

# REVIEWS

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***The Professor and the Profession*, by Robert B. Heilman. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1999, 358 pp., \$39.95 hardbound.**

*Edward Alexander*

If we think of the essay not as enlarged journalistic polemic, but as the graceful movement of a free and capacious mind at play, then Robert Heilman is one of the great living masters of the essayist's art. His voice and language and wisdom are things of power, and they permeate the essays on education and literature and himself that make up this latest collection, which combines essays (mostly recent) reprinted from periodicals with essays published for the first time.

The opening section of *The Professor and the Profession* is called "The Self Displayed," and is made up of four essays largely about the writer himself. He begins with an account of his boyhood as a "pk" (preacher's kid) growing up in Lutheran parsonages, first in Pennsylvania Dutch country and then in Easton. This is followed by two "sports" essays, dealing with personal recollections of his experience of baseball and football. The last essay of this group, "The Rail Way of the World," is probably the greatest ever written on the subject of railroad travel. Heilman is an astute observer of the world around him, setting forth his observations in a lively and humorous prose that is enriched by unremitting awareness of the history and structure of the English language. Moreover, as a narrator of his own experience, he strikes a near-perfect balance between self-criticism and self-respect.

The book's second section moves from the personal to the professional, offering portraits of four of Heilman's colleagues and friends: Eric Voegelin, Robert Penn

Warren, Theodore Roethke (the masterpiece of the quartet), and Malcolm Cowley. Section III and most of Section IV show Heilman still at the top of his form in his long-established role as critic of Shakespeare and of nineteenth- and twentieth-century fiction.

The remainder of the book deals mainly with educational questions that should be of immediate interest to the readers of *Academic Questions*. Heilman, who was born in 1906, reflects on the changes that have overtaken American education since he attended high school in Pennsylvania in the 1920s. His school afforded only three options, "commercial" for those who were going right to work after graduation, and "classical" or "scientific" for those aspiring to college. If you took the classical option, as Heilman did, you had no other choices to make. You had contracted for four years of Latin, four of English, three of French, two of math, and one of science. This, of course, obviated the need for academic counseling, the only instance of which the author can recall was "a warning against the evils of masturbation, which in those pre-Portnoy days was still causing blindness, muscular dystrophy, and premature senility." When he moved on to Lafayette College, Heilman was again denied "choice." Majoring in English meant taking everything the department offered: six one-year courses, which combined to give a coherent and nearly complete picture of English literature.

Far from lamenting that controlled regimen as a relic of the academic dark ages, Heilman uses it to establish the perspective from which he now views the changes of the next half-century and more. "I would not trade those eight years for any other educational track that I have seen in fifty years of college teaching." Those six courses of the old English ma-

major have, of course, now expanded into several hundred unrelated ones and scores of majors. Lurking behind this “wild curricular centrifugality,” in Heilman’s view, is a loss of the old sense of community and the belief that we are members of one another.

Even more egregious than the obsession with “difference” that drives the engine of unfettered curricular “innovation” and electivity is the craving for “relevance” or passionate presentism. Heilman tries to imagine what his own English major would have been like if, eighty years ago, European classics and English literature had been eliminated in favor of the provincialism of the contemporary. Instead of Chaucer and Shakespeare, “we would zealously have studied the fiction of Percy Marks, James Branch Cabell . . . , Ruth Suckow, and Sinclair Lewis . . . . In poetry we would have been ‘with it’ with Stephen Vincent Benet, Witter Bynner . . . , Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Elinor Wylie.” Such lists, he points out, show us that “an exclusive attachment to any present means being trapped in a morgue.” The best-known inhabitants of that tomb of “once-upon-a-time up-to-dateness” were, of course, the students of the 1960s, totally uneducable because they already knew all the answers.

Heilman is far more keen an observer of educational hokum than many other contemporary critics because he writes out of experience (half a century of teaching and 24 years as a department chairman) rather than ideology. And the writing combines hilarity with shrewdness. Take, for example, a few questions from his dream college-board exam:

#2. Do you believe that the twentieth century is morally superior to the nineteenth, i.e., more realistic, more honest, less hypocritical, etc.? (If the answer is “yes,” the applicant will be assigned to remedial section.)

#4. Do you believe that America is a very bad place, and that we must use force to make it like the better countries of the world? (If the answer is “yes,” the applicant is certified for the Jane Fonda Institute of Moral Philosophy.)

#8d. Do the words “enthusiastic,” “caring,” and “concerned” mean anything without modifiers? (If the applicant says they do, he may be recommended to the Experimental College of the Secular Bleeding Heart).

For readers of *Academic Questions* the key essay in the book is “Three Generations of English Studies,” a tour de force that integrates literary history and criticism with moral insight and ripened wisdom in a synthesis that no living literary scholar can match. Heilman describes a pattern for the professional lives of professors of English born between 1900 and 1920, especially those (like himself) who experienced three whole generations of English studies. These people grew up during the reign of the old literary history, spent their middle years coming to terms with the “new criticism,” and their later ones facing the recent wave of literary insurgents calling themselves “theorists.”

Heilman fully experienced the heavily Germanic historical approach at Harvard. Professors there lectured on classical models, rules, sources, influences. If the great mass of historical facts had been delivered before the hour was over, the professor might venture a “non-professional” remark like “I like Ben Jonson. Don’t you?” Heilman himself began to have some doubts about the old historical approach and hoped he was not alone when he found himself feeling that it was hard for grown men at Harvard to take seriously the topics announced for graduate seminars.

The second generation was prepared by the work of the “new humanists”—Irving Babbitt, P. E. More, Norman Foerster—who taught that the history of ideas was a larger, more significant domain than the history of texts. But the new wave was really defined by the “new criticism,” of which Heilman would himself become a skilled major practitioner. The new critics appealed to those who sensed that the old history was indifferent to aesthetic matters such as the relation of form and content, the main interest of John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, and their British counterparts.

Heilman reminds us that these men had themselves been trained in the historical school and were far better grounded in literary history than products of today’s graduate programs; but their question was always “What else is there besides history?” (Heilman himself published in the *Southern Review*, edited by Brooks and Warren, an article arguing for the relevance of historical knowledge to aesthetic judgments.) The new criticism flourished because its chief expositors wrote persuasively and clearly (Tate used to say that critical writing should be as plain as the nose on your face) and convinced young teachers that here was an objective method of distinguishing better and worse in literary works. The new criticism became conspicuous in the late 1930s and remained dominant until the 1970s.

But in the fullness of time—and who better placed than Heilman to view things from that perspective?—the younger converts to the new criticism, “practitioners of small learning and less discipline,” become esoteric, obscure, and stridently antihistorical. In reaction, so Heilman argues, arose the “theorists,” whose dogmas now dominate virtually every major English department. Unlike the late Irv-

ing Howe, who said that his eyes glazed over whenever he tried to penetrate the stupefying opacity of theorist prose, Heilman has forced himself to examine the doings of this third generation. His conclusions, albeit stated with characteristic restraint, are grim:

The repellent vocabulary and style of theorists, who produce quotable passages of marvelous opaqueness and apparent untranslatability . . . , may restrict the boundaries of [their] empire. “Theory,” of course, embraces a congeries of dogmatic identifications and skepticisms of identity. The Marxist, Freudian, and feminist ways of doing things seem to derive literary works from causes that are absolute; you identify the psycho-social or socio-politico-economical forces that generated the work, and you know what the work has to be, however different from this it looked to other generations.

Heilman is particularly incisive about the peculiar mix of dogmatism and skepticism that pervades different modes of “deconstructive” activity.

While skepticism about texts is dogmatic, it rarely includes skepticism about the text that asserts dogmatic skepticism. Skepticism is evidently a faith that deconstructs other faiths. It escapes the self-referentiality that is the fate of all other works.

Heilman understands that, as John Henry Newman once wrote, ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt. Just as students may encounter difficulties in solving a mathematical problem without doubting that it admits of an answer, so literary critics may find that classic works can simultaneously sustain numerous differing interpretations without concluding that there is no such thing as an ideal reading demanded by the work. The health of English studies, in Heilman’s view, de-

depends upon whether we think of the literary work

as a challenging labyrinth or as an inviting trampoline. If the former, we accept its complexities, false leads, and culs-de-sac, but count upon ultimate order and design; if the latter, the work invites us to leap, bounce, and spring in critical virtuosity.

For Heilman, time is the only reliable literary critic, the only begetter of "the canon," even though literary insurgents assume they can alter it by declaring the timely timeless and organizing political caucuses to overthrow the dictates of many generations of readers. Looking back over the changing attitudes to history of the three generations of English professors that have flourished in his lifetime, he offers this concise and elegant encapsulation:

The old historian told how the work came into being . . . ; the new critics tried to define the being it came into; the new historians attributed the whole history to rape; and the new theorist saw the productive forces as linguistic and modal, and the product a mestizo without rights since it was born to serve the critic.

Among the many writers (Elizabeth Bishop, Malcolm Cowley, Richard Eberhart, Vernon Watkins) who were given their first teaching jobs by Heilman was the young Irving Howe. Arriving at the University of Washington in the summer of 1952, Howe might have been expected to gravitate towards his socio-political allies, the numerous (Parringtonian) leftists then in the department. Instead, as he observed in a letter of 1991, he had found himself drawn to Heilman and the school from which Heilman derived because, polemical disputes apart, he found in them a charm,

civility, and largeness of spirit that he had seldom found in the intellectual world since then. The qualities that Howe recognized in 1952 are still brilliantly on display in *The Professor and the Profession*.

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**Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reforms** by Diane Ravitch. New York and London: Simon & Schuster, 2000, 544 pp., \$30.00 hardbound.

*Edwin J. Delattre*

All of us who work to elevate teaching and learning in homes, schools, colleges, and universities have been indebted to Diane Ravitch for a very long time. Her books and articles on the history and the condition of schooling and her exposure and criticism of anti-intellectualism among educationists have left no room to evade or deny the persistence and the urgency of failure in American schooling.

In *Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reforms*, Ravitch's "aim . . . is to trace the origins of America's seemingly permanent debate about school standards, curricula, and methods." Ravitch "recounts the story of unrelenting attacks on the academic mission of schools"—attacks on the "academic curriculum" understood as "the systematic study of language and literature, science and mathematics, history, the arts, and foreign languages." She cautions

readers not to suppose that our current complaints about schooling are unprecedented: “[T]hose who seek the ‘good old days’ will be disappointed, for in fact there never was a Golden Age.”

We can see this last point confirmed in Mary Fisher’s exquisite 1912 book, *A Valiant Woman: A Contribution to the Educational Problem*. There, Fisher quotes her exemplary teacher—the unnamed valiant woman from whom she learned so much, and who believed “that the earliest years of a child’s life require the most careful teaching”:

I feel deeply the present results in the education of the young, but I am not sure that the schools are to blame in the matter. The children have not the right start from the very first in the home. The memory should be strengthened by learning fine poems, and long ones. The young should get a good vocabulary, beautiful thoughts, and a command of language from masterpieces in literature read to them. Instead of that, there is no home reading, or that of a very poor kind, and enough of such to weaken the mind; then, in school, follows the cramming of facts. I have sometimes been in the lower grades of the public schools, and I have pitied the poor children. I felt that if I were obliged to remain there a week, I should turn into one of the wooden benches. I suppose you know how little real mental culture the girls have who are given certificates to teach and begin their work with dear children.<sup>1</sup>

The “valiant woman” would witness this same lack of “real mental culture” in many classrooms today.

In American schooling, history repeats itself. In 1900, Ravitch recounts, “Edward Bok, editor of *The Ladies Home Journal*, mounted a campaign . . . alleging that the mental health of children was being destroyed . . . by a national crime.” The crime was homework. Much influenced by Clark

University President G. Stanley Hall, a leader of the child study movement, who had insisted “it would not be a serious loss, if a child never learned to read” or write, Bok claimed that a student under the age of fifteen should never “be given any home study whatever by his teachers.” Bok opposed “cramming” and saw homework as nothing else.

In 2000, I received an invitation to a symposium at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. The purpose was to discuss a new book by independent teacher trainer Etta Kralovec and a former associate editor of *The Progressive*, John Buell, *The End of Homework: How Homework Disrupts Families, Overburdens Children, and Limits Learning*. A hundred years have passed, and conflation of the distinction between bad homework assignments and homework itself persists.

Ravitch casts the century of failed school reforms as a contest for the future of American schooling between advocates of “education for utility” and proponents of the academic curriculum—“knowledge for general intelligence.” She points to two main sources of assault on the academic curriculum: “business leaders, who wanted economy and efficiency in the schools, and progressive educators in the nation’s new colleges of education who wanted the school curriculum to be more closely aligned to the needs of society in the industrial age . . . . Progressive educators wanted socially efficient schools that would serve society by training students for jobs.” Indeed, “the pedagogical profession arose as a protest against the academic tradition.”

Among the most instructive and powerful dimensions of *Left Back* is Ravitch’s practice of allowing influential figures in the great debate over the proper mission of schooling to speak for themselves. The reader encounters at first hand claims and

arguments made by Charles W. Eliot, Walter Lippmann, Ellwood P. Cubberly, Oscar D. Robertson, G. Stanley Hall, W. E. B. DuBois, William Henry Maxwell, Edward L. Thorndike, David Snedden, William Torrey Harris, William Chandler Bagley, Isaac L. Kandel, Alexander Meiklejohn, and Arthur Bestor. Ravitch reminds us of the positions taken and the influence wielded by figures often neglected in histories of American education.

Ravitch also quotes liberally from John Dewey, not a neglected or forgotten figure certainly, but one often misread or not read at all, even by those who claim to be his followers. As Ravitch points out, the practice of progressive education was often at odds with Dewey's ideas, and Dewey himself was sharply critical of shallow forms of progressive education. It is "progressivism as a many-sided movement" that Ravitch chronicles and criticizes, not the "ideal version" of progressivism which "had not been institutionalized in American public schools." Missing, though, from *Left Back* is a clear account of how the "ideal version" differed from the prevailing practices of progressive education. The Dewey quotations are generally from his more popular writings, rather than from his most important philosophical writings on education.

The utilitarian form of progressivism that Ravitch emphasizes and describes was fundamentally anti-intellectual: a doctrine of child-centered education driven by a diminished conception of human capacity, xenophobia and fear of a rising immigrant population, the fatalism of a putative science of education and mental testing for assigning students to differentiated curriculum tracks, and hubris among educationists in the presumption of both the ability and the right to foretell the destiny of individual children (especially mi-

nority and low-income children) as well as the authority to use schools for indoctrination so as to reconstruct society itself.

Educationist "experts" such as Hall, Thorndike, and Snedden "cleared the way for two of the worst manifestations of anti-intellectualism." Rejection of the academic curriculum as the best means of providing equal educational opportunity for all children deprived education of its "historic rationale" so that "the definition of education itself was up for grabs, available for capture by any idea, fad, or movement that was advanced by pedagogical experts, popular sentiment, or employers." Furthermore, "the notion that education should be determined by the child's future occupation turned democratic rhetoric upside down . . . [I]n the new way of thinking, equal opportunity meant that a banker's children would get a very different education from a coal miner's children, and all would be fitted to occupy the status of their parents."

Against utilitarian progressivism has stood the academic curriculum with its "simile of the educational ladder with its foot in the gutter and its top in the university."<sup>2</sup> By offering one academic curriculum to all students, "schools were expected to make social equality a reality by giving students an equal chance to develop their mental powers to the fullest."

Among the education "professionals," none stood more resolutely in favor of the academic curriculum than William C. Bagley. Appointed to the faculty of Teachers College in 1918, after serving as a school teacher and district superintendent, Bagley rejected the innovations of the "differentiated curriculum." With a combination of time-tested wisdom and great foresight, Bagley tried to put "a competent and cultured teacher into every American classroom." He predicted that "if that should ever happen, it would do

more for American education than all the other innovations lumped together.”

Bagley was right then, and his words remain true today. Unfortunately, during the past hundred years too few educationists have understood what a “truly competent and cultured” person—and therefore a truly competent and cultured teacher—is. No one of any sense believes that knowledge of “language and literature, science and mathematics, history, the arts, and foreign languages” is sufficient to make anyone a good teacher. Likewise, no one can reasonably believe that a teacher in a school with any semblance of an academic mission can possibly do without it.

Unfortunately, while G. Stanley Hall held center stage in declaring that illiteracy does not matter and that “even ignorance may be a wholesome poultice for weakly souls,” educationists completely neglected Abraham Lincoln’s great lecture of 1858-59, “Discoveries and Inventions.” In it, Lincoln had argued that the greatest of all inventions is the printing press. Wide availability of books, and the ability to read them, he argued, would free the public from the “false and under estimate” of themselves in which they had been shackled by illiteracy and ignorance of their own possibilities. Lincoln lamented that the full benefit of books could not yet be realized, because there were not enough qualified teachers of reading. Today, we still have too few such teachers, while “Discoveries and Inventions” goes unread in schools of education.

By the middle of the twentieth century, educationists had undermined the idea of a competent and cultured teacher by popularizing the thoroughly misguided idea of “child-centered” education, expressed, as Ravitch observes, in the cliché, “We teach children, not subject matter.” The cliché echoes among educationists today. Recently, I interviewed a candidate

for the superintendency of an urban school system who described himself as child-centered. I asked him what he was not centered on. He replied, “The convenience of adults.”

Too many educationists resemble him. They do not make clear that successful teaching is always a triadic relation, as the philosopher John Passmore explains, including student, teacher, and subject matter to be taught and learned: “All teaching is pupil-centred in the sense that its object is not merely to expound a subject but to help somebody learn something . . . . But at the same time, the teacher is trying to teach pupils *something*, and it is by no means unimportant what that something is . . . . [The teacher] has to teach *both* pupils *and* subjects.”<sup>3</sup>

Academic traditionalists in education have also been guilty of neglecting the triadism of sound instruction. Being “subject-matter” centered without regard to one’s students, and being “teacher-centered” without regard to the repertoire of artistry a teacher needs in order to teach heterogeneous students effectively have routinely been fatal to genuine educational opportunity.

Where instruction is properly conceived, it enables the student to learn vicariously—whether from reading, writing about, and discussing history, biography, and literature; witnessing and thereby learning to perform scientific experiments; or watching an exemplary craftsman make a piece of furniture. Misconceived “child-centered” education destroys vicarious learning by condemning children to their own devices and refusing to provide direct instruction. Misconceived “subject-matter-centered” education obstructs vicarious learning by pedantry that cannot bring literature or mathematics or craftsmanship to life in the presence of students.

Ravitch knows that there is plenty of blame to go around for the failures of education reform in the past hundred years. "At their extreme," both progressive education and traditional education

can be faulted, the one for demeaning intellectual and academic standards, the other for caring more about subject matter than children. But at their best, both philosophies have made valuable and complementary contributions to American education. Progressive education can take credit for emphasizing students' motivation and understanding and making the school responsible for the health and general welfare of children. Traditionalists such as Harris, Bagley, and [E. D.] Hirsch must be credited for insisting upon the democratic responsibility of the school to promote the intellectual growth of all children. At their best, these traditions overlap and the differences between them become blurred because thoughtful educators, regardless of label, seek to develop their students' intellect and character.

It seems to me that for this conclusion to be entirely plausible, *Left Back* would have to present a more considered case for progressivism "at its best" in American education during the past hundred years. Ravitch does describe a few progressive schools that succeeded admirably, but absent a fuller account of the sophisticated form of progressivism these schools embodied, the significance of the examples remains unclear.

But Diane Ravitch is exactly right in her account of the only way to overcome the persistent causes of our failure to fulfill the educational birthrights of the young and to avoid a future of education reform that is as unsatisfactory as the past century has been. What we need, she says, what we have always needed, is attention to "fundamental, time-tested truths": "that children need well-educated teachers who

are eclectic in their methods and willing to use different strategies depending on what works best for which children . . . [and] that adults must take responsibility for children and help them develop as good persons with worthy ideals."

The question is whether we can secure in educators and parents genuine fidelity to these truths. Doing so will not be easy. Dispense with labels, as Ravitch rightly suggests, and we are left face to face with brute facts: many academics in the liberal arts as well as faculty in schools of education profess relativism and subjectivism in ethics and aesthetics. Supposed "postmodernists" go much farther. Along with schoolteachers who have been indoctrinated in crude and simplistic versions of relativism, large numbers of academics view character formation and moral education as a minefield best left untrod in schools. Only a small portion of teachers have studied ethics and the formation of bad, weak, strong, and good character, while schools of education routinely use unreliable textbooks rather than original works when they touch on ethics with prospective teachers.

In some state laws and state education regulations, and in university curricula, the idea of teachers as "eclectic in their methods and willing to use different strategies depending on what works best for which children" has declined into the dogma of "learning styles" and "teaching styles," as if teaching and learning were matters of mere style without substance. Teachers who do not respond positively to the "styles" of their students—no matter how inimical to learning anything at all those styles may be—suffer criticism for being insensitive to children and their needs. Direct instruction in literacy and numeracy falls into peril wherever the dogma of learning styles holds the force of law, regulation, or school policy.



Most of what I have read and heard in the past five years as a member of the Massachusetts Board of Education about teaching “strategies” is sheer puffery from educators and policy makers who can neither define “strategy” nor identify the differences between a strategy and a tactic. Diversionary jargon and pseudojargon continue to run rampant in education circles. Where jargon rules, thought perishes.

Powerful agencies in education have latched onto the financial rewards of education reform and introduced new “standards” for teachers. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) offers as its first “new” standard for prospective teachers: “Candidates preparing to work in schools as teachers or other professional school personnel know and demonstrate the content, pedagogical, and professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to help all students learn.”<sup>4</sup> The standard is preposterous. It serves only to obscure what teachers should know and be able to do. To “help all students learn,” a teacher would have to be fluent in the countless first languages of today’s schoolchildren, know thoroughly how best to teach children with a wide range of disabilities, be able to cut through well-established habits of violence and predation among students who are members of criminal gangs—and all this in schools where administrative cowardice and incompetence leave teachers bereft of institutional support. A preparatory curriculum that purports to enable “candidates to help all students learn” must be so fragmentary and broad as to prevent learning anything in sufficient depth to teach it competently.

Concern for the “health and welfare of children” has led to legislation, as in Massachusetts, requiring “comprehensive health education.” Under Massachusetts

law, what must be taught is spelled out in far greater detail than for any academic core subject such as mathematics or history:

Instruction in health education shall include, but not be limited to: consumer health, ecology, community health, body structure and function, safety, nutrition, fitness and body dynamics, dental health, emotional development and training in the administration of first aid, including cardiopulmonary resuscitation . . . In connection with physiology and hygiene, instruction as to the effects of alcoholic drinks and of stimulants, including tobacco, and narcotics on the human system, as to tuberculoses and its prevention, as to detection and prevention of breast and uterine cancer, and as to fire safety, including instruction in the flammable qualities of certain fabrics, and as to the prevention and treatment of burn injuries, shall be given to all pupils in all schools under public control, except schools maintained solely for instruction in particular subject areas.<sup>5</sup>

The expansiveness of this law reflects the enormous power of health education advocates derived from state funding from tobacco company settlements. Compliance with the law intrudes directly on time available for the academic curriculum. And because much of health education endorses the view that human faults and frailties are largely the result of “addictions,” the health curriculum can militate against the formation of good character and a sense of responsibility for the conduct of one’s own life.

As we continue to try to improve schooling and to provide students with entirely competent and cultured teachers, we will have to contend with extremely difficult obstacles, few of them altogether new. We will nowhere be able to take for granted widespread adherence to “fundamental, time-tested truths.” To live up to the educational birthrights of the young, we will have

to aspire to more than equal educational opportunity; we must, as Australian philosopher John Howes has written me, aspire to abundant educational opportunity for all.

But what shall we take “abundant opportunity” to mean? As president emeritus of St. John’s College, I am heir to the tradition of Scott Buchanan, Stringfellow Barr, Robert Maynard Hutchins, Mortimer Adler, and others, that “the liberal arts are everybody’s business.” I believe that every student should study literature and language, history, mathematics, natural sciences, and the arts. I believe also that academic programs for gifted and talented students are essential to abundant opportunity for them and are not an affront to educational opportunities for others. Neither of these beliefs implies, in my view, that sound vocational programs at the secondary and post-secondary levels, where students learn arts of craftsmanship, deprive the young of their educational birthrights.

I have known too many craftsmen who participate actively in civic life, take joy in private life, and avail themselves of cultural treasures to believe that extended study of the liberal arts is essential to the conduct of a well-lived life. Likewise, more than thirty years in academe have taught me that expertise in an academic discipline or disciplines is no guarantee of either refined intelligence or good character. When I think about abundant educational opportunity, I keep these facts in mind, and I think with gratitude of the abundant contributions to education Diane Ravitch has made.

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*The fourth edition will be released in August 2001. Please address correspondence to Academic Questions / NAS, 221 Witherspoon Street, Second Floor, Princeton, NJ 08542-3215; editor@aq.nas.org.*

#### Notes

1. Mary Fisher, *A Valiant Woman: A Contribution to the Educational Problem* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company Publishers, 1912), 52, 53.
2. We might add to Ravitch’s reference to this metaphor a passage from the philosopher Thomas Hill Green in his 1882 “Lecture on the Work to be Done by the New Oxford High School for Boys”: Proper funding of schooling “might have served to provide a ‘ladder of learning,’ to use Professor [Thomas Henry] Huxley’s figure, by which boys of intellectual promise should have been able to mount, I do not say ‘from the gutter,’ for that phrase would imply parental neglect, which can never be followed by real success in learning, but from the humblest well-disciplined homes to the universities.” In *Works of Thomas Hill Green*, ed. R. L. Nettleship (London, New York: Longmans, Green, 1899, 1900) Volume III, 461.

Huxley grew somewhat weary of his own metaphor, which he had intended to apply above all to technical education. In an 1877 lecture, “Technical Education,” Huxley said: “When I was a member of the London School Board, I said in the course of a speech, that our business was to provide a ladder, reaching from the gutter to the university, along which every child in the three kingdoms should have the chance of climbing as far as he was fit to go. This phrase was so much bandied about at the time, that, to say truth, I am rather tired of it; but I know of no other which so fully expresses my belief, not only about education in general, but about technical education in particular.” But Huxley’s metaphor did not serve “social equality” as Ravitch intends. Huxley continued, “The great mass of mankind have neither the liking, nor the aptitude, for either literary, or scientific, or artistic pursuits; nor, indeed, for excellence of any sort. Their

ambition is to go through life with moderate exertion and a fair share of ease. . . . But a small percentage of the population is born with that most excellent quality, a desire for excellence, or with special aptitudes. . . . Now, the most important object of all educational schemes is to catch these exceptional people.”

Huxley served on the school board from 1870 until 1872. The speech ap-

pears in *Science and Education*, consisting of speeches and an essay by Huxley, with introduction by Charles Winick (New York: The Citadel Press, 1964), 358.

3. John Passmore, *The Philosophy of Teaching* (London: Gerald Duckworth Co., Ltd., 1980), 24.
4. *NCATE 2000 Standards*, 31 March 2000, 1.
5. *Massachusetts General Laws*, Chapter 71, Section 1.

The National Association of Scholars  
mourns the passing of  
Willard V. Quine  
1908 – 2000  
A friend and valued member of our  
board of advisors