory, where our "nature" means our bodies, these are "natural" groups opposed to "artificial" bonds like communities of work and culture. This does not mean that liberalism values these "natural" groups. Quite the contrary: since liberal political society reflects the effort to overcome or master nature, liberalism argues that "merely natural" differences ought not to be held against us. We ought not to be held back by qualities we did not choose and that do not reflect our individual efforts and abilities. [Reformers] recognize women, racial minorities, and the young only in order to free individuals from "suspect classifications."
>
> Class and culture are different. People are part of ethnic communities or the working class because they chose not to pursue individual success and assimilation into the dominant, middle-class culture, or because they were unable to succeed. Liberal theory values individuals who go their own way, and by the same token, it esteems those who succeed in that quest more highly than individuals who do not. Ethnicity and class, consequently, are marks of shame in liberal theory, and whatever discrimination people suffer is, in some sense, their "own fault." We may feel compassion for the failures, but they have no just cause for equal representation, unlike individuals who suffer discrimination for "no fault of their own."[8]

Yet while contemporary emphases in the humanities are consistent with the aspiration for autonomy that underlies the modern scientific venture, this conformity has not lent the humanities much long-term viability. In the absence of strongly articulated grounds for studying the liberal arts, in distinction to the modern project of autonomy and mastery, students and administrators are voting with their feet and pocketbooks to support the areas that show more promise for mastering nature. It is a sign of the success of the vision of

autonomy advanced by the main players in today's humanities that their disciplines are shrinking and even disappearing, while STEM and economic pursuits grow. In the absence of a persuasive counternarrative, students, parents, and administrators understand that the best route to achieving the liberal conception of freedom is not in the humanities but elsewhere.

Today the liberal arts have exceedingly few defenders. The children of the left cultural warriors of the 1980s are no longer concerned with a more representative and inclusive canon. They are more interested in advancing the cause of egalitarian autonomy, now arrayed against the older liberal norms of academic freedom and free speech in the name of what some call "academic justice" and greater campus representation. While a rallying point is the cry for greater diversity, the ongoing project of "diversification" in fact creates greater ideological homogeneity on nearly every campus. Under the guise of differences in race, an exploding number of genders, and a variety of sexual orientations, the only substantive worldview advanced is that of advanced liberalism: the ascent of the autonomous individual backed by the power and support of the state and its growing control over institutions, including schools and universities.

The children of the right's cultural warriors have also largely abandoned interest in the role of formative books as the central contribution for cultivating self-government. Instead, today's "conservatives" are more likely to dismiss the role of the liberal arts not only as a lost cause, but not even worth the fight anymore.[9] Instead, reflecting priorities of the modern marketplace, they are more inclined to call for greater emphasis on STEM and economic fields—those fields that

have gained prominence because of the victory of ideas in many of the "Great Books" that successfully proposed that old books might no longer be studied. Conservative political leaders like Governor Scott Walker of Wisconsin or Senator Marco Rubio of Florida disdain the liberal arts for not leading to high-paying jobs—and find unexpected support from President Obama, who criticized art history on the same grounds.

LIBERAL ARTS AGAINST LIBERALISM?

Contemporary circumstances have only accelerated the demise of the liberal arts. In the absence of forceful articulations of the reason for their existence on today's campuses, a combination of demands for "usefulness" and "relevance," along with the reality of shrinking budgets, is going to make the humanities increasingly a smaller part of the university. They will persist in some form as a "boutique" showcase, an ornament that indicates respect for high learning, but the trajectory of the humanities continues to be toward a smaller role in the modern university.

While few of today's professors of the humanities are able to articulate grounds for protest, I would think the humanities of old would be able to muster a powerful argument against this tendency. Its warning would be simple, recalling its oldest lessons: at the end of the path of liberation lies enslavement. Such liberation from all obstacles is finally illusory, for two simple reasons: human appetite is insatiable and the world is limited. For both of these reasons, we cannot be truly free in the modern sense. We can never attain satiation, and will be eternally driven by our desires rather than satisfied by their

attainment. And in our pursuit of the satisfaction of our limitless desires, we will very quickly exhaust the planet. Our destiny, should we enter fully down this path toward our complete liberation, is one in which we will be more governed by necessity than ever before. We will be governed not by our own capacity for self-rule but rather by circumstance, particularly the circumstances resulting from scarcity, devastation, and chaos.

Our commitment to a future of liberation from nature and necessity is illusory—it is the faith-based philosophy of our time. Religion is often accused of being incapable of drawing the right conclusions from evidence, but it seems to me that we have in plain view the greatest leap of faith in our time—namely, the response of the leadership of our nation and our institutions of higher learning to this very economic crisis that otherwise is used to justify a further displacing of the liberal arts in the name of economic viability. The crisis was itself precipitated by inattentiveness to the lessons of the traditional liberal arts, which in turn is today invoked as reason for its further neglect. The economic crisis, as everyone now knows, was the result of the idea that one could consume without limits, that a new kind of economics, combined with a liberatory politics, now allowed us to live beyond our means. The wanting of something was warrant for the taking of the thing. Our appetite justified consumption. Our want was sufficient for our satiation. The result was not merely literal obesity but moral obesity—a lack of self-governance of our appetites ultimately forced us on a starvation diet.

At our institutions of higher learning, a multitude of panels and conferences were organized on the economic crisis, bemoaning such things as the absence of oversight, lax regulatory

regime, failures of public and private entities to exercise diligence in dispensing credit or expanding complex financial products. Yet one searches in vain for a university president or college leader—especially at the elite echelon—acknowledging that there was deep culpability on the part of their own institutions for our failure and our students' as well. After all, it was the leading graduates of the elite institutions of the nation who occupied places of esteem in top financial and political institutions throughout the land who were responsible for precipitating the economic crisis. Graduates of elite institutions occupied places of power and influence in the national economic order. Leaders of such educational institutions readily take credit for Rhodes and Fulbright scholars. What of those graduates who helped foster an environment of avarice and schemes of the get-rich-quick? Are we so assured that they did not learn exceedingly well the lessons that they learned in college?

If a renaissance is to come, it must be from a reconstituted education in the liberal arts. While a great patchwork of liberal arts colleges remains, most liberal arts institutions have been deeply shaped by presuppositions of the "new science." Hiring and promotion are made increasingly in accordance with demands of research productivity. Increasingly faculty members have been overwhelmingly trained at leading research institutions at which priorities of that new science dominate—priorities that many professors have internalized, even if those priorities do not mesh well in the liberal arts settings they occupy. As a result, many of these institutions incoherently aspire to elite status by aping the research universities, with many even going so far as to change their names from "College" to "University."[10]

Yet their reconstitution is not wholly out of reach. As "palimpsests," the older traditions persist. When we think of "liberal arts" more concretely, we rightly picture a numerous variety of institutions, most (at least once) religiously affiliated and variously situated. Most were formed with some relationship to the communities in which they were formed—whether their religious traditions, attention to the sorts of career prospects that the local economy would sustain, close connection to the "elders" of the locality, or strong identification with place and the likelihood of a student body drawn from nearby. Most sought a liberal education *not* that fully liberated its students from place and the "ancestral" but that in fact educated them deeply in the tradition from which they came, deepening their knowledge of the sources of their beliefs, confirming—not confronting—their faith, and seeking to return them to the communities from which they were drawn, where it was expected they would contribute to its future well-being and continuity.

Above all, liberal education did not so much "liberate" students from the limits of their backgrounds as it reinforced a basic teaching embedded deeply within its own cultural tradition, namely an education in limits. Often this conception of limits—conceived most often as based in morality or virtue—was drawn from the religious traditions of the particular institution. Most classical liberal arts institutions founded within a religious tradition required not only knowledge of the great texts of the tradition—including and especially the Bible—but corresponding behavior that constituted a kind of "habituation" in the virtues learned in the classroom. Compulsory attendance at chapel or Mass, parietal rules, adult-supervised extracurricular activities, and required courses in

moral philosophy (often taught by the president of the college) sought to integrate the humanistic and religious studies of the classroom with the daily lives of the students.

Based upon a classical or Christian understanding of liberty, this form of education was undertaken with an aim to pointing to our dependence—not our autonomy—and the need for self-governance. As the essayist and farmer Wendell Berry has written, awareness of fundamental constraints of human action and behavior

> is not the condemnation that it may seem. On the contrary, it returns us to our real condition and to our human heritage, from which our self-definition as limitless animals has for too long cut us off. Every cultural and religious tradition that I know about, while fully acknowledging our animal nature, defines us specifically as *humans*—that is, as animals (if that word still applies) capable of living within natural limits but also within cultural limits, self-imposed. As earthly creatures, we live, because we must, within natural limits, which we may describe by such names as "earth" or "ecosystem" or "watershed" or "place." But as humans we may elect to respond to this necessary placement by the self-restraints implied by neighborliness, stewardship, thrift, temperance, generosity, care, kindness, loyalty, and love.[11]

An education based in a set of cultural conditions takes its lead from nature and works alongside it, through such practices as agriculture, craftsmanship, worship, story, memory, and tradition. It does not, in the model of the new science, seek nature's dominion or capitulation. A fundamental responsibility of education, then, is the transmission of culture—not its rejection or transcendence. A proper regard for and transmission of culture seeks to prevent the willful and

aggressive exploitation of nature and Gnostic condescension toward culture, just as it cautions against the sort of roving and placeless form of deracinated philosophy of the sort recommended by an education in "critical thinking" and implicitly commended by our encouragement of our students to define success only by achieving a condition of placeless itinerancy demanded by our global economic system.

Finally, understood as a training in limits and care for the world and particular places and people, a liberal education—properly understood—is not merely a form of liberation from "the ancestral" or nature but an education in the limits that each imposes upon us necessarily to live in ways that do not tempt us to Promethean forms of individual or generational self-aggrandizement or the abusive effort to liberate ourselves from the limits and sanctions of nature. Particularly in an age during which we are becoming all too familiar with the consequences of living solely in and for the present and disconnected from "ancestral" concerns for living within our means—whether financially or environmentally—we would be well served to move beyond the extreme presentism of the contemporary era. We should instead seek a reinvigoration of an idea of liberal education in which we understand liberty to be the condition in which we come to terms with, and accept, the limits and constraints that nature and culture rightfully exert. As commended by ancient and religious traditions alike, liberty is not liberation from constraint but rather our capacity to govern appetite and thus achieve a truer form of liberty—liberty from enslavement to our appetites and avoidance of depletion of the world. In short, needful is the rescue of liberal education from liberalism.

CHAPTER SIX

The New Aristocracy

WHILE both sides in our current anticulture wars advance the liberal project of statist and market deracination and liberationism, achieved through expansion of individual autonomy and the Baconian project of conquering nature, students are wholly shaped to be working pieces within this system of "liberation." Increasingly today's students enter college solely with an aim to its "practical" application, by which is meant its direct relevance to its economic and technical applications, wholly unaware that there is a more capacious way of understanding "practical" to include how one lives as a spouse, parent, neighbor, citizen, and human being.

A two-tier system has arisen in which elite students are culled from every corner of the globe so that they may prepare