The Inner Restoration: Protestants Fighting for the Unity of Truth, 1930–1960

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The Inner Restoration:
Protestants Fighting for the Unity of Truth, 1930–1960

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
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Abstract

This study demonstrates that a Protestant system of thought that I term *Protestant Idealism* shaped three historic universities deep into the twentieth century. Educators at Harvard, Princeton, and Yale infused core curricula, humanities courses, honors programs, admissions, and selectivity with a Protestant Idealist philosophy. Further, decisions about what knowledge counts as good were made with Protestant Idealism—and an elite Protestant leadership class—in mind.

Based on thirty separate archival collections, the study tracks classicists, English literary critics, art historians, and religiously oriented philosophers and historians who were engaged in a quest for the unity of all truth—divine and secular. Humanists such as philosopher Theodore M. Greene (Princeton), classicist John Finley (Harvard), and philosopher Charles Hendel (Yale) resisted secularization and championed Protestant faith and modern knowledge as unified in a single system of thought.

Even college presidents who seemingly led the process of secularization defended the unity of faith and knowledge. This study brings James B. Conant’s religiosity to life. The Harvard president, known as a propagator of science and research, also believed that Harvard had what he called an otherworldly mission. Using the archives of the Committee on General Education in a Free Society, the study offers a hidden history of Harvard’s famed post–World War II document, popularly known as the “Harvard Redbook” for its colorful cover. The Harvard Redbook arguably outlined the general education requirements that many colleges and universities, and many high schools, still follow today.
I am calling the combined efforts of these humanists and leaders an *Inner Restoration*: an effort to defend and extend Protestant Idealism as the font of all civilization. The Inner Restoration was a messy affair; it intersected both with the world crisis of democracy and the growing recognition of human and religious diversity. For this reason, I also explore the chaos and battles among Protestant leaders who disagreed on what Protestant Idealism entailed in the modern world. Far from being unified, the Inner Restoration as a movement was rife with tension and factionalism.
Introduction

This dissertation explores a topic that has not received much attention: the role of the Protestant faith in American higher education after 1930. Scholars have devoted many pages to Protestant beliefs in higher education from the founding of Harvard University in 1636 as a Puritan stronghold to the proliferation of colleges and universities through 1930; relatively few scholars have explored the continuity of the Protestant faith in higher education after that period.¹

In particular, the study concerns a system of thought that I am calling Protestant Idealism. The reader will note that the subjects of this study used many variations of this term. Subjects in the study also used the terms “humanism,” “Humanism,” “humanistic idealism,” “Idealism,” “Platonism,” and “Puritanism” to describe the worldview that I am studying. To draw together these related positions, and to point out their Protestant character, I use the term Protestant Idealism.

Historians and scholars occasionally use the term Protestant Idealism. They typically use it to describe the general, interdenominational Protestant culture and philosophy that dominated in the United States before 1930. As historian David Hollinger

writes, “This generic, transdenominational Protestantism had come by the end of the
nineteenth century to be taken for granted by nearly all of the Americans in a position to
influence the character of the nation’s major institutions, including those controlling
public education, politics, the law, literature, the arts, scholarship, and even science.”²
Protestant Idealism inculcated certain timeless ideas: that the United States itself had
been founded on universal, a priori principles grounded in Protestant Christianity, and
that the privileged classes had an obligation to uphold these principles and to, as legal
historian Evan Tsen Lee notes, “perceive the common welfare” of all Americans.³ Such
ideas—and the notion that ideas themselves are timeless and immutable—were
reproduced through American higher education itself, which, prior to the late nineteenth
century, was almost entirely based in classical teachings and in Christian philosophy.
Princeton’s John Witherspoon, Harvard’s Francis Bowen, Yale’s Noah Porter, and many
other college presidents, pastors, and philosophers taught generations of undergraduates a
Christian moral system that included proper beliefs on science, law, and government. The
senior-year moral philosophy course was an institution imparting what historian Donald
Harvey Meyer calls a “national ethic” to fellow Americans.⁴

Many historians see this Protestant Idealism as waning after 1900 and even disappearing entirely by 1930. The “increased authority of science and the decline of a Protestant Establishment are staples of the historiography of modern American intellectual history,” Hollinger once observed. The classical-Christian curriculum, had, by 1930, become obsolete in its original form; most colleges and universities had shed their affiliations with churches and turned to scientific research over inculcating moral principles. In public culture and philosophy, Scientific Naturalism—the general belief that ideas should be tested in experience, and that few or no timeless principles exist as governing principles—had seemed to replace Protestant Idealism.

In this study, I became focused, however, on particular branches of Protestant Idealism. These branches are the Anglican, Puritan, and the Reformed Protestant traditions: the branches typically associated with the Anglican, Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Congregational churches and with a high church interpretation of the Protestant faith. When historians trace the decline of Protestant Idealism, they often center their analysis on liberal Protestants, or on the low church tradition. The low church tradition emphasizes individual freedom, change, and science, while a high church tradition usually emphasizes human depravity, the limits of science, and the authority of God.

Note that there were many differences in this interdenominational Protestantism—for example between Unitarian and Presbyterian faiths. The above books reflect both the similarities and the differences. Hollinger, Science, Jews, and Secular Culture, 7.


The terms high church and low church have their own complicated histories; here, I am referring to the respective tradition or cluster of ideas rather than evolution of the historical terms themselves. Helpful
The term high church is usually given to refer to continuity with the beliefs and practices of the Anglican (and therefore Catholic) tradition, and sometimes to the Reformed Protestant tradition. It emphasizes (1) the unity of the natural and supernatural worlds, (2) the unity of the individual and the community, and (3) an essentially immaterial conception of life. The essential concept to the high church tradition is the unity of all truth. All knowledge is ultimately related to a divine truth—summarized as God, the Divine Being, or the One. Therefore, in the high church tradition, the quest for truth is a quest to reach what God had ordained.

My assertion in this dissertation is a controversial one: that elements of this high church tradition survived at these three universities well into the 1960s, if not beyond. I base this argument on research in thirty separate archival collections, in which the terms “Puritanism,” “Platonism,” “Humanism,” and “Idealism” were used to refer to a tradition that had to be protected and defended.

This high church system of thought—especially its New England varieties—is famously difficult to describe in systematic detail. This is because, in the view of its adherents, it is highly subjective. Although God has ultimate authority, emphasis is also placed upon an individual communion with God, which is considered poetic and transcendent. Its essence can hardly be described in words; as Perry Miller characterized it in The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century (1939), the original Puritan system of thought, brought over to the colonies from England, is based upon the idea of

regeneration: “...the act of communion in which the infinite impinged upon the finite, when the misery of the fragmentary was replaced with the delight of wholeness.”

Because the system of thought is difficult to describe in the terms of conventional academic research, this study is exploratory rather than conclusive. The study takes a journalistic and sociological approach to the system of thought, in which I try to reconstruct the twentieth-century history of the three universities through the lens of this system of thought.

I am not asserting that the actors in this study were Puritans, or that everyone in this study subscribed in equal measures to its twentieth-century outgrowth in Protestant Idealism. As Miller once asserted, many other philosophies were added to the Puritan system as it faced the modern world. In the twentieth century, the naturalism of John Dewey and the economic materialism of Karl Marx all found their way into what I call

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9 In addition to Miller's work, another model and guide for this study is Hoeveler, *Creating the American Mind*, which synthesized the early histories of the nine colonial colleges through the lens of Puritanism.
10 As such, this dissertation is not a contribution to the academic field of Puritan studies. Although I have consulted work from that field and scholars of that field may be interested in my findings, I do not attempt to engage with the historiography of that field. A helpful review of that field is given in Naoki Onishi, “Puritan Historians and Historiography,” in Kevin Hayes, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Early American Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). To understand Puritanism as a system of thought and a social philosophy, I also consulted G. R. Cragg, *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason: A Study of Changes in Religious Thought Within the Church of England, 1660 to 1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950); Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1957); Richard S. Westfall, *Science and Religion in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958); and Margo Todd, *Christian Humanism and the Puritan Social Order* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Although these works are older, they were helpful in gaining a general understanding of seventeenth-century Puritanism—especially as my actors would have understood it.
Protestant Idealism. My assertion, rather, is that the system itself survived—especially the high church belief in the unity of all truth.\textsuperscript{12}

To illustrate this point, Harvard President James B. Conant is characterized in this study as taking a latitudinarian position within the Protestant Idealist system of thought. In the seventeenth century, the Latitudinarians were English theologians and philosophers who believed Puritanism to be too constrictive.\textsuperscript{13} Similarly, I found that Conant believed that Protestant Idealism was too constrictive. He hoped for a Protestant world but not one that followed the subjective religiosity of Protestant Idealism to the letter.\textsuperscript{14}

As such, I have divided the actors in this study into two broad categories: \textit{Humanists} and \textit{Culturalists}. Humanists, such as Princeton philosopher Theodore M. Greene and Harvard classicist John Finley, were adamant that Protestant Idealism was transcendental. Resisting experimentation and individuality, they viewed their mission as inculcating self-knowledge—an inner quest for transcendence that followed a particular and well-trodden path. The educational path began with Plato, particularly his \textit{Republic}, and moved toward the Bible.

Culturalists, on the other hand, believed in a shared Protestant culture and a unity of truth but wished to incorporate temporal history, diversity of views, and empirical

\textsuperscript{12}I realize that Puritanism and the high church tradition are different; in fact, Puritans of the seventeenth century were trying to break from elements of the high church tradition. My goal in this study is to examine the overlaps, however, especially when compared with most liberal and low church Protestant traditions.


\textsuperscript{14}My interpretation shares overlaps with James Hershberg's magisterial biography of Conant. Hershberg carefully explored Conant's religious thought, particularly its Puritan aspects—although the study as a whole was concerned with Conant's scientific career and his role in the making of the atomic bomb. See James Hershberg, \textit{James B. Conant: Harvard to Hiroshima and the Making of the Nuclear Age} (New York: Knopf, 1993).
Culturalists championed experimentation and a degree of choice and individuality. They saw their mission as preserving a Protestant culture, but using descriptive lessons for students rather than prescriptive moral teachings.\textsuperscript{15}

I examine these battles between Humanists and Culturalists within the contexts of the three universities: Harvard, Princeton, and Yale. This dissertation is therefore the first of its kind. It is the first attempt to synthesize the twentieth-century history of these three universities through the lens of a common Protestant Idealism. Most studies of these three universities are concerned with how they modernized; they therefore treat subjects such as curriculum, research, or admissions separately.\textsuperscript{16} This study ties seemingly disparate subjects together through the lens of a metaphysical/theological system.

A final contribution of the study is to the history of general education. In the 1920s and 1930s, American educators from many different universities, high schools, and higher education associations launched what they referred to as the “general education movement” (or sometimes the “liberal arts movement”). Although general education approaches varied, Harvard University attempted to settle controversies via a World War II faculty committee that spoke with national authority on both high school and collegiate general education. Thus, Harvard attempted to speak to the nation and to the world about its comprehensive version of general education. The committee’s final report, nicknamed the “Harvard Redbook,” quickly became one of the more celebrated documents in

\textsuperscript{15} I mean these categories to be loose heuristics rather than perfectly drawn types. Actors in this study (such as Conant) sometimes identified with both positions or switched sides. For a similar dichotomy of views among Protestant educators in this era, see Robert Kenneth Wilson-Black, “Uses of Religion: The Dual Role of College Religion Departments at Midcentury” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2002).

American higher education history. Using the archives of the Harvard Committee on General Education, the study offers a hidden history of this document. I argue that the Harvard Redbook was not the result of a randomly selected faculty committee debating the merits of different approaches to general education (and finding a mutual consensus), but rather a culmination of the Protestant Idealist theology that began its journey at Princeton in the early 1930s. The Harvard Redbook arguably outlined the general education requirements that many colleges and universities, and high schools, still follow today.\(^\text{17}\)

**The Radical Transformation of American Higher Education and Intellectual Life**

What were the Protestant Idealists in this study reacting to? What did they want to restore? Besides protecting the system of thought itself, what motivated them to come together and defend the faith beginning in the early 1930s?

Both Humanists and Culturalists were first reacting to their brethren, liberal or low church Protestants, who had transformed American higher education and intellectual life in the decades before 1930. They were thus reacting to a progressive understanding of truth as conditional and natural, and to the rise of Scientific Naturalism. Three representative men might be utilized to summarize the totalizing aspects of that transformation: Harvard president Charles W. Eliot (1824–1926), Columbia University philosopher John Dewey (1859–1952), and Columbia historian Charles Beard (1874–1948). I do not mean to suggest that these three liberal Protestants were the sole transformers of American higher education and intellectual life, but they were often looked upon—then as now—as representative reformers.

Charles W. Eliot made Unitarian Harvard into the nation’s preeminent research university. He helped create the modern university pattern that many other colleges and universities followed. He built up the graduate schools, professionalized the faculty, and championed science and research as the purpose of higher education. In the undergraduate curriculum, Eliot popularized what he called the “New Education.” The New Education replaced the classics and Christian ethics with electives and a spirit of critical inquiry in all subjects. Likewise, Eliot and other university reformers created separate departments of knowledge. These departments survive today in the form of departments of anthropology, history, sociology, etc.

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Columbia’s John Dewey likewise helped transform American philosophy. Previously, academic philosophy in the U.S. had close ties to Protestantism; it was dominated by philosophical and theological idealism—the view that it is the transcendent mind and ideas that shape all reality. As such, philosophy held a central place in all thought, art, and science; as mentioned, it was the culmination of the old college curriculum. Dewey and other philosophical naturalists transformed this view of philosophy; they gave the name “pragmatism” to the idea that all truth is relative to context. Ideas are not essences, Dewey thought; they are tools. Thus, philosophy is also a tool, like a hammer or a fork. Dewey’s intention was to save philosophy in the modern world, but his critics attacked him for destroying and fracturing it.

Columbia’s Charles Beard helped transform the study and understanding of history. Previously, an idealistic conception of history dominated the academy and also had close ties to religion and to philosophy. In this view, history was the study of ideas...
and essences. Beard, a leader of the progressive historians, came to reshape the study of history; history became material. No longer about essences, it was about culture, political, and economic power. Beard’s most famous and controversial book was An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States (1913), which asserted that the founders were not motivated by grand ideals, but rather by money and power. Beard asserted that they used grand ideals and essences as a cover for gaining economic power. The book remains controversial today, and Beard resigned from Columbia during World War I because he was accused of being unpatriotic.25

These reformers and revolutionaries exemplified what Morton White once called the “revolt against formalism”—against big, innate, transcendent ideas being the shapers of all reality.26 They represent a new functionalist and critical approach to reality, citizenship, and nationhood. They represent the modern university with its proliferation of subjects and fields, its emphasis on individual choice and diversity, the birth of the social sciences, and the lionization of science and critical thinking.

In Protestant churches, similarly, leaders in the liberal tradition accommodated their faith traditions to the nation’s new intellectual life. They began thinking about science as a tool for survival and growth. Members of the higher criticism/historical criticism movement subjected the Bible to the tools of the new history, new philosophy,

and the scientific ethos. They began to see science as a partner and savior of religion, and they de-emphasized the Bible as the ultimate authority of God.²⁷

These transformations are the first part of what the Humanists and Culturalists in this study were reacting to, quite negatively. The second part of what they were reacting to was the rise of Socialism as a competing political system and the increasing mechanization and collectivism of modern society.²⁸

**The Rise of Socialism**

This study does not deal much with the intricacies of politics; the subjects in this study viewed the search for truth as prior to any political system, including Democracy. Yet, in their words and actions, they clearly feared Socialism and socialistic theories, and many of their actions were intended to protect American economic interests as much as Protestantism.

The transformations of American intellectual life and higher education went hand-in-hand with the industrial revolutions. Those revolutions helped advance the laissez-faire (free market) economic system that Americans largely have today. By the turn of the twentieth century, that system, along with capitalism and Democracy more generally, came under scrutiny. Progressive critics charged the free market system with being a

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cover for Wall Street and big business interests. They instead promoted social welfare programs and forms of organized socialism. Meanwhile, the Russian Revolution and the rise of Democratic Socialism and Communism abroad threatened the free economic system from afar.²⁹

What this dissertation demonstrates is that the actors in this study reacted to both Scientific Naturalism and the rise of various forms of social politics. Indeed, both Humanists and Culturalists considered the two transformations to be intimately related. They considered both Scientific Naturalism and Socialism to be a threat to Protestantism, and they often equated a scientific and functional ethos directly with forms of socialism and collectivism. As I demonstrate, they often used the words “materialism,” “naturalism,” or “totalitarianism” to capture the societal and intellectual threats as a whole.

Scholars have mainly focused on the transformations themselves and the transformers; they have not focused as much attention on the backlash to these combined transformations in the 1930s. Particularly in the study of higher education, high church approaches to knowledge are typically not given much weight. When scholars have studied the history of religion in higher education after 1930, they tend to follow low church modernists and liberals such as Reinhold Niebuhr, evangelical and fundamentalist

movements, or the advent of religious studies departments. This study helps to fill that gap in scholarship by examining high church beliefs and practices.

The Three Fundamentals of Protestant Idealism

The fundamental belief of Protestant Idealism as I describe it here—common to both Humanists and Culturalists—was the belief in the unity of all truth and the unity of all humanity. This belief was typically considered prior to anything else—any political, cultural, economic, or social system. It was this belief in the unity of all truth that survived at Harvard, Princeton, and Yale. It was this belief that allowed leaders at the three universities to argue on behalf of a common core, the unity of Western Civilization, and the primacy of the humanities and religion over science.

Another related belief that survived into the twentieth century was the belief in what the actors in this study called “Man.” By this term, they meant the unity of humankind under the banner of reason. Since they believed that all thought is unified, they also believed that all humans are ultimately unified by the rational quality of their thought. However, they also spoke about the limits of that rationality. Both Humanists


31 In the chapters that follow, I sometimes retain this language of “man” in order to explain the Protestant Idealist beliefs in their own terms. At other times, I substitute the terms “civilization” or “humankind” so as to avoid using the term man over and over again. Readers interested in further background on the Puritan view of human nature should refer to Miller, The New England Mind and his subsequent works. As Miller notes, the original Puritan view of human nature was itself quite complex. It is not as simple as saying that the original New England Puritans believed in an absolute view of human nature. Because, in their system, universality and particularity are merged, the Protestant Idealist view of man was, too, simultaneously universal and particular.
and Culturalists believed that rationality is limited; when Man’s rationality stops being effective, God’s authority begins.

The third fundamental belief that survived was the primacy of ideals over experience. The actors in this study despised functional and contextual approaches to knowledge. They asserted that the world is ultimately the product of a single intelligence and that this single intelligence is prior to any lived experience. This did not mean that lived experience is not important, but rather that it is secondary to the single intelligence.

Beyond these three fundamentals, the Protestant Idealists clashed on everything else. They wished to enact what I am calling an Inner Restoration—a restoration of these beliefs in unity, the individual, and ideals in the face of skepticism and functional approaches to knowledge. They considered this restoration crucial to the protection of Christianity, Democracy, and the American state. Americans, they believed, had become too critical, unable to see the forest for the trees and unable to understand the world as a unified whole. However, the Inner Restoration also fractured, divided between its Humanist and Culturalist sides. This division inadvertently contributed to the fracturing of knowledge rather than to its restoration.

**Chapter Summaries**

In the first chapter, on Princeton University, I outline the beginnings of the Inner Restoration. A group of Humanists at Princeton took on the responsibility of forming the intellectual qualities of the Inner Restoration. Creating a “Special Program in the Humanities,” they emphasized the classical and Christian origins of Western civilization. They considered this an idealistic quest for essences over functions and contexts. After
World War II, the Humanists launched “Man and His Freedom,” a humanities course that inculcated principles of Princeton Humanism to students.

In the late 1930s, the Inner Restoration began to fracture. I pick up some of that fracture at Princeton, and then explore it further at Yale. At Yale, Humanists and Culturalists argued over the core of the curriculum. Would the curriculum be based in “philosophy” (Idealism as a transcendental essence that could be understood only poetically) or in “history” (Idealism as a historical phenomenon that could be studied)? This was a major battle that had large implications for Protestant Idealism. If Protestant Idealism was more of a historical phenomenon, how could it be protected against historical, scientific, or sociological criticism? Yale Humanists such as English professor Maynard Mack believed that Protestant Idealism was transcendental. They won out over Culturalists at Yale, but divisions between parties increased.

Finally, at Harvard, President James Conant attempted to save Protestant Idealism from fracturing. He created a high-profile faculty committee on general education that included many viewpoints and worldviews. Believing that Protestant Idealism required more integration with competing worldviews, especially atheistic and naturalistic ones, Conant subjected Idealism to tests of empirical verification. These tests went awry, and Conant had to step in to rescue the faith.

Throughout the study, I try to incorporate world events and contextual experiences. This approach creates a limitation to the study. The Protestant Idealist system of thought is the union of poetic, spiritual experience with logic—it exists in the realm of pure thought and should, ideally, be systematized first. This is what Perry Miller
did, to brilliant results, in *The New England Mind* (1939) as he captured the Puritan thought of the seventeenth century. Although Miller later broke slightly from this approach, in *The New England Mind* he considered all temporal history and context to be of secondary importance to the systematization of the ideas and ideals of Puritanism as a whole, as it had been carried over from England to the New England colonies (and particularly to Harvard).  

As someone who favors the pragmatic and contextual approaches in scholarship, much of the material in this study is contextual. The advantage is that world events and experiences are seen to be part of the system itself; the limitation is that the system of thought is not fully explored or explicated. Again, this is partially a limitation of the material; the system itself is difficult and complex. But it also reflects the limitations of the author. As an exploratory study, I hope that this study provides a jumping off point for future research. At the conclusion of the study, I offer a few ideas for further research.

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Chapter One
Platonists and Aristotelians

A fundamental belief of the Humanist factions in this study is that humans, although united, can also be characterized into two types: Platonists and Aristotelians. In “Two Roads to Truth: Science and Religion in the Seventeenth Century” (1941), Harvard English professor Douglas Bush explicated this view of the tragedy of humankind—the split of the single intelligence into two dualistic sides: “At the very beginning we have the antithesis between Plato and Aristotle, between a profoundly spiritual philosopher whose vision of the good life for man is illuminated by his vision of the divine Ideas, and a profoundly curious philosopher whose range, to be sure, includes ethics and politics, but who is fundamentally a biologist exploring the facts of nature and who acknowledges a deity as a useful item in his inventory of the world.”¹ Bush gave this speech to the Tudor and Stuart Club of Johns Hopkins University; the club, formed in 1923, was dedicated to “the encouragement of the study of English literature in the Tudor and Stuart periods...and the promotion of good fellowship and a love of literature.” Bush explained that Plato and Aristotle may “stand as the great prototypes of the humanist and the scientist.”² He further argued that, “...nearly all Christian humanists, consciously or not, are more or less in the Platonic tradition, while nearly all scientists, even in rebellion

² Ibid.
against Aristotelianism, reveal their kinship with Aristotle.”3 This split was tragic, but it could be harmonized, Bush explained.

According to Bush, the split between the Platonic and Aristotelian sides of man could be harmonized by what he called a broader conception of Christian humanism. Bush admitted that this broad Christian humanism was difficult to define:

It is not easy to give a concrete definition of Christian humanism, for throughout many changing centuries it was an attitude, an informing spirit, rather than a body of doctrines. It was a religious, ethical, rational, and largely unmystical view of God, man, and the world. Its basis was the conception of right reason, that is reason conceived of not as a dry light, an unmoral instrument of inquiry, but as the moral will, the divine faculty in man which allied him with God, which assumed certain absolute values in life and thought and made those values the goal of human effort. It was a fusion of Christian revelation with the highest wisdom of those pagans who had groped their way toward the true light.4

Bush noted that this broad conception of Christian humanism, that of “right reason,” had something to teach Americans in the 1930s and 1940s. “Its importance grows the more we fully realize that the chosen period represents only one phase of a fundamental antagonism which is as old as human thought and as new and terrible as the recent rise of barbarism; for, as many people have said, the last few years have witnessed the ultimate results of the divorce between science and religion.”5

Bush explained that this totalizing Christian humanism was not just a faith, nor mere knowledge. It was, Bush noted, the total union of faith and knowledge. “There is no conflict between faith and reason because both are divine gifts,” he told his audience:

3 Ibid.
4 Ibid, 82.
5 Ibid.
…the strongly ethical and practical impulse of humanism implie[s] the extension of its basic principles from private life into education, government, and the whole social structure. Humanism was by nature, or in time came to be, a conservative force on the side of moderation and order, sweetness and light...[it] was ready to combat the irreligious and naturalistic implications of science — and also, one might add, such other things as irrational “enthusiasm” in religion.6

Bush observed that the secret to this “conservative force” was frequent, strategic returns to Plato. When humankind’s Aristotelian (scientific) impulses overcome their Platonic souls, the Platonic view must be strengthened. He noted how the English universities, particularly Cambridge and Oxford, had bolstered the Platonic soul since the seventeenth century. He finished his speech with a call to arms, for humankind and particularly American universities to recover Plato as “the first and greatest humanist” who expounded “the emphasis upon the existence of a divine and absolute scale of religious and ethical values, upon man’s instinct and capacity for attaining divine knowledge, upon the positive ideal of a divine way of life, upon the sovereignty of the rational soul over the irrational passions and appetites, and upon the application of these basic doctrines to education and government as well as to morality.”7 He called upon the followers of “Cicero and Augustine, Plato and Christ,” to rise up.8 For the “great problem, as no generation in history ever had more reason to believe, is still the nature of men, and, after the psychologists have told us all they know, we may still think that the root of the matter is in the New Testament and Plato and the humanistic tradition.”9

6 Ibid, 83.
7 Ibid, 84.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid, 102.
Bush’s comments may, at first, seem out of context during World War II. Bush seemed to be implying that the barbarism of the war was a cause... of a split between science and religion? Of the tragedy of a split between Plato and Aristotle? Of the growth of science? But Bush’s comments reflected a worldview that was still very much a part of the intellectual milieu at Harvard, Princeton, and Yale. It was a belief in universities as the ancient protectors of right reason.

Indeed, it was these lessons that Princeton University Humanists taught during World War II and after. Future Princeton president Robert F. Goheen, who organized and taught a large humanities course after the war, used to repeat Bush’s assertion that all men could be divided into Platonists and Aristotelians.10 George Thomas, Princeton’s Professor of Religious Thought, observed that, “...the idealistic worldview which was first formulated by Plato affirms that the world is a divinely created Mind whose purpose is to realize Good in different forms and at different levels.”11 It was the object of a Princeton education, Thomas said, to reform the minds of men to conform to the divinely created Mind.12

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10 Humanities 201–202: The Western Tradition: Man and his Freedom; 1948–1955; Robert F. Goheen Papers, Public Policy Papers, Folder 1, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.
11 “My Story by George Thomas,” My Story TMS; 1977; George F. Thomas Papers, Box 1 Folder 2; Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.
Princeton begins the Inner Restoration because the university was at the heart of an intellectualization of Protestant Idealism. In the hands of Humanists such as Goheen, Thomas, and professor of philosophy Theodore M. Greene, Protestant Idealism was systematized into a working philosophy. Through a “Special Program in the Humanities” and Goheen’s course, “Man and His Freedom,” students were taught the working philosophy. They were instructed on the restoration of humankind’s right reason—the return of the moral will against the dry light of scientific inquiry.13

The Special Program in the Humanities, which ran from 1936 to the early 1960s, educated some famous names in recent American history. Neil Rudenstine (later provost of Princeton, executive vice president of the Mellon Foundation, and president of Harvard); James Hester (future president of New York University), James L. Armstrong (later dean of the School for Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins); Edward Said (future renowned literary critic and public intellectual); Robert Belknap (later professor of Russian and teacher in Columbia’s core curriculum for over fifty years); Philip Kunhardt (later film producer and editor of Life magazine); Charles Scribner IV (future head of the Scribner publishing company); Walter Guzzardi Jr. (later Time-Life bureau chief in Rome); Robert Cecil Agee (later environmental advisor to Robert Kennedy); Robert V. Keeley (future ambassador to Greece, Zimbabwe, and Mauritius);

and Anthony C. E. Quaintain (future ambassador to Kuwait) were all graduates of the Special Program. The Special Program—nicknamed simply “SPH”—was a four-year program for future elites involving a deep study with one of the Princeton Humanists, either with Goheen, Greene, Thomas, Whitney J. Oates (classics) or Asher Hinds (English).

Graduates of the Special Program spoke about the experience in spiritual terms. Many alumni believed that they had received higher knowledge as well as religious training. James Billington, a 1950 graduate and future Librarian of Congress, remarked that, “Next to learning from my father, who never went to college at all, I learned most from the people in and around that program, who both left me with a sense of awe at the tradition one inherited, and a feeling that one had both deep obligations and broad possibilities for perpetuating it.” Charles Scribner IV remarked that the Special Program taught him to be “constantly aware of the creator behind the creation.” Other Princeton students, however, were completely mystified by the Special Program. From the outside, Special Program participants seemed to lounge around and read poetry and Biblical texts all day—seemingly with little obligations. During junior and senior years, Special Program men attended few classes. Instead, they worked on a senior thesis or creative project and took part in special seminars with strict rules for entering (and not entering) a

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14 This list was culled from Irwin's manuscripts and from other thesis lists in the SPH files. For Edward Said's remembrances of the program, see Edward W. Said, \textit{Out of Place: A Memoir} (New York: Knopf, 1999).
15 Other faculty participants in SPH included Francis Godolphin (classics), Albert Friend (classical archaeology), and E. Harris Harbison (medieval/art history).
16 Quoted in Irwin, “SPH: Special Program in the Humanities at Princeton”.
17 Ibid.
18 Irwin collected a summary of Princeton student views in Material for Proposed Newsweek Feature Write-Up by W. Irwin—Includes report on Views of 9 Undergraduates, 1942; 1941–1943; Council of the Humanities records, Box 2; Princeton University Archives, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.
private study room.\textsuperscript{19} “The great majority of Princeton is left completely in the dark,” commented one Princeton student that was asked by a Special Program graduate to characterize the program from a general student view. “To them the Humanists are members of an esoteric secret society, whose aims are incomprehensible and whose doings unfathomable.”\textsuperscript{20} Another Princeton student, reporting about the program in a college newspaper, observed that the Special Program resembled a “secret order” whose members were “tapped” through methods similar to Yale’s secret societies or Princeton’s own undergraduate eating clubs.\textsuperscript{21}

During World War II, the Humanists also created what they called a “defense course” called “The Western Tradition: Man and His Freedom.” Organized by Goheen, it ran from 1942 to the early 1960s and featured guest lectures from Thomas, Oates, and other Princeton Humanists. The goal of this course was the same as that of the old Christian moral philosophy: the attempt to summarize, in Christian moral terms, the whole of Western thought, history, science, and experience. It reached over 5,000 students and has rarely been covered by historians or scholars.\textsuperscript{22}

In both of these curricular efforts—the Special Program and “Man and His Freedom”—the goal was largely the same: to teach students that science could not solve all problems of Democracy, the state, and, most importantly, the human condition. Instead, the Humanists taught that only God or a Divine Being could guide Americans.

\textsuperscript{19} “SPH is the Password,” \textit{Nassau Sovereign} (April 1950).
\textsuperscript{20} Quoted in Material for Proposed Newsweek Feature Write-Up by W. Irwin.
\textsuperscript{21} “SPH is the Password”.
\textsuperscript{22} Humanities 201–202: The Western Tradition: Man and his Freedom; 1948–1955. This was Princeton’s version of the Western Civilization course. However, in histories of that course, the course is presented in secular terms. See Gilbert Allardyce, “The Rise and Fall of the Western Civilization Course,” \textit{The American Historical Review} 87, no. 3 (1982): 695–725.
By science, the Humanists meant all critical inquiry and research. The worth of anything, the Humanists asserted, is not the test of discovery but the test of truth. Did it conform to God’s will? Did it advance man’s right reason toward God? Did it, as Greene said, develop “a realistic but uncynical knowledge of the possibilities of human nature, both for good and evil”? Did it lead to a “deeper realization of human finitude and of man’s search for, and dependence upon, a Divine Being,” as Greene put it?

In the view of the Humanists, only Divine enlightenment could truly answer questions of truth. Knowledge of the self—which was also knowledge of God—could answer these questions in a way that science or critical inquiry could never accomplish. This was true “philosophy,” the Humanists stated, and it required bolstering at times when science threatened the unity of all truth.

True philosophy, although Divine, always began with a pagan thinker—Plato. According to the Princeton Humanists, Plato, although a pagan, had provided the ideal starting point for understanding the Ideal aspects of knowledge. The Special Program had two mottos, both of which were taken from Plato: “When a person is ready to taste every kind of knowledge, and addresses himself joyfully to his studies with an appetite which can never be satiated, we shall justly call that person a philosopher” (from the Republic) and “I maintain, my friends, that every one of us should seek out the best teacher whom he can find, first for ourselves, who are greatly in need of one, and then for our youth,

24 “High School — Princeton University Humanistic Conference,” December 12, 1941, Summary of T.M. Greene's Talk, 1930–1950; Historical Subject Files Collection, Box 38, Folder 5; Princeton University Archives, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.
regardless of expense or anything” (from *Laches*). The Humanists placed these mottos on door signs and on syllabi and seminar notes. Accordingly, Special Program students read Plato’s dialogues (often reading them multiple times) and Christian interpretations of Plato’s thought, as well as Greene’s own book, *The Meaning of the Humanities* (1938). These interpretations of Plato came from high church theologians, especially Archbishop William Temple (an Anglican bishop in the Church of England), from the Platonic philosopher and Humanist Paul Elmer More, and from the Catholic philosopher Étienne Gilson.

According to the Princeton Humanists, true philosophy always moved from Plato to the Old and New Testaments. The Humanists gave specific instructions for how to read the Bible. The Old Testament is very complex, they said, and many readers misunderstand it. In their view, the Bible was a record of pure thought and should be read in a particular way. It must be taught first rather than read coldly. Students of the Old Testament should focus on the life of Moses, the Humanists indicated, rather than on Genesis. The “Hebrew” element of transcendent spirituality should be taught over too much intellectualization of the Old Testament, they said. Students of the New Testament, meanwhile, should focus on the life of Jesus as represented in the Gospels, as well as

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25 The first motto can be found in Irwin, “SPH: Special Program in the Humanities at Princeton”. The second is located in “Philosophy v. History,” n.d., 1930–1950; Historical Subject Files Collection, Box 38, Folder 5; Princeton University Archives, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.


“teaching of the contemporary Rabbis and the religious thinking of the Pharisees and Sadducees” and a “treatment of the Apocalyptic.”

Yet, this enlightened education did not only give knowledge of God or of Jesus Christ. It gave knowledge of human nature and the just state—of man and the just society. It gave instructions to all humankind on how to act, how not to act, and why to live and defend God and country. Whitney Oates, quoting former Princeton president Woodrow Wilson, attributed the goals of the Special Program and other humanities programs they helped to organize as such: “The chief glory of a university is the leadership of the nation in the things that attach to the highest ambitions that nations can set for themselves, those ideals which guide nations into the atmosphere of things that are permanent and do not fade from generation to generation.”

When the United States entered World War II, the Humanists felt that such teachings about the just society should increase, “in view of the weightier responsibility for the preservation and progress of learning that has fallen upon America because of the World War.” The Princeton Humanists both reinvigorated the Divine aspects of Protestant Idealism and gave those aspects a patriotic mission. This chapter explores how the two missions overlapped and how the two missions were taught to students.

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28 Report of the Special Committee of the Faculty on Religious Education, April 11 1935, Religious Education, Report of the Committee on; 1930–1935; Office of the Secretary Records, Princeton University Archives, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. This document was co-authored by Greene and Friend, two of the Humanists.

29 Report on a Humanities Seminar meeting held at Whig Hall, October 3, 1947, 1930–1950; Historical Subject Files Collection, Box 38, Folder 5; Princeton University Archives, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

30 Meeting Minutes of the Humanistic Council, February 10, 1943, 1930–1950; Historical Subject Files Collection, Box 38, Folder 5; Princeton University Archives, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.
“One Small Chapel in the Big Church”

It is difficult to pinpoint precisely when the Humanist restoration at Princeton began. Many archival and some limited published records point to Paul Elmer More being the inspiration and spiritual guide to the Princeton Humanists.31 This is an important finding, because More was one of the nation’s foremost conservatives and is sometimes considered a founder of modern conservatism.32 In addition, no existing scholarship points to More being the inspiration for a university curriculum. More was a complicated figure—at once both intensely private and very public. He was first a journalist, then a leader of the New Humanists (a separate, national group that opposed the research university and modernity), and, in his later years, a Christian apologist and a Plato scholar.33

As the leader—along with Harvard’s Irving Babbitt and the University of Iowa’s Norman Foerster—of the New Humanists, More inflected the New Humanism with religiosity. The New Humanism was the foremost humanities movement against the transformations described in the introduction. New Humanists of the early twentieth century railed against the modern research university, the elective system, and the lionization of science. New Humanists adamantly defended Democracy as an essentially absolute faith based in classical and universal teachings. This national movement was

31 Irwin, “The Legacy of SPH”; Dakin, Paul Elmer More; Spaeth, “Conversations with Paul Elmer More”.
33 Dakin, Paul Elmore More; Stephen L. Tanner, Paul Elmer More: Literary Criticism as the History of Ideas (Provo, Utah; Albany, NY: Brigham Young University; Distributed by State University of New York Press, 1987).
highly controversial; liberals and progressives, as well as moderates and conservatives, accused the New Humanists of anti-democratic, authoritarian aims.\textsuperscript{34}

In the 1910s, More moved to Princeton, where he was an occasional lecturer at the university and a well-known critic of Woodrow Wilson as both president of Princeton, and, then, U.S. president.\textsuperscript{35} In the 1920s, More’s involvement in university affairs increased. He began teaching a course on Aristotle in the Princeton Graduate School that many of the Princeton Humanists—who were then graduate students—enrolled in as a rite of passage.\textsuperscript{36} More also began hosting weekly dining and bridge clubs with local religious, cultural, and university leaders. He formed a literary and bridge society, the “Gentlemen Dowagers,” to which some of the young Humanists belonged.\textsuperscript{37} In these gatherings, the future Princeton Humanists and other future Princeton leaders heard excerpts from More’s recent books on the relationship between Plato and Christendom.\textsuperscript{38}

According to More, in the hands of the liberals American Democracy was losing its power and strength. His recent books on Plato and Christendom were efforts, he said, to develop a systematic “philosophy of conservatism” that More believed would bring


\textsuperscript{35} Dakin, \textit{Paul Elmer More}.

\textsuperscript{36} Remembrances of M. Spackman and other student remembrances, Paul Elmer More Papers, Box 42 Folder 1929; Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.


“together again of England and America in peaceful brotherhood.” More’s books on Plato and Christendom were designed to restore an ancient and true “philosophy” to American intellectual life that would both save the humanities and restore order to Democracy:

I can foresee no restoration of humane studies to their lost position of leadership until they are felt once more to radiate from some central spiritual truth. I do not believe that the aesthetic charms of literature can supply this want, nor is it clear to me that a purely scientific analysis of the facts of moral experience can furnish the needed motive...only through the centralizing force of religious faith or through its equivalent in philosophy can intellectual life regain its meaning and authority for earnest men.40

In 1932, these gatherings with More became more frequent, and another philosophical club formed with the Humanists—now faculty members—at the center of it. More nicknamed his new group the “Baltimores,” because he and the Humanists met in a diner across from Nassau Hall: the old Baltimore Dairy Lunch. Theodore M. Greene, Asher Hinds, Whitney Oates, and another faculty member and future dean, Francis Godolphin (classics), made up the Baltimores and thus the Princeton Humanists as well. According to student accounts, the Humanists met every afternoon for coffee and wide-ranging philosophical discussion.41

At the Baltimore Dairy Lunch, the Humanists listened to More’s criticisms of Princeton, Democracy, and the future of humankind. The message was one of imminent decline unless something was organized immediately. “I simply cannot understand how

39 Quoted in Dakin, Paul Elmer More, 159, 166.
40 Ibid, 171.
anyone conversant with what is going on over the country can fail to see the present policy of Harvard and Princeton and Yale is suicidal,” More wrote in a 1930 letter to Dean Christian Gauss, a friend of the Humanists. “Their attempt to compete with these great state universities on a common ground means that they will lose their national position and sink into mere local institutions.”42 By “national position,” More meant a Christian and superior one, since he believed that the United States was, and should be, a Christian nation. His views reflected a controversial New Humanist stance that the state universities, with their embrace of science and discovery, were enemies of a truly Christian nation.43

According to More, Princeton was especially guilty of “blindly and contemptibly [lowering] her flag.”44 Recent presidents, from Woodrow Wilson to John G. Hibben, had, according to More, few responsible ideas for keeping Princeton and America Christian. These leaders had fallen into the Aristotelian fallacy that science could provide truth and direction, or, worse, they had professed indifference on the question of morality. More argued that President Hibben, in particular, should be, in his words, “cut with the executioner’s sword” for abandoning Princeton’s own Christian mission and its role of protecting Christianity worldwide.45 At least in written letters, More did not specify exactly what Hibben had done to harm Princeton’s Christianity and deserve the sword of

42 Paul Elmer More to Christian Gauss, February 23, 1930, Correspondence between More and Gauss; dates not examined; Paul Elmer More Papers, Box 26 Folder 4; Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.
44 More to Gauss, February 23, 1930.
45 Ibid. More’s use of the phrase “cut with the executioner’s sword” was likely a hyperbolic expression rather than an actual goal; still, it illustrates his strong views on the proper mission of Princeton.
the executioner. However, we know from histories of Princeton that Hibben was a generally liberal figure that encouraged (or at least did not prevent) Princeton’s modernization.\textsuperscript{46}

Nationally speaking, More criticized the New Education and reforms of Charles Eliot, and what he deemed to be the growing vapidity of research and specialization. He also felt that John Dewey, in particular, was “striking at the roots of everything that makes life worthwhile” through his naturalistic pragmatism.\textsuperscript{47} Americans, he thought, were rapidly forgetting God and universal laws; they were steeped in a relativistic, critical attitude to everything—an attitude that More attributed to Dewey. This critical attitude, More believed, was not only blasphemous but also dangerous. It made the nation weak against its new opponents: the Soviets, the Fascists, and the rising nations of Asia. The answer, for More, was to revive the humanities as they were conceived of in Greek and Roman times, and in the beginnings of the British Empire. In those eras, More believed, the humanities were the pulse of national and world justice as well as the protectors of Christendom.\textsuperscript{48}

The Humanists surrounding More at the Baltimore Lunch did not always share his views, although his confidence was particularly attractive. Behind More’s back, the Humanists called him the “Demon of the Absolute”; they felt that he was far too harsh and critical himself.\textsuperscript{49} However, the Humanists did share More's sense of decline. Christian Gauss, the Dean of the College, friend of More, and Humanist ally, wrote in an

\textsuperscript{47} Dakin, \textit{Paul Elmer More}, 185.
\textsuperscript{48} Dakin, \textit{Paul Elmer More}.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid, 365–366.
unpublished essay that, “Liberalism is bankrupt in the old sense...Devotees of science tell us that if the humanities were only willing to recognize the importance of the specialized branches of science, physics, chemistry, biology, we would soon realize that nothing had been lost and much gained in the reconstruction of the modern course of study,” he wrote. However, the issue remained for Gauss that science “cannot tell us what is just and what is beautiful.” Therefore, in his view, “It should be equally clear that the advance of science alone cannot save democracy, unless we find a way of limiting the possibilities for destruction which science has opened to modern man.”\(^50\) By “destruction,” Gauss had in mind technical destruction—but also, more importantly, destruction of powerful ideals and beliefs that powered a Christian nation. For Gauss, a revival of the humanities and what he called the “humanistic attitude” would provide an organizing check on the scientific ethos of discovery.

The other Humanists felt similarly that Democracy was becoming “impotent” against its new enemies.\(^51\) They related this claim to the decline of the humanities. During the previous three hundred years, the Humanists argued, science and empiricism had taken over American thought. (The problem could be traced back to that signature Aristotelian, Francis Bacon). Especially in the previous few decades, science had been elevated to the status of a dogmatic and superficial cult, they believed. The Humanists blamed this state of affairs on some individuals and groups as well as on a faulty understanding of Democracy and liberalism. They blamed it chiefly on German scholars

\(^{50}\) Gauss, “Peace at Gettysburg,” undated; Christian Gauss Papers, Box 25 Folder 4; Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Although this essay is marked undated, based on the Gauss collection and the content of the essay I am confident that it was written in the early 1940s, as the United States entered the war. That is a slight departure in the timeline I am presenting here, but the essay's ideas are consistent with Gauss’s earlier writings.

\(^{51}\) Irwin, “The Legacy of SPH”.
of the late nineteenth century, on pragmatists of the early twentieth, and on Progressive educators, naturalists, and social scientists of the 1920s and 1930s. For classicist Oates, modern science as preached by these groups had led Americans to accept a “dangerous pseudo-metaphysic, namely, that truth derives only from what can be scientifically verified.”\(^{52}\) Asher E. Hinds agreed that German scholars in particular had gutted true Humanism by advocating for “painstaking, analytical, historical, descriptive research,” which had “pulverized” humanity into tiny pieces.\(^{53}\) Greene agreed that modern academics had become “more and more irresponsible and impious towards themselves and mankind, nature, and Diety.”\(^{54}\) Sparing Dewey himself, Greene singled out progressive education followers of Dewey especially, who believed that, “genuine liberty can be achieved in a vacuum.” This was “utter foolishness,” according to Greene. Only a higher “sanction,” by which Greene meant a Divine essence, could provide “initiation into knowledge and wisdom,” he argued.\(^{55}\)

However, the Humanists did not believe that this self-education should completely ignore modern insights, as More often claimed. It should, instead, incorporate these modern insights into the total path of wisdom. The Humanists pronounced this self-education a Puritan one that was inclusive of all knowledge. E. Harris Harbison, another

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\(^{52}\) Whitney J. Oates, “The Purpose of the Divisional Program in the Humanities,” speech at a Secondary School Conference, December 11, 1942, 1930–1950; Historical Subject Files Collection, Box 38, Folder 5; Princeton University Archives, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

\(^{53}\) “Princeton University The Divisional Program in the Humanities,” n.d. but handwritten note stating “1940 or soon thereafter” and likely written by Asher Hinds, 1930–1950; Historical Subject Files Collection, Box 38, Folder 5; Princeton University Archives, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

\(^{54}\) Greene quoted in van Horn, “The Philosophy of Theodore M. Greene and Its Significance for Philosophy of Education”, 87.

ally of the Humanists and teacher in the Special Program, noted in a “Princeton Essay on Liberal Education” that, “The Puritan’s worldview has crumbled as his world has disappeared, but because we are in many respects children of Puritanism, we will and should judge our institutions ‘by their fruits’ as the God of our forefathers judged his elect.” Such an approach entailed humility toward the fruits of academic and human labors—even the dangerous ones. “The real question is whether we shall prove to be as far-seeing and truly catholic as our Puritan ancestors about what is useful to know and how to make what we know useful,” Harbison wrote. “The great majority of those who believe in liberal education—and they are neither Ancients nor Moderns—must build an educational philosophy for their own day which starts from as broad a conception of ‘usefulness’ as Puritanism in its day,” Harbison argued. Harbison and Greene were both adamant that an inner restoration of human nature and idealism must fuse together disparate traditions and not be too doctrinaire.

According to a graduate of the Special Program, the Humanists imagined a system of humanistic programs that would constitute what they called a “small chapel in the big church.” These programs, the Humanists indicated, would not really challenge what they called “scientism” so much as augment it and provide Americans with assurance in timeless truths. The collection of programs they founded would be somewhat like an Invisible College—the term that Robert Boyle, the English natural

56 E. H. Harbison, “Princeton Essay on Liberal Education,” February 8, 1945, 1940–1945; Office of the Secretary Records, Box 69, Folder 1; Princeton University Archives, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. The Princeton Essays on Liberal Education were a series of draft publications on the Princeton view of liberal and general education. It seems as though they were never published.
57 Ibid.
58 Irwin, “The Legacy of SPH.”
59 Ibid.
philosopher, once gave to the humanistic and theological programs of the English Restoration and early British Empire (roughly 1660–1710). Not widely advertised, the programs would nonetheless seek to reshape American thought by strengthening convictions about American ideals and repositioning the American state as a vehicle of Christendom.

**The Special Program in the Humanities**

By 1935, after three years of meetings and planning, the Humanists were ready to announce their first program. Initially called the “Divisional Program in the Humanities,” the name soon shifted to the Special Program in the Humanities—and then simply SPH—by the early 1940s. The Humanists envisioned this program as a kind of super honors school. Select students—plucked for their Platonist qualities as well as their superior intelligence—would essentially undertake an independent study for their entire four years. They would work under the tutelage of one or two of the Humanists—producing a final thesis that demonstrated what graduates and their teachers referred to as the “unity of knowledge.”

The Special Program reflected a Humanist theory of cultural change. One might think that, if the Humanists wanted to protect or restore American ideals, they might simply teach students about American achievements. However, the Humanists considered American ideals to be non-material entities provided by God, not material achievements

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61 “The Special Program in the Humanities,” News Clippings and Press Releases; 1936-1998; Historical Subject Files Collection, Box 38, Folder 4; Princeton University Archives, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.
like the Constitution or the Bill of Rights. In this view, the United States and its people were simply carriers of ancient values that began at the intersection of Plato and Christianity. To teach these ideals, one needed to begin with both the origins (true philosophy) and the spirit (what they called the “Hebraic” element of grace and regeneration). I will explain each of these elements in the text that soon follows, but first it is important to explain more about the overall theory and scope of the Special Program.

According to the Humanists, Protestantism and God’s will were perpetuated and protected by chosen people. Their philosophy, although it honored God’s will, was also people-centered. That is why the Humanists paid attention to the carriers of God’s will and those who, in their view, ignored God’s will. In the view of the Humanists, select individuals—more than books—carried forward the faith. The Special Program was designed to choose and create cultural agents who would carry forward the faith in what the Humanists viewed as a proper direction.

In addition (and very much related to the focus on cultural agents), a restoration of God’s will could never be too doctrinaire or abstract. It required some level of diversity and experimentation (within the faith). There was no master plan here, no final blueprint. Instead, the Humanists hoped that their apprentices would use the essential pieces of the faith (true philosophy and the Hebraic element of regeneration) to create new cultural forms and even, to some extent, new ideals (or new forms of these ideals). These new cultural forms and ideals could take on many material varieties: a play, a

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62 Report of the Special Committee of the Faculty on Religious Education.
movie, a poem, research and scholarship, statesmanship, or leadership and “work” of any kind. As long as the central principles of true philosophy and regeneration were kept in tact, almost anything produced by the Special Program graduates could be a part of Protestant Idealism.

Student remembrances from the program reflected this view of cultural reproduction. Journalist Philip Kunhardt, for instance, wrote that, “Intertwining disciplines and humanities of every kind have been integral to my life. All this began to take form during my years in SPH when history and literature and art and music and architecture and theater and religion were forever fused in my mind.”63 Charles Scribner IV emphasized the importance of training new generations of Idealists when he commented that, “Obvious as it may seem, it is this emphasis on the fact that all achievements in the arts and sciences are made by human minds for human minds that unifies all departments of knowledge.”64 Anthony Quaintain, future ambassador to Kuwait, reflected that, “Humanism must increasingly go beyond the development of the individual to an evaluation of the common factors underlying our common humanity. This is not to suggest a repudiation of our European and classical heritage, but rather a refocusing of our studies and an elaboration of them to include other cultural and other intellectual traditions.”65 In other words, Protestant Idealism must now be global, diverse, and not strictly Western European, Anglo-American, or even, to some degree, Protestant.

The Humanists did not seem particularly interested in inculcating precise approaches to this reincarnation of Protestant Idealism. Indeed, some graduates seemed

63 Quoted in Irwin, “SPH: Special Program in the Humanities at Princeton”.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
baffled by their studies, even after they had successfully graduated from the program.

“Even when one doesn’t understand very much, the idea of understanding the Whole Thing will continue to exert its powerful attraction,” writer James D. Lynn recalled, when asked several years after graduation to reflect on what he had learned in the Special Program.66

The Blueprint of Human Nature

However, this inclusivity did involve some substantial intellectual and theological architecture behind the program. The whole program itself was imagined and likened to an ideal Protestant leader. The program itself was “likened to a human figure,” a graduate of the Special Program observed. The curriculum followed “man” with “feet on familiar ground but hands reaching for a wider nondepartmental sky. Its chronological pattern swung down to departmental earth, then up again in search of synthesis.”67 Human nature was itself pictured as fixed: the Humanists taught that Protestant man was always up against the universe, facing the eternal problem of knowledge of himself.

This major concept of man facing an unknowable universe owed itself to Puritan thought as Perry Miller systematized it. Miller noted that for the New England Puritans of the seventeenth century, “There was for the Puritan a hierarchy of comprehension, what Preston called a ‘three-fold kinde of Truth’: on the first plane there was natural truth within the heart of men; on the second there was the common knowledge that natural men could acquire from theologians and books; on the third was spiritual knowledge. All men had the first, all might gain the second, only grace could give the third; yet on that

66 Ibid.
67 Irwin, “The Legacy of SPH.”
level alone was redemption to be secured.” This stage view of humanity also echoed the Platonic view of the ascent and descent of the philosopher-king: from natural to ideal knowledge and back again to the natural.

The Special Program encouraged and guided that ascent to grace and back to Earth. Theodore M. Greene developed a modified version of this staged system that was a core teaching of his textbook, The Meaning of the Humanities. Greene’s system had five stages: (1) atomistic awareness, (2) solitary synthesis, (3) social convention, (4) creative specialization, and (5) historico-philosophical synthesis. For Greene, all humans were capable of the first, second, and third stages, some reached the fourth, and only a select few reached the fifth. It was those philosopher-kings who Greene believed guided the rest of humanity.

By “atomistic awareness,” Greene meant a childlike view of the world as a series of disconnected parts. This stage was roughly the equivalent of basic sensory awareness and was sometimes compared by Greene to what animals experience. Humans next reached the stage of “solitary synthesis,” which Greene depicted as an adolescent one of general self-awareness: I exist and think in the world. Many humans stayed at this stage, Greene said, although they often succumbed to the third stage, “social convention,” giving up their curiosity and idealism about the realm of human possibilities. Although

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69 Many works on Plato’s theory of knowledge could be cited here. I realize controversies abound on the precise meanings of Plato’s theory as presented in the Republic; my intention is to draw connections and summarize.
71 Greene, it should be noted, never used the term philosopher-king. Yet, an examination of his philosophy and the high position he gives to the Humanist as ultimate cultural leader shows obvious debts to Plato. Elizabeth van Horn makes this connection between Greene and Plato in van Horn, “The Philosophy of Theodore M. Greene.”
this third stage of social convention was beneficial, Greene believed, it was ultimately fruitless for true idealism. Expertise was needed in the specialized fields—hence Greene’s fourth stage, “creative specialization.” This was the stage for scientists, experts, and professionals.\textsuperscript{72} Finally, grace was partially achieved by the fifth stage, which Greene specified was no longer a true possibility but rather more of an ambition:

> Historico-philosophical synthesis is only partially actualized, since it constitutes the highest objective of all humanist thought and action. The humanist, I shall argue, is uniquely defined in terms of his allegiance to this ideal, whose attainment constitutes, as he believes, man’s true ambition as a human being. Those, on the other hand, who repudiate this ideal will be found to define the goal of human endeavor in terms of the third or fourth levels of experience.\textsuperscript{73}

What does this all mean in terms of the Special Program pedagogy and curriculum? Even though Greene meant his system to apply to all humanity and God’s creatures, he also applied the stages to the program itself. Students in the Special Program began in a modified version of Greene’s first stage. They sampled the departments of knowledge, including the sciences and social sciences. With “feet on familiar ground,” they took introductory courses in these fields, but were encouraged by their mentor(s) to begin to see connections rather than the differences that other professors seemingly taught.\textsuperscript{74} For instance, why did the anthropologists seem to teach one way about human nature and the physicists or biologists another? Or, the Humanists asked students, were these approaches more related than one might think by sampling introductory survey courses? Were they incompatible or quite unified views of what humanity is? If so, how so? Such exercises were designed to get Special Program students to see beyond their lingering

\textsuperscript{73} van Horn, “The Philosophy of Theodore M. Greene,” 64.
\textsuperscript{74} Irwin, “The Legacy of SPH.”
belief in the world as a series of disconnected parts. The Humanist mentors guided
students through these questions, provoking rather than answering in the Socratic style.\textsuperscript{75}
There was an obvious preference for a Platonic view of inherent unity of all human
nature rather than what they called the Aristotelian view of fact-finding, diversity, and
verification.\textsuperscript{76} Thus, science was included in their system, but it came under the control of
Platonism.\textsuperscript{77}

From this initial stage, Special Program students moved through the stages of
Greene’s system, reaching stage four, “creative specialization.” They selected an area of
specialty, such as music, literary criticism, or art history. Importantly, however, their
Humanist mentors instructed them to see their specialty as connected to all knowledge—
including supernatural or Divine knowledge of the past. Students went “up again in
search of synthesis,” transcending specialization for a broader view of humanity and all
creation.\textsuperscript{78}

Greene and his fellow Humanists developed a seminar, “Theory, Fact and Value:
Philosophy and History,” to help students reach the final stage of higher awareness. This

\textsuperscript{75} This Socratic style also reflected a general method of education at Princeton, termed the “preceptorial
method.” See Princeton University Committee of Eight on the Preceptorial System, \textit{The Preceptorial
Method of Instruction} (Princeton University, 1913).

\textsuperscript{76} Humanities 201–202: The Western Tradition: Man and his Freedom; 1948–1955.

\textsuperscript{77} Historians have noted connections between Platonism and Christianity. See John M. Dillon, \textit{The Golden
Chain: Studies in the Development of Platonism and Christianity} (Aldershot, Hampshire, Great Britain;
Brookfield, VT: Variorum; Gower, 1990); Brian Dobell, \textit{Augustine’s Intellectual Conversion: The Journey
from Platonism to Christianity} (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

\textsuperscript{78} Irwin, “The Legacy of SPH”; Irwin, “The Special Program in the Humanities.”
seminar attempted to resolve the fact-value and faith-knowledge dichotomies characteristic of the modern West since Descartes.79

The “Theory, Fact and Value” Seminars

The goal of these private seminars was to demonstrate to Special Program students that the world of fact (understood as pagan or secular) and the world of value (understood as God’s active will) were not separate worlds, but rather the same world. The facts of nature, as understood by science and research, were limited understandings of reality. What science and research does, the Humanists said, is abstract nature from its larger meaning—forever altering meaningful experience by chopping it up into smaller and smaller parts. On the other hand, modern religious figures, especially liberal Protestants who had embraced historical criticism, put spirituality and religion into a Pandora’s box that was usually only opened at church on Sundays, they indicated. (Reinhold Niebuhr came under special scorn).80 These liberal Protestants, too, abstracted religion from meaningful, lived experience, according to the Humanists.81 The goal was to reunite these worlds: to understand the power of what the Humanists called the “Non-Statistical Aspects of Man.”82 While the Humanists noted that other intellectuals and religious leaders had tried to unite these worlds as well, they argued that these leaders had

fallen short, to detrimental results.83 As such, Americans were losing their faith and hope, because they only had technical and positivistic science to guide them.

In order to do teach these lessons, the seminars began with the world of everyday “fact.”84 The Humanists explained this world of fact in the terminology and character of Scottish Common Sense Realism. This philosophy, which had dominated at Princeton from around 1780 to 1900 but had since fallen out of favor, divided up the natural world into “perceptual facts” and “brute facts.”85 Brute facts are those given purely by sensation; when we see a table or chair, we know it is something hard. Perceptual facts, on the other hand, are facts brought under our reason. When we see a table or chair, we call it a “table” or “chair” because we compare it to other similar objects that we have seen.86 “We never have mere sensations,” Greene wrote in the seminar notes. “We always, consciously or unconsciously, interpret our sensations.”87 These interpretations Greene called perceptual facts: those brought under reason.

Greene put aside the linguistic and cultural revolutions in anthropology, sociology, literature, and other fields that had occurred since around 1900.88 One of the

84 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Scholars sometimes associate the linguistic or cultural turns in the American academy with the mid-twentieth century and beyond, often associating these turns with Thomas Kuhn, Clifford Geertz, Noam
reasons that Scottish Common Sense Realism declined as a master philosophy at Princeton and elsewhere was that it considered language and culture to be of secondary importance to innate and universal ideas. The linguistic and cultural revolutions in the social sciences had challenged this Common Sense understanding of the world. They had demonstrated that people interpret the meaning of tables and chairs according to conventional linguistic and cultural norms (indeed, the word for table is different in different cultures), not by employing a universal “faculty of reason” to understand all reality. Using a physical object (such as a table) as an example may have been strategic on Greene’s part; if he had used another example such as facts or ideals about human injustice or gender, he would be in murkier territory. In addition, Greene put aside or minimized the insights of behavioral psychology, which discounted the idea that any kind of a priori or transcendent ideas existed.

In the seminar, Greene observed that man’s “faculty of reason” gives him the power to interpret all brute facts and convert them to perceptual facts. “We not only have

Chomsky, or the French structuralists. However, the linguistic/cultural turn began in its earliest forms around the 1870s and reached a brief heyday in the work of Franz Boas, the Boasian school of anthropology, and the semiotic systems of Ferdinand de Saussure. See P. H. Matthews, A Short History of Structural Linguistics (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and, for the field of anthropology, George W. Stocking, Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology (New York: Free Press, 1968). Also helpful for understanding these early turns in the context of democratic theory and the battles over linguistic and cultural relativism are Andrew Jewett, Science, Democracy, and the American University: From the Civil War to the Cold War (Cambridge University Press, 2012); Edward A. Purcell, The Crisis of Democratic Theory: Scientific Naturalism & the Problem of Value (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1973); John S. Gilkeson, Anthropologists and the Rediscovery of America, 1886–1965 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

For an excellent (primary source) discussion of these controversies in the time period, see David Bidney, “On the Concept of Culture and Some Cultural Fallacies,” American Anthropologist, 46 (1944): 30–44.

the ‘faculty of sensation’ but the ‘faculty’ of reason,” Greene wrote. “By means of reason we can compare different sensory experiences and note their similarities and differences. To note these similarities and differences is to apprehend them conceptually...Let us call these common qualities, so conceived, ‘universals.’”

This set of teachings, just on its own, would have been controversial then as now. What Greene was claiming was that humanity thought (or should think) the same way. He drew upon the old “faculty psychology”—the psychology that had framed and organized the old college curriculum—to argue that all humans possess the same universal faculty of sense and the same universal faculty of reason. Thus, humans, in Greene’s view, always understand the world as an exact representation of the human mind’s own inner structure. United by their common sense, humanity in Greene’s view is universal, not a distinct set of cultures, worldviews, and identities.

Greene continued further than bolstering the Common Sense philosophy. He specified that both reason and sense are necessarily faulty. Not only could humans make a logical or conceptual error; they always try to rely too heavily on their reason or their sense to understand the world. This strategy of Greene’s recalled the Puritan system of thought as Miller described it. Everyday reason and sense always come close to understanding reality but eventually fall tragically short. “Extreme philosophical rationalists,” Greene warned, “have tried to rely solely on reason for a knowledge of the

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objective world. They have tried to deduce such knowledge from pure logic, to discover *apriori* truth (i.e. truth freed from the vicissitudes of day-to-day experience). 18th century continental rationalists exemplify this attempt,” Greene wrote. 95 On the other hand, “Extreme philosophical empiricists, notably the British empiricists, have tended to rely solely on immediate sensation and to distrust all rational interpretation and inference.” 96 Like other Western philosophers, Greene also reduced all Western thought into two dualistic buckets—while claiming that Common Sense is the truly universal path forward to truth.

Greene continued the seminar with the observation that, “Since Kant it has been generally recognized that neither sense nor reason alone can give us knowledge; concepts divorced from sensation are ‘empty’, sensations divorced from conceptual interpretation are ‘blind’. Reason and sense must cooperate to give us truth.” 97 Greene explained that it was the American pragmatists who came the closest of the pagans to making sense and reason cooperate. Their careful and nuanced attempts to understand how people conceptualize their lived experience, as symbolic tools for action, came close to true philosophy and therefore Greene’s fifth stage of higher awareness. 98

Unfortunately, Greene specified, the pragmatists were just about the only recent philosophers to be responsible philosophers of the world of fact and nature. “During the last three hundred years...the philosopher of nature has had little effect on scientific thought, partly because of the inadequacy of philosophical theory, and partly because of

96 Ibid.
97 Ibid.
98 On this point, see van Horn, “The Philosophy of Theodore M. Greene.”
the lack of interest on the part of scientific specialists,” Greene summarized. Accordingly, “Both science and philosophy suffered.”

The problem, for Greene, was that with this failure, human beings were mostly taught reality from scientists—from the Aristotelian side of man. This was dogmatism, he said. Science is only an attempt to systematize the perceptual facts; it can never grasp the brute facts in their original form. “No sharp line can be drawn between perceptual and scientific judgments or ‘facts,’” Greene wrote in the seminar notes. “The latter are merely more inclusive, more abstract, more accurately formulated and more carefully tested than the former.” Yet, problematically, “Scientific knowledge is continually seeping down to the level of ordinary perceptual experience in a popularized form.” In Greene’s view, science was taking over man’s capacity to understand the full dimensions of reality.

Greene also warned that modern “philosophers of science” were gradually trying to replace the natural philosophers of old. These new “philosophers of science,” he indicated, were attempting to bring coherence to all the sciences including the social sciences and, increasingly, parts of the humanities. They were therefore trying to “annex” Humanism, Greene wrote. Although failing to capture the public imagination, these philosophers of science were indeed a threat. Their “theories,” Greene said, were too powerful to ignore. Although Greene did not name names, it is likely he had logical positivists (Austrian philosopher of science Rudolf Carnap especially, who had then emigrated to the U.S. and to a position at the University of Chicago) in mind. As we will

100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
102 For an elaboration of Greene’s point, see van Horn, “The Philosophy of Theodore M. Greene.”
see, the Yale Humanists who wrestle control of the curriculum in Chapter Two were trying to prevent a worldly philosopher of science, F. S. C. Northrop, from gaining power.

Greene’s Common Sense system—applied only to the world of fact—taught students that science and research can only go so far. When Special Program students investigated a problem or a topic, they, too, were limited by the faultiness of reason and sense. They might make errors in investigating the problem, or trust their senses or their reason too heavily. They were likely to abstract their knowledge from its lived experience in order to research and understand it. The result was a loss of cultural and humanistic unity and totality, Greene argued. Thus, a piece of music or an art form had lost its “totality,” its ability to shape and inspire all other things and to give humans a higher reality and purpose. Ultimately, Greene wrote, even Common Sense knowledge was limited because it ignored the higher poetics of pure aesthetic experience—the only kind of experience that Greene believed could inspire men.

Greene then took Special Program students into the world of value—a separate but overlapping world of poetry and aesthetics. He explained that this world of poetic value was supernatural and Divine in origin. It transcended all of the Common Sense

104 This message was repeated in another Special Program seminar, “Facts and Interpretations in Art.” That seminar was devoted to a comprehensive theory of aesthetics. See Divisional Program in the Humanities, “Subject: Facts and Interpretations in Art,” Jan 22, 1940, 1930–1950; Historical Subject Files Collection, Box 38, Folder 5; Princeton University Archives, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Greene explored his comprehensive theory of aesthetics in a published volume, The Arts and the Art of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952).

philosophy that Greene had previously explained. It did not invalidate that world of fact and reason, but rather, he indicated, augmented it and helped to shape it.106

In the world of value, the problem was similar to the problem of Common Sense knowledge. In the last three hundred years, Greene wrote, philosophers of value— theologians, philosophers, poets, and liberal churchmen—were reducing value to mere sensations and emotions. They were making value subjective and conditional. Here it was John Stuart Mill and his followers, as well as some liberal Protestants, who came under special scorn. “It is a mistake to ‘reduce’ all value judgments to pleasure and pain as it is reduce all knowledge to sensation,” Greene wrote.107 Values are transcendent and objective, Greene specified—they come from knowledge of the “Good,” which is Divine and above rationality and human insight. “When the question of the ‘truth’ of value judgments arises at this level the criterion of truth tends to be utilitarian and hedonistic,” Greene warned. “Actions and objects are judged by their effects, and these effects tend to be considered good or bad depending upon whether they yield pleasure or pain.”108

The true Humanist transcends these utilitarian and hedonistic errors. Using his God-appointed special gifts, he reaches beyond this world of appearances and pleasures into the world of “critical values” or “intrinsic values,” Greene specified, which exist beyond humankind itself. These intrinsic values were “moral, aesthetic and religious.”109 They were objective and total governing structures of all humanity.

107 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
109 Ibid.
However, Greene recognized that a problem remained for Humanists. What prevented them from distorting these values, in the same manner as scientists and the "common man" did to brute facts? What enabled them to have special access to a higher power that was beyond human reason and sense? This is where popular theologians had erred, Greene wrote—they were led astray by individual subjectivity. “The great difficulty of testing the accuracy of such conclusions has in all ages led certain thinkers into subjectivism and hedonism. Those skeptics argue that values are not objective at all but are mere unconscious projections into the objective world of subjective emotive experiences which are more or less pleasurable depending on the particular agent.”

Thus, these theologians were also sensationalists, according to Greene; they only trusted their individual sensations and interpretations. Here, Greene attacked theologians who (he believed) had fully accepted David Hume’s separation of fact and value. Their departure from knowledge of the objective and total “Good” led them to abandon Plato and God for Aristotelian fact-finding in the phenomenal world. Thus, humanity was left bereft of any critical or intrinsic values that superseded subjective experience.

On the other hand, theological rationalists (here Greene likely had Catholic theologians in mind) claimed to discover everything by their God-given reason. This, too, was dogmatism, because God can never be truly known (in the Humanist view). According to Greene and the Humanists, God is the ultimate mystery and searching for

110 Ibid.
that ultimate mystery is the meaning of life and thus the main objective of education, politics, and everything else.\textsuperscript{111}

This analysis led to the real problem that concerned the Humanists: it was not just the lack of God’s ultimate authority that bothered them, but the lack of any authority in the West. This is how the West would fall in the world crisis, they warned. It would fall through a lack of \textit{any} authority—because the only thing that currently ruled it (according to the Humanists) was individual subjectivity and technical science.

So, how could Humanists understand and access objective reality and restore both authority and God? First, they should return to the word of Plato, who had systematized reality into a comprehensive whole that was unified, transcendent, and unbreakable. Plato was the only pagan philosopher to unify sense and reason into a grand system, the Humanists said. Plato’s “systematic approach to Reality,” Greene said, was “the systematic, not historical, approach; philosophy seeks to discover the \textit{abiding} characteristics of Reality in all its many aspects, and the \textit{abiding} relation of those characteristics to one another.”\textsuperscript{112} The true philosopher can only touch every type of knowledge by following the direct authority of Plato’s dialogues and system. Only then can these new philosopher-kings avoid subjectivity and sensationalism. In this sense, the Humanists considered Plato to be something like a God, or part of God. Plato was the word of God, the \textit{logos}, in pagan form.

\textsuperscript{111}I interpret this view of the Humanists from their writings, from the seminar notes, and from Miller’s systemization of Puritan thought. In general, the Humanists avoided talking directly about modern Catholics. However, as I will show in the forthcoming section on the “Man and His Freedom” course, the Humanists clearly had modern or liberal Catholicism in mind as an opponent. An excellent overview of the modern Catholic system of thought and its influence in mid-twentieth-century higher education is Philip Gleason, \textit{Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

By following Plato’s word, the true philosopher tastes every aspect and every kind of knowledge—both secular and Divine. He merges secular and Divine knowledge together, in a single monism. He “seeks to transcend the specialist’s provincialism and to achieve a world-outlook; he tries to offer as coherent an account of Reality as a whole as does the specialist in his domain,” Greene wrote in the seminar notes. The Humanist thus determines and tries to influence all of humanity’s common sense and normative values, but he does not do this subjectively or dogmatically (according to the Humanists). The responsible Humanist instead checks his judgments against the words and system of Plato, and second, with the words of the Old and New Testaments and interpreters of that tradition (select theologians, especially St. Augustine).

In addition, the true Humanist can no longer make these judgments and normative interpretations by himself. In previous eras, a lone Humanist—John Milton was offered as a frequent example—typically attempted to provide a poetic interpretation of all Divine and secular knowledge and inspire humanity as a whole. This was no longer really possible, the Humanists said. Thus, the Special Program and the Princeton Humanist group itself were attempts to collectively shape normative experiences for all humanity, avoiding the lone wolf problem of the past. The Humanists would check their judgments with each other—what they called “Criticism.”

This collective normative production would also avoid charges of dogmatism and ideology, the Humanists thought. One of the major issues with the previous dominance of

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113 Ibid.
114 As Miller noted, the importance of St. Augustine to the Puritan system of thought cannot be overstated. Likewise, the Princeton Humanists often drew upon Augustinian concepts.
Christian Humanism (positioned as the 1600s to 1800s), they believed, was that those previous Humanists were nevertheless accused of ideology. However, the Princeton Humanists were convinced that their system was less prone to such charges, since it depended on collective judgment and production. When Special Program students pursued projects or work after graduation, they would not all produce a singular Protestant culture in lockstep. There was no absolute, as there was in Fascism or Communism (or, they imagined, in Catholicism). Rather, Humanists would check their results with each other through mutual criticism, as well as produce diverse works of art, leadership and statesmanship that lacked a centralized blueprint.

These works would not try to precisely mimic Plato or the Bible, either; it is not as if the Humanists were trying to get Americans to read Plato or the Bible or follow those lessons to a tee. Rather, Humanists would take the lessons of Plato and the Bible and use these lessons to help guide contemporary affairs, including understandings of science, politics, and society. To give examples, when judging educational reform movements, art, or findings in chemistry, the Humanists would apply both their Common Sense reasoning and readings of Plato and the Bible in order to come up with conclusions that they would offer to others. Or, when creating a piece of art, a novel, or leading a university, they would consult these sources when making creative decisions. As long as the two ultimate sources of authority (Plato and God) were kept, America and the world would keep ideals of freedom and truth at the forefront of their minds, the Humanists thought. At the very least, Americans and the free peoples of the world would be less inclined to question everything and would instead defer to authority in some fashion—
even if it were the authority of more popular art and opinion rather than grand works such as Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

To choose the correct students to carry out this task, the Humanists looked for several qualities. First, they looked for polymaths: students who were extremely intelligent in many different fields. The Humanists desired students who could write a symphony by day and solve a problem in calculus by night. Polymaths were the students who could truly understand all of this philosophy and system building; students who were not polymaths only favored their Platonic or Aristotelian sides (or were simply not intelligent enough), according to the Humanists. The Humanists desired reproductions of themselves: true Protestants and Christians who united the Platonic and Aristotelian sides of humanity together in a unity of truth. They seemed to also view high intelligence as a God-given gift that would be shameful not to exploit for the benefit of all.

In addition, the Humanists searched for students who seemed to be searching for some kind of authority in their own lives. According to a graduate of the Special Program, freshmen were typically “caught in the web” of the Humanists when they lingered after an introductory humanities class to ask probing questions of the Humanists.\(^{116}\)

Normally, typical Princeton students kept their distance from the Humanists. The Humanists could be harsh and cold at times, especially when students dismissed their views as subjective or irrational.\(^{117}\) The Humanists likely viewed these criticisms as

\(^{116}\) Irwin, “Special Program in the Humanities at Princeton.”

\(^{117}\) See Princeton student views collected in Material for Proposed Newsweek Feature Write-Up by W. Irwin - Includes report on Views of 9 Undergraduates.
blasphemous to God or irresponsible and shortsighted. “Too many of our students today are mentally or morally undisciplined, factually uninformed, culturally unintegrated, spiritually disillusioned or dogmatic and socially irresponsible,” Greene complained of the typical Princeton undergraduate.  

In contrast, good candidates for the Special Program were deferential to the learned authority of the Humanists. These special candidates approached the Humanists and their teachings in a different way—they were more open to figuring them out or understanding them. They often raised their hands in class to ask probing questions, or, more often, lingered after class to ask deep questions about the Humanist teachings. This lingering usually led to invitations to dinner with one of the Humanists. Over dinner, the selected Humanist would act like Socrates: showing extreme confidence, asking probing questions of the student, and taking special interest in the student’s career. Suddenly—at least according to student accounts—the student would find his entire career carefully plotted out. The select Humanist mentor would choose the student’s courses, guide him toward a thesis topic, and invite him to special dinners and functions. Now, the “tapped” student was “caught in the web”; he would apply to the Special Program, which would guide him further and unite him with fellow Humanists-in-training.

In addition to this kind of selection process, the Humanists also actively recruited students from high school age. The Humanists did not offer admission into the program, but rather sold the program as a special opportunity to succeed at Princeton. Looking for

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118 Quoted in “The Special Program in the Humanities,” News Clippings and Press Releases; 1936–1998; Historical Subject Files Collection, Box 38, Folder 4; Princeton University Archives, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.
119 Irwin, “Special Program in the Humanities at Princeton.”
120 Ibid.
young polymaths and sensitive souls, they hoped that these students would succeed in their first semester and apply for the program.¹²¹

Typically, the Humanists searched for high school recruits from the private high schools and boarding schools in New England.¹²² They maintained strong connections to these private and boarding schools, believing that these institutions had maintained their Reformed Protestant character and mission.¹²³ In turn, Special Program graduates often became leaders of the private and boarding schools, ensuring cultural reproduction.

As these burgeoning Humanists-in-training became acquainted with every type of knowledge and truth, the Humanist mentors also guided them toward wisdom, regeneration, and grace. These qualities were viewed as intangibles that provided confidence and calmness—trust in God’s will. Wisdom, justice, and grace were thus seen as another aspect of religion—there was the main purpose of guiding Americans but there was also a corollary purpose of achieving God’s grace and seeking rebirth. This achievement of grace led Special Program students to certain passages from the Bible and ways of understanding the Bible.

The Religious Program and the Achievement of Grace

In the late 1930s, the Humanists added a separate Religious Program alongside the Special Program. The Religious Program, which included several courses and related campus programming, augmented the Special Program as well as taught all Princeton

¹²¹ Ibid.
¹²² Ibid.
students how to understand the true meaning of Christianity. (After World War II, all Princeton students were required to take a religious studies course—a requirement that lasted through the Cold War and remains today in the form of a required ethics course). The Religious Program emphasized how the “Christian-Hebraic” or simply “Hebrew” element of Western culture was in decline and needed to be bolstered. The Hebrew element, the Humanists stated, was the element of Christianity that was transcendent and supernatural, rather than natural or rational; it would provide Americans with clarity, conviction, and confidence that secular philosophy could not provide.

At first, it may seem somewhat odd that a group of Reformed Protestants pronounced this true understanding of Christianity as “Hebrew.” Yet, the way the Humanists described the Hebrew tradition was not necessarily to accentuate its Jewish elements so much as to accentuate the spiritual and supernatural elements of the Old Testament. According to the Humanists, the “Hebrew culture was the only one of those of the ancient world powerful enough to resist absorption by the Greek.” This was essential, for, as early Reformed Protestants had recognized, Plato (and especially Aristotle) must be matched by carefully selected Christian texts in order to guide man’s freedom to Christian and Protestant directions. A purely pagan education would be disastrous, the Humanists believed, because it gave little “sanction” (teleology, purpose,

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126 *Report of the Special Committee of the Faculty on Religious Education*. 
A pagan education might create the impression that humanity alone is entirely self-sufficient.

Perhaps reflecting their view that a restored Humanist education still began with Plato, the Humanists did not organize this Religious Program until after Greene’s foundational intellectual system was in place. In the late 1930s, following the establishment of the Special Program, the Humanists hired George Thomas to be the first director of the new Religious Program and Professor of Religious Thought. Thomas oversaw the new Department of Religion as well as the infusion of religious courses and ideas into the Princeton general education curriculum.

Thomas was an ideal choice. A friend of Greene’s, he was a Platonist as well as a Christian theist. “Platonists have always insisted upon the ultimate identity of beauty, truth and goodness,” Thomas wrote in his unpublished memoirs, “My Story.” “Much of my reading and thinking in philosophy has been motivated by an effort to show that the Idealistic and Biblical view of the world and man is not an arbitrary product of imagination but is supported by reason and experience.” Thomas gave this philosophy the title “poetry,” explaining that his “Platonism” was a view of the universe as poetic justice for the chosen people. Thomas contrasted his view with the cold facts of history and the historians, that, he said, provided little meaning and narrative direction to the human race.

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127 Greene, “Christian Education and Democracy”.
128 “My Story by George Thomas”.
129 Ibid. See also the essay “Poetry, History, and the Good,” Essays on Poetry, Imagination, and Religion; circa 1940s; George F. Thomas Papers, Box 1 Folder 5; Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.
Thomas was to guide Princetonians and all Americans toward a calm and focused future. This was an essential role in order to prevent the Greek or pagan element of Western culture from overwhelming humanity with its dry light of inquiry. Without grace, even Plato could be used for the wrong purposes. (Indeed, during the 1930s and 1940s, some Western scholars accused Platonic writings of inspiring Hitler and the Fascists).  

To achieve grace, Thomas would move Princetonians and all Americans from studying the “origins” of humanity (Plato’s system) to understanding the lessons of Jesus Christ. The Religious Program material made this movement from the origins to Christ clear:

We go to the Old Testament and the New to find the best presentation of what Religion is, but not...to study the origin of these religious forces. It is an aberration of the historical method to confuse the origins of a thing with the thing itself. It is impossible to begin the study of anything with its origins when the student does not know the things he is seeking the origins of. The study of the earliest manifestations of religious forces in the human race, that is to say, primitive religions, is valuable afterward; but the start should be in a developed portrayal of what religion is, and that portrayal is in the Old and New Testaments.  

According to this statement, the purpose of studying the Bible is to understand grace in action. It is to understand Right Reason and true grace. Reading the Bible is not an emotional experience, in the view of the Humanists. Rather, the Bible is the best depiction of the ideal human society; it is the depiction of the Ideal in its perfect state. What the Bible does is portray the laws of human society, Thomas and the Humanists

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131 *Report of the Special Committee of the Faculty on Religious Education*. 
stated. It guides action and therefore justice, not evangelical revival or the origins of the Ideal itself.\textsuperscript{132}

Here, the Humanists were responding to both the rise of evangelicalism, on the one side, and the higher/historical criticism of the Bible (or “science of religion”), on the other side. Against evangelicalism, they resisted a purely emotional reading of the Bible as a born-again experience centered in the atonement of Jesus Christ. The Humanists were sympathetic to spiritual rebirth but viewed such emotionally driven experiences as irrational. Simultaneously, they reacted against the higher criticism, which had subjected the Bible to historical and scientific inquiry. The Bible was everything, in the view of the Humanists; it was both life and truth. The Bible was Right Reason and the expression of the perfect moral will.\textsuperscript{133} To put their views another way, the Bible was the drama of all humanity—to which Plato was a major contributing author.

The Humanists considered these competing religious forces (evangelicalism, historical and scientific criticism) to be major barriers to understanding the true meaning of the Bible, and therefore, the Bible’s meaning for general and liberal education. “The various forces, religious, moral, and intellectual, of this powerful religion working in us, consciously and unconsciously, to this day make nonsense and confusion of our thinking and actions unless we are able to understand them and know what they are,” the Humanists wrote.\textsuperscript{134} To find their essence—their shape, structure, and meaning for all truth and reality—was the goal of liberal or self-education.

\textsuperscript{132} Humanities 201–202: The Western Tradition: Man and his Freedom; 1948–1955.  
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{134} Report of the Special Committee of the Faculty on Religious Education.
According to the Humanists, most cultures left out the Bible and its living truths from liberal education. “The central religious force in the culture of which we are a product is, and has been, without dispute, Christianity,” the Humanists wrote in a report on religion. “So the object of religion for us should first be an understanding of what Christianity is—a difficult but fundamental goal.” Yet, since “it has not been part of liberal humanistic training,” the Humanists aimed to re-insert it. 135

Read in the correct ways, the Old Testament provided a teleology and set of laws for God’s elect. “If the Greek amalgam,” they said, “chiefly bred our art and science, and philosophy, we owe chiefly to the Hebrew the religious and moral elements of our civilization.” 136 From the Old Testament, they stated, “there emerges a sense of the purpose of time and of its significance.” 137 If Plato and the Greeks provided no specific destiny, the Old Testament gave Christians a “purpose, a direction, and a goal” that was the realization of God’s Kingdom on Earth as in heaven. 138

Thus properly conceived, the Bible provided the laws and will of God. These laws included the notion that no man is an island; his freedom depends on the freedom of others but ultimately on the divine will of God. 139 Princetonians and all free peoples must listen to God’s word as he spoke through the Bible, they argued. “The Kingdom of God is a real social order in which God reigns,” George Thomas stated. 140 Without this “check,” the “individual is faced by the alternatives of bitter pessimism or of emotional

135 Ibid.
136 Ibid.
137 Ibid.
138 Ibid. This was also a goal shared by liberal Protestants.
140 Ibid.
intoxication,” while society faces “extremes first of tyranny and then of anarchy, and both destroy its liberty.\textsuperscript{141}

To counteract the messages of authority and depravity, however, the Humanists turned to the New Testament. As opposed to the “Hebrew” element of fire and brimstone, the New Testament, they said, offers more hope and optimism. The life of Jesus, presented through the Gospels, gives humanity a promise of continuous rebirth and renewal. “The fulfillment in Christianity occurred and is concentrated in the life and teaching of a single individual, Jesus Christ,” the Humanists wrote. “The peculiar power of this concentration is exactly in its human and personal presentation and implications. It is not only in the teaching, but also in the life which the teaching is infused…[The Gospels] are themselves infused with that sense of purpose in action and events, inherited from the Hebrew tradition, which moves their historical validity into the future.”\textsuperscript{142}

Echoing evangelicalism but discarding the emotional revivalism, the Humanists placed the Gospels as directly shaping current events and even “facts.”\textsuperscript{143} The Gospels for the Humanists cause "the powerful religious forces they embody to be immediately experienceable to our own day” and influence the “facts of history”—causing a “dynamic and purposeful interfusion” of historical facts with religion.\textsuperscript{144}

Perhaps it is now easier to grasp how the Princeton Humanists attempted to fuse utilitarian American interests with a realization of God’s Divine will. The two were hardly divorced in their system of thought. The United States was the chosen nation, and

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{142} Report of the Special Committee of the Faculty on Religious Education.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid.
its Christian people were the chosen people, they agreed. Thus conceived, the role of the elect, as it had been in the old Puritanism or “Christian Humanism” of yesterday, was to guide the masses toward justice.

Yet, who among the Christians would lead the masses? Believing Protestant culture to be produced by righteous people, the Humanists also viewed their task as fighting liberal Protestants and skeptics who were destroying or failing to guard the unity of truth.

**Fighting Protestant Culturalists and Skeptics**

Sometime after he retired as Dean of Princeton College, Christian Gauss, an ally of the Humanists, sat down to write his autobiography. Although Gauss never published it, the autobiography could have been titled “Man and His Freedom.” As Gauss reviewed his life, he centered his self-analysis on the question: what did it mean for humankind to be free?\(^{145}\)

Gauss believed this perennial question had become popular and important again in mid-century America. In the 1920s and 1930s, he reflected, Americans began to seriously question the direction of their society. What had modernity brought them? He believed that Americans were now living through all of the “stages of the race,” and that modernity had brought them to a precipice. Now, according to Gauss, they needed to

\(^{145}\) Drafts; undated; Christian Gauss Papers, Box 4 Folder 1; Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.
make a leap into a higher stage of existence usually reserved for kings, theologians, poets, and true philosophers.\textsuperscript{146}

As he probed inward to the development of his own freedom, Gauss observed that he had personally lived through all of these “stages of the race” and therefore possessed special insight into selecting the next step for Americans. Citing the nineteenth-century natural philosopher and psychologist G. Stanley Hall, Gauss reflected:

The most significant single thing about me is that I have lived through and actually experienced all the various stages...into my single life there have been compressed all the stages in the three thousand years in the history of civilized man as a result of conditions that will probably never again be repeated.\textsuperscript{147}

It is difficult to know what Gauss precisely meant by the “stages of the race,” but his stage theory seems similar to Greene’s. Further, Gauss’s autobiography reflected a transcendental idea of freedom as something non-material. For Gauss, the material progression of human history did not mean progress; rather, freedom was something spiritual and intrinsic.

In another essay, “Are We Decadent?”, Gauss wrote that Western man was looking for new values from new leaders. The scientists, secular philosophers, and specialists had led the West to an abyss, he said. “We have referred our problem to specialists, to economists, to political leaders, to scientists,” he wrote. They have not come up with an “energizing principle that releases our energies and directs them toward larger, achievable ends.” Gauss repeated these messages of decline in his 1934 book, A

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
Primer for Tomorrow: Being an Introduction to Contemporary Civilization. In that book, he similarly positioned Christianity as the “energizing principle” for the future.

Before joining the Princeton Humanists, Gauss was a Protestant Culturalist who typically preferred to think critically about different cultural value systems. However, a fight with a scientist at Princeton changed his mind. Following that fight, he jumped toward what he called the “bandwagon” of the Humanists, despite misgivings about actively joining their camp. The support of Dean Gauss helped make the Humanist programs a key part of Princeton’s curriculum and pave the way toward the creation of the “Man and His Freedom” course.

With Gauss’s support, the Humanists also thwarted attempts by other Protestant Culturalists to offer up a more descriptive, historical curriculum that would show Protestantism as a cultural phenomenon. Other Protestant Culturalists wanted to use history—defined in a more secular fashion as the material progress of time—as a window into the relative strengths of Protestantism vis-a-vis other religious and ethno-religious traditions. In addition to thwarting these attempts to use secular history to ground the curriculum, Humanists also thwarted attempts by scientists to reform Princeton along the model of the natural sciences.

In the process, the Princeton Humanists also attacked what they perceived to be an overreliance at Princeton on the Common Sense tradition. That philosophy of

148 “Are We Decadent?”; 1934–1936; Christian Gauss Papers, Box 17 Folder 1; Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; Gauss, A Primer for Tomorrow: Being an Introduction to Contemporary Civilization (New York, London: Scribner, 1934).
149 Christian Gauss to Paul Elmer More, February 18, 1930, Gauss, Christian, 6 letters; 1918–1921 1929–1930 1915; Paul Elmer More Papers, Box 3 Folder 33; Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.
Common Sense gave American elites a too-simple division of labor between science and religion, the Humanists argued. In the view of the Humanists, sinful moderns had increasingly violated that division of labor in any case, driving supernatural principles out from civilization and causing humankind to be bereft of its animating ideals. They saw their efforts as a rebalancing act—one that must be fought at home as well as beyond the campus. This rebalancing act meant pulling back on science and the Common Sense tradition and restoring religious authority.

The scientific ethos was making its way into the undergraduate curriculum. Biological evolution and natural science courses, as well as introductory surveys in the social sciences, had gained in popularity. In the 1920s, pioneering social scientists at Princeton had launched a historical and economic course that treated religion as simply another category of analysis.150

This debate about the future leadership of Princeton and humankind led Dean Gauss to switch sides and ally himself with the Humanists. Gauss fought a high profile fight with Princeton biologist Edwin Grant Conklin in particular. Gauss and Conklin spent the spring and summer of 1930 dueling words.

At the time, Edwin Grant Conklin was perhaps the nation’s most recognized biological scientist and proponent of natural scientific knowledge becoming a new ethical creed. His research in cells helped revolutionize biology. A respected teacher, Conklin chaired the Princeton Biology Department for many years and introduced undergraduates

150 See Kemeny, Princeton in the Nation’s Service; This course is briefly described in James K. Baker, "The Evolution of the Concept of General Education" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1947), 173. My thanks go to historian Kevin Zayed for providing me with a copy of this older and well-researched dissertation.
to the scientific methods of biologists. According to Conklin, biology provided a new ethical system for all humanity that would largely replace Protestant Christianity and the old Idealistic system.

A strong proponent of Darwinian evolutionary theories, and a leading member of the American Eugenics movement, Conklin’s social theories were well known. He was an outspoken believer in the unity of knowledge—but his theory was that it was science, and particularly biology, which would bring about God’s Kingdom on Earth and unite both the fields of learning and the world’s peoples and races as one. In Conklin’s view, the universe properly understood had an interconnected biological structure, which Conklin associated with a Christian worldview of holism. Thus, for Conklin, Protestant Christianity as a religion could also be enriched by science and connected with other world religions, extending rather than diminishing its power and influence. Science would give humankind a new type of ethical structure—a new religion—that would ideally replace and supersede Protestantism, but not abandon its ideas altogether.\(^{151}\)

Conklin’s views are an example of how many scientific thinkers of the era saw little conflict between science and religion. They saw science as either replacing religion or strengthening it, leading to what John Dewey hoped would become “a common faith” in scientific inquiry and discovery.\(^{152}\) Conklin also tended to identify this scientific notion

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of the interconnected universe and democracy as communal, stressing its social (and perhaps vaguely socialist), rather than its individualist, aspects.153

Although I found no record of a major push by Conklin to reform Princeton in congruence with his theories, his views were well known. Other leading biologists had pushed for required biological evolution courses to ground a new core curriculum. In the early 1920s, Dartmouth College became one of the first of the historic, old Christian colleges to institute a required Evolution course in the freshman year—an invention of Conklin’s colleague, biologist William Patten.154

Conklin’s views fit the Protestant Culturalist position. He hoped for a curriculum that would be more descriptive than prescriptive. Instead of self-enlightenment and an ascent to grace, Conklin preferred to use biology as a series of descriptive examples of how humans should act and behave.

In May, 1930, Dean Gauss lashed out at Conklin’s and the scientists’ views. In “The Threat of Science,” published in Scribner’s, Gauss wrote that scientists were becoming “amoral” by threatening to trespass into the realm of the humanities. Gauss insinuated that scientists and scientific thinkers were sinners. By promising that science could improve humankind through the extension of the scientific method to human affairs, scientists were violating the established division of labor and causing the unity of truth to collapse. Only a restored Christian idealism, Gauss argued, could provide


Gauss clearly felt that it was not just religion that it would suffer; Democracy, civilization, and “culture” more generally would suffer, he wrote. For Gauss, “culture” meant a dominant Protestant culture. According to the Dean, the more science explored human affairs, the more it threatened to annex Protestant authority. Thus, for Gauss, “The Threat of Science” was also a threat to Protestant culture.\footnote{Gauss, “The Threat of Science.” The Dean repeated these views in \textit{A Primer for Tomorrow}.}

A few months later, Conklin responded to Dean Gauss. Walking up to the podium at Brown University to deliver a graduate school commencement address, Conklin took the opportunity to criticize Gauss directly. This address, published as “Science and the Future of Man,” called out Gauss as a conservative enemy. Conklin claimed that Gauss had been brainwashed by Paul Elmer More and other “Humanists.” Conklin detected elements of “orthodoxy” in Gauss’s \textit{Scribner’s} article; he argued that the kind of orthodox “Humanism” that Gauss was now peddling would destroy a burgeoning, free democracy as a beacon to the world.\footnote{Edwin Grant Conklin, “Science and the Future of Man,” \textit{Brown University Papers}, IX (June 14, 1930).}

Conklin even made the bold statement that social “revolutionaries” abroad—by which he seemed to mean Marxists and socialists—were pioneering a new kind of “freedom” based in social and natural science.\footnote{Ibid.} Although Conklin did not elaborate, a link between a socialized science and Communism was by then becoming known and
controversial. Educated readers may have understood that Conklin was developing a link between a natural and social science under a socialized political system and the Marxist philosophy. Conklin concluded the article by presenting a choice: Americans could either join the international “revolution” by embracing the scientific revolution, or they could lapse into orthodoxy, tradition, and—by extension—despair.

This exchange illustrates the stakes of the debate, as the combatants equated the future of Protestantism, humankind, and Democracy together, along with the future of science. The exchange also led Gauss to switch sides. Abandoning a more neutral Protestant Culturist position, Gauss joined the Princeton Humanists. “It struck me as about time that someone should present the claims of the humanities and at least intimate that they have a place,” Gauss wrote to Paul Elmer More. “I have swung a little further to the humanistic attitude. I am perhaps taking the first step to your bandwagon but even so life may never be pleasant for me again on this Princeton campus...As I am afraid I will have no friends left among the scientists I may have to snuggle up a bit closer to you humanists.” Gauss did not seem entirely happy about "snuggling up" to the Humanists, but he seemed increasingly convinced their program was the only hope for the future of man.

Later in 1930, Gauss wrote to Conklin directly. “The spirit in which you took me over the coals was fair and friendly,” Gauss began the letter to Conklin. In “calmer moments,” Gauss might agree that science and religion could be united together in global harmony. However, these were not “calm moments,” Gauss wrote. “I do believe you

159 See Jewett, *Science, Democracy, and the American University*, 243-250 for a discussion of these controversies.
160 Gauss to More, February 18, 1930.
people are running away with civilization’s apple cart,” he finished the letter to
Conklin.\textsuperscript{161} Gauss referred to scientists as “you people,” arguing that they were stealing
away civilization’s best-laid plans.

This attempt by scientists and others to annex civilization required a warlike
defense of Humanism. “If we are not to be overwhelmed today by mob hysteria and anti-
humanistic propaganda, humanists must, as Thomas Mann has urged, become ‘militant’
and boldly proclaim the faith that is in them,” Greene wrote in \textit{The Meaning of the
Humanities}.\textsuperscript{162} Christian Gauss agreed. In an early 1940s essay, Gauss wrote that the true
“totalitarians” were all those who subscribed to modernity, naturalism, and historicism,
while Humanists were true liberals who proudly proclaimed that, “Man is the master of
history.” Through his free will and his personal communion with an authoritative God,
the true Protestant determines his fate and the fate of others, according to Gauss.\textsuperscript{163}

Gauss later wrote that too many modern historians were becoming totalitarian.
“Too many historians put the cart before the horse, then step out in front of the cart and
think they are leading the parade,” he wrote in a letter about the errors of fellow
Christians.\textsuperscript{164} In his autobiography, Gauss elaborated that, “Our age has come to believe
more and more that it is history which reveals to us the meaning of our lives. Historians
tell us that only out of a study of the past can we understand our own experience. I have
come to suspect this is not true.” Gauss believed that, instead, “The reverse of this is

\begin{enumerate}
\item\textsuperscript{161} Christian Gauss to Edwin Grant Conklin, October 25, 1930, C: Miscellaneous; 1935–1945; Christian
\hspace{1em} Gauss Papers, Box 57 Folder 16; Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special
\hspace{1em} Collections, Princeton University Library.
\item\textsuperscript{162} Ibid, xvi.
\item\textsuperscript{163} Gauss, “Peace at Gettysburg,” undated.
\item\textsuperscript{164} Christian Gauss to E. Harris Harbison, October 28, 1942, Harbison, E.H.: 1936–1944; Christian Gauss
\hspace{1em} Papers, Box 63 Folder 19; Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections,
\hspace{1em} Princeton University Library.
\end{enumerate}
much nearer to the truth. My thesis therefore is this. Only out of our own experience can we understand the meaning of our own lives and the lives of others.” In other words, it is only through a Protestant realization of Divine judgment that history made any sense at all.

The Humanists used the word “vacuum” to describe this atmosphere of historical criticism and distrust of God’s will:

Today the young man has ordinarily received no systematic or disciplined religious instruction either in his home or in his church; if, indeed, he belongs to one. But, on the surface, he is not innocent of religious notions on that account. He will have an accretion of odds and ends, dogmas of various descriptions; prejudices new and old; for him inextricably mixed up with scientific theories, social theories, political theories, in a conglomeration which unfortunately seems to harden with age and to crack under the pressure of his own living. And underneath all this is nothing very deep, nothing very fundamental so far as an understanding of the religious forces is concerned. Yet this vacuum is not without value since it makes so apparent what may be done, and offers so little resistance to the doing of it. To build up systematically a knowledge of what religion is by the study of it—for us a study of its manifestation in Judaism and Christianity recorded in the Bible—is the first necessity for supplying that medium of communication for the free discussion of the religious forces and for the annihilation of that vacuum which keeps otherwise intelligent people from any understanding of what these forces really are.

For the Humanists and their allies, the pervasive naturalism of the last three hundred years had created a spiritual “vacuum” that must be annihilated—not merely tolerated.

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165 Drafts; undated; Christian Gauss Papers.
166 Report of the Special Committee of the Faculty on Religious Education.
The scientists and scientific thinkers had crossed the line in making this naturalism seem like the only truth, Greene wrote.167

Other Princeton Humanists explained their philosophy of action and warfare in starker terms. “Secularism is the theory that men should seek ends which are exclusively human and natural,” argued George Thomas. “Its sting is in its assumption that all ends which claim to transcend nature and human life are illusory.” For Thomas, Naturalism and Secularism were virtually one and the same; they both rejected “Supernaturalism” as well as “philosophical Idealism,” he wrote. To combat Naturalism and Secularism, Thomas argued that true leaders must affirm that “…the human spirit and its values are rooted in an eternal spiritual life,” a commitment common to both Supernaturalism and philosophical Idealism, he believed.168

Robert F. Goheen, Princeton Humanist and, later, president of Princeton (1957–1972), expressed this warlike sensibility with the metaphor of a boxing match. In the “Man and His Freedom” course that Goheen later pioneered, Goheen told his students that, “Modern naturalism has, in fact, been helped to what many regard as the world’s permanent Heavy-weight championship.” In order to combat the modern heavyweight champion, Goheen believed that Princeton must take a long-range view and revive a “degutted humanism and decapitated Christianity” to the “title World’s best view of man.”169

167 van Horn, “The Philosophy of Theodore M. Greene.”
168 “Religion in an Age of Secularism,” General; 1935–1941; Office of the Secretary Records, Box 14, Folder 7; Princeton University Archives, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.
Princeton President Harold Dodds (1933–1957), who preceded and prefigured Goheen, related these ideas to both to the future of American “liberalism” and to the historic conflict with Communism. “This issue between dialectical materialism and liberalism is the modern version of the age-old contest of the body versus the spirit,” Dodds wrote in his book, *Out of This Nettle, Danger* (1943). “Because of the very limitations it imposes upon itself science can provide no answer...The liberal believes that ‘history is a spiritual achievement’, not merely the reflected image of an economic order.” The true “ethic of liberalism,” Dodds wrote, is the “Christian ethic,” which Dodds equated with a spiritual or immaterial conception of history.  

Christian Gauss also compared this true “ethic” of liberalism to the secret weapon of the dictatorships. The differences were not actually that different, he observed. The secret of such dictatorships, Gauss wrote, was their recognition of the human need for idealism. Cynical as they might be, perhaps, Gauss found that dictators at least recognized that humans wanted to be genuinely inspired. “The dictatorships hold over us one important advantage,” Gauss wrote in his unpublished essay, “Peace at Gettysburg.” “They are dynamic, are moved by an active inner principle. That is why for years they have possessed the initiative. The democracies, on the other hand, have been content with the status quo. To be complacent about the status quo is not a source of strength.”  

For Gauss, as for Presidents Dodds and Goheen, the Christian ethic (which for Gauss recalled

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170 Quoted in Princeton Essays on Liberal Education, Office of the Secretary Records, Box 69, Folder 1; Princeton University Archives, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. See also Harold W. Dodds, *Out of This Nettle, Danger* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1943).

171 Gauss, “Peace at Gettysburg”.
Abraham Lincoln and his Gettysburg speech) was the source of inner strength and purpose.

The existence of a spiritual vacuum was not just a violation of God’s will, then. It was a major weakness in the Western world crisis, according to the Princeton Humanists. Gauss joined the Humanists in arguing that the West lacked an idealistic vocabulary that would make Westerners motivated to action—to fight.

Gauss also believed that this problem had been faced before. “This is why Plato, in an age when civilization had already passed its peak, held that if men are to be well governed, they must be governed by a philosopher king.” They must, Gauss wrote, be governed by “a unitary world...that is governed by laws.” The Greeks, he said, also recognized that these “laws” must co-exist with a conception of a Divine cosmos and a transcendental notion of truth.\(^{172}\) Here again, the worlds of high church Protestantism and classicism blended into one another, providing a set of ideals that would guide humanity toward action.

Through his analysis, Gauss was finally able to identify a hidden enemy within. The hidden enemy, for him—and increasingly, for the rest of the Princeton Humanists—was the historians. It was they who gave the world a “new materialism,” Gauss wrote, in which “men do not make history...they are only the products of history.” Gauss called these modern, progressive historians vile “nationalists,” who hold “that the individual does not exist for his own sake, but for the interest of the state.”\(^{173}\) According to Gauss, the historians were the hidden problem; it was they, more than the scientists and scientific

\(^{172}\) Ibid.
\(^{173}\) Ibid.
thinkers, who were reshaping the moral order, debasing Protestantism, and causing humankind to surrender to barbarism and anarchy.

This identification of the real threat as the historians led to fights even with allies of Humanism, including E. Harris Harbison (art history)—who taught occasionally in the Special Program. Harbison wrote to Gauss that he feared the Humanist assertion that Protestantism stood above history in some kind of metaphysical state of being. Harbison argued with Gauss that putting Christianity above time and place was akin to the Fascists’ placing of the German will above history. In Harbison’s view, it came dangerously close to nihilism and the end of truth. For if history was no longer “rationally intelligible,” Harbison warned, it would not be worth studying at all and history would, in a sense, cease to exist as a unifying agent of humankind. All events would seem “unique and unpredictable,” a state of affairs in which “the Nazi view of history as sheer creation of will...is correct,” even if the Nazis ultimately lost the physical battle. Harbison warned that the Humanists were risking the imposition of “irrational voluntarism” on humankind, a kind of eternal subjectivity that “worries me a helluva lot.”

Indeed, the Humanist view—that Protestantism stood in a supernatural or metaphysical state above history—angered even supportive religious and secular thinkers who saw an integrated American humanism as a goal. Increasingly, the Humanists claimed that true Christianity stood beyond history and beyond the phenomenal. They also began to assert more strongly that God’s authority was the basis and end of democracy itself. This was the view that the Humanists brought to the 1941 “Conference

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174 Harbison to Gauss, November 12, 1942, Harbison, E.H.; 1936–1944; Christian Gauss Papers, Box 63 Folder 19; Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.
on Science, Philosophy, and Religion in Their Relation to the Democratic Way of Life.” Rabbi Louis Finkelstein, president of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City, had organized this annual conference, which brought together leading American and some overseas intellectuals for a discussion on the future of democracy. Finkelstein hoped to create what he called a “super-Thomas Aquinas or Maimonides,” referencing the great Christian and Jewish theologians of the Middle Ages. He wished to ground democracy in a union of spirituality and secularism, although in fully open and collaborative fashion. Most of the seminars of the annual conference were published and reported on by the New York Times and other media outlets.

The Princeton Humanists, led by Greene, Oates, and Thomas, and joined by economist J. Douglas Brown, astronomer Henry Norris Russell, chemist Hugh S. Taylor, Harbison (who must have temporarily shed his concerns about Humanism), and Princeton Theological Seminary president John A. MacKay, formed a “Princeton Group” at the second Conference and presented a controversial religious paper on the “Spiritual Basis of Democracy.” Stating that Democracy was only a means to a larger end, the Princeton Group asserted that the end they had in mind was “the realization in human society of certain ideals—human dignity, moral responsibility, spiritual freedom—which have their...sanction in a moral and spiritual order which transcends history.” Conference-goers objected to such a strong ahistorical stance, which they associated with the authority of the English and Roman Catholic churches if not with Fascism. Many conference-goers were instead attempting to bolster a middle ground between secular

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humanism and liberal theology, with the latter expressed more as pantheism rather than theism.

“The Western Tradition: Man and His Freedom”

During World War II, Dean Gauss talked with President Dodds, Dean of the Faculty Robert K. Root, and the Princeton leadership about creating what Gauss called a “defense course” on the “Theory and Practice of Democracy.” He also spoke with George Thomas, who had been at Dartmouth College during talks of a similar Dartmouth defense course even before the war began. Gauss and Thomas discussed creating a model, roughly based on the Special Program experience, in which ten or twelve Princeton professors would co-teach a course over a whole year to the entire Princeton undergraduate population. By “defense course,” Gauss and Thomas meant a resolute defense of Humanism, not just a generic defense of democratic ideas.\(^\text{177}\)

In 1942, Princeton indeed launched the course, titled “The Western Tradition: Man and His Freedom” (Humanities 201/202). Organized and taught mainly by Special Program graduate, progeny, and future president of the university Robert F. Goheen, the course also featured lectures from Thomas, Oates, and other allies of Humanism. The course is probably the closest Princeton came to resurrecting the old president’s course in moral philosophy in the twentieth century and teaching an official Princeton philosophy of life. It ran from 1942 to the early 1960s, educating around 5,000 students over a twenty-year period. Although not required, Princeton freshmen and sophomores—

\(^{177}\) “My Story by George Thomas.”
especially those majoring in the social sciences and the sciences—were encouraged to take the course.\(^{178}\)

Goheen set up the course as a “viable alternative to the social sciences and the anthropological view of man.” In contrast to an “anthropological view” of man as a creature of environment, science, and customs, Goheen positioned man as a unique and powerful spirit who transcended the natural world. The motto of the course came from Paul Elmer More in his final book, *Pages From an Oxford Diary*:

> We are born knowing nothing and with much striving we learn but a little; yet all the while we are bound by laws that hearken to no plea of ignorance...In such a state humility is the virtue of men, and their only defense: to walk humbly with God, never doubting, whatever befall, that...His Law is right.\(^{179}\)

In the introductory lecture to the course, Goheen explained that the world was divided. Nations, races, and peoples, he said, were divided by three “views of Reality.” These three views, Goheen specified, were “Naturalism,” “Humanism,” and “Theism.” A proper “world-view,” Goheen argued, would transcend all three “partial” accounts and unite them together into a new fusion.\(^{180}\) (It is important to note that “Humanism” here had a different meaning than the one presented in this chapter. As will be explained below, “Humanism” was used by Goheen to stand for secular humanism. Goheen did not name his fusionist philosophy to students—he did not call it Humanism, but rather simply the unity of all humanity and these three views).


Although Goheen did not state it openly to students in the course, meeting notes from the Advisory Council at the time indicate that the Princeton Humanists had very specific, competing worldviews in mind when they conceived of these three competing “views of Reality.” According to these notes, the Humanists intended “Naturalism” to stand mainly for Marxism, “Theism” to stand primarily for Catholicism, and “Humanism” to stand for secular liberalism. Ideally, Goheen would find a method of reconciling these competing “views of Reality” under the ultimate banner and power of Protestant Idealism. Again, he strategically positioned “Humanism” as something to be usurped by a larger and powerful unity.\footnote{Charles Hendel to Harold Dodds, November 15, 1949, Humanities; 1934 May–1957; Office of the President Records: Jonathan Dickinson to Harold W. Dodds Subgroup, Box 117 Folder 1, Princeton University Archives, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.}

The Advisory Council meeting notes also indicate that this course syllabus was hotly contested, even among those who were sympathetic to the cause. For example, Advisory Council member Frank Knight, one of the nation’s leading economists, questioned why “Naturalism” must stand for Marxism, why “Theism” must stand for Catholicism, and why “Humanism” must stand for secular liberalism. Theodore M. Greene, who by now had left Princeton for Yale but who still sat on the Advisory Council, questioned the same rigid linkages as well. The rest of the Humanists proceeded, despite these concerns.\footnote{Ibid.}

In the introductory lectures to the course, Goheen defined his terms somewhat more openly. He defined “Theism” as the view that, “There is a super-natural, super-human agency of some sort acting in the world; either in natural processes, or in history,
or within the individual, or in all 3 ways.” He noted that, “The activity of God in history & his compelling importance for the human individual receives the strongest expression in Hebraic and Christian thinkers. You will also meet theism, in somewhat different forms, in Greek tragedy & Plato and the Stoics. Whenever God is part of a thinker’s worldview, He almost always exerts a strong influence on the interpretation of man.” Goheen seemed to suggest that Theism—which, we know, was a stand-in for Catholicism—was a universal part of Western man but not his master.183

Turning to “Humanism,” Goheen defined it as the view that “discounts divinity, when it doesn’t omit God entirely, but at the same time, it regards man as somehow superior to natural processes and distinct from lower animal life.” Humanism in this secular sense champions “reason and intellect,” although it may occasionally also recognize “receptiveness to beauty and to humane feeling.” In this view, Goheen lectured, “Man is placed at the center of the circle,” a philosophy that he traced to Protagoras. Goheen explained that, “This is a point of view which is still very much with us today in the pragmatic humanism of John Dewey. In our reading of this term, Aristotle marks about the closest approach to a pure humanistic view. And in general we can set down an emphasis upon the use of reason as a primary concern with man’s self-realization as being humanistic traits and products of the Greek tradition.”

Goheen went on to define “Naturalism” in rather stark, totalitarian terms. “Naturalism,” he specified, “regards the world as entirely a matter of physical processes and so it regards man as primarily a biological organism: a highly developed and

complicated product of natural processes.” In this view, man is, at most, a “high-grade animal...This view which is perhaps the dominant one in 20th century intellectual circles—at least in this country—is at most a secondary feature of Biblical and Greek thought. The single outright naturalism which you will meet will be the philosophy of Epicurus...But naturalism is not entirely to be discounted in the Greek and Hebrew tradition.” Goheen explained that Naturalism is merely one of the “ideational forces with which Plato & Aristotle are in contestation.” In addition, Goheen foreshadowed that Prof. Ramsay “will insist” that, in early Hebrew and Christian thought, “It is possible to see a significant strand of naturalism as a root element combining with theism.” So, Goheen did not entirely discount Naturalism, either, as an aspect of man. It could not, however, represent a fully realized man.

Goheen explained to the lecture audience that these three views of “Man” and “Reality” were always in tension. “In any case, I think we shall see that there is always a certain amount of tension between these 3 ways of viewing man’s nature and his locus in this world.” He also cautioned students not to be doctrinaire about their application. “In point of fact one seldom finds any one of these perspectives maintained in its pure and extreme form,” he said. “Instead what we will find being plotted for us are various positions...between the 3 poles. For example, a naturalistic theism in the Old Testament writers; a theistic humanism in Plato, a naturalistic humanism in Aristotle; a humanistic naturalism in Epicurus.” By the end of the course, Goheen hoped that Princeton students would arrive at their own position.185

184 Ibid.
185 Ibid.
In further introducing the course and leading students to a coherent worldview, Goheen explained the problem of human “essences.” What defined human nature? “We shall see that some thinkers insist on the immeasurableness of the human spirit, while in others there is the notion that human nature has limits which can at least approximately be marked. Speaking very generally, the former attitude characterizes the Old & New Testaments, and the latter, the view that human nature can be defined…is a Greek view.” This was a major difference that Goheen hoped to tease out and perhaps to reconcile. “So, in the Greco-Roman tradition, the reason (or intellect) is most commonly regarded as the ‘essence’ of man—or, at least, as the most definitive and important feature of man’s nature. Whereas in the Biblical writers, the emphasis is on will or volition.”

These two views of the human condition (reason and free will) often sought to outduel each other, Goheen argued. “In later Western thought, each [view of the soul or mind] repeatedly sought first position. Again, that is, one finds a certain amount of perennial tension between the two aspects of human nature—volition and intelligence.” Goheen portrayed this “historical altercation” between will and intelligence as “illustrated quite clearly in our readings by St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas,” with St. Augustine representing the “will” and Aquinas representing the “intellect.” Goheen implied that students would need to exercise their own free will in order to make a choice between will and intellect—although the choice in favor of will over intellect already seemed apparent.

186 Ibid.
187 Ibid.
Finally, Goheen wrapped up his introduction to the course by articulating another area of disagreement, what he termed “The Problem of Destiny.” Separate but related to the problem of human nature, “the Problem of Destiny” was, in Goheen’s view, the same as the question of “the meaning of history and time.” He asked rhetorically, “Is there a cosmic scheme? Does man have a meaningful place in it? Is the course of history one of advancing development or of repetitive recurrence? Is human destiny an individual or social matter? Is it a question of this world or the next?” Goheen told students that the course would not seek to answer these questions for the individual; rather, it would develop frameworks to understand the significance of the questions themselves. “There is no hard and fast solution for the larger problems we will be facing…No approved ‘School Solution’ to which you have to comply to get good grades,” he assured students. Goheen wanted to avoid dishing out what he called “reams of ‘cold dope.’”

Yet, Goheen clearly had some “cold dope” in mind. The course seemed to be designed as a defense both against Communism and against aspects of liberal Democracy or Democratic Socialism in the United States and in the West. Goheen also singled out “Oriental thought” for its false view of human destiny. “Generally speaking…Western thought, as distinct from Oriental thought, has viewed man’s destiny chiefly in terms of the individual.” He explained that, “parts of the New Testament, some phases of Platonism, and St. Augustine’s most ardent belief point to a transcendent destiny beyond the conditions of this world. On the other hand, Aristotle and the Old Testament prophets, in different ways, see the human end as a matter of this world.” Although differing and in

188 Ibid.
tension, the Western “tradition,” Goheen seemed to suggest, was united in focusing on
the individual and his or her spiritual superiority.

Ultimately, Goheen indicated that the course would teach students to contemplate,
and, hopefully learn, the nature of “freedom.” Although different conceptions of
“freedom” existed, in the final analysis “freedom” was a communion between the
individual soul and “God’s Law,” Goheen said. This union was similar to, but in many
ways superior to, “Natural Law.”

Conclusion

The Special Program and its outgrowths, such as the “Man and His Freedom”
course, represent a remarkable and largely unrecognized attempt by Princeton to shape
the future of American thought. These humanities programs were not just designed to
defend a past, but to resurrect a spirit and restructure a faith. That faith was primarily
concerned with the qualities of leadership. Befitting Princeton’s Presbyterian heritage,
and its ties to the state, it viewed a new Humanism as breathing life into a selected
leadership class and defending the faith against assumed enemies.

This new leadership class included graduates of the Special Program, who were
educated to be both prophets and researchers. These graduates would ideally work
individually, and collectively, to interpret science and modernity for the rest of the nation.
They included postcolonial critics such as Edward Said and more conservative leaders.

189 Ibid.
The founders of the Special Program, the Princeton Humanists, designed it with both utilitarian and spiritual goals in mind. They were equally concerned with the future of the American state and with the future of Christendom; the two goals could hardly be divided in their minds. Special Program co-founder Whitney Oates once compared their efforts to the aims of Pericles, the Greek statesman and orator. In the age of Pericles, Oates said, the state and higher ideals were not divorced; nor could they be divorced in mid-twentieth century America.\(^\text{190}\) Ultimately, Oates and the Humanists believed that they were working for the good of the state \textit{and for the will of God.}\[footnote{Whitney J. Oates, "The Purpose of the Divisional Program in the Humanities," speech at a Secondary School Conference, December 11, 1942, 1930–1950; Historical Subject Files Collection, Box 38, Folder 5; Princeton University Archives, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.}
Chapter Two

“We Must Take the Offensive in the War of Ideas”: Fighting For World Unity, God, and Man at Yale

Historian Thomas Mendenhall, a member of a Humanist camp, was frustrated. Mendenhall was finishing up his tenure on Yale’s Course of Study Committee. His committee began their debate on the future curriculum in 1940, with lofty ideas of change. They hoped to finally demolish Charles Eliot’s elective system and restore classical and Christian ideas of prescription, unity, and order in the American course of study. The committee viewed a restoration as necessary for two reasons: to preserve Protestant Idealism, and to unite the world under its banner.

Yet, despite celebratory announcements of the new curriculum, Mendenhall believed that Yale had failed in this quest. The “unity of knowledge,” he wrote to Yale’s president, “must be decided and faced...While all will pay lip service to a general ideal of liberal studies, the introduction of issues such as teaching objectives (interpretation or factual knowledge), free election or rigid requirement, the importance of some synoptic or synthesizing course...introduces immediate division in the ranks.”¹ Yale’s president, Charles Seymour, responded with a perfunctory note: yes, there were many misunderstandings between the faculty on the Course of Study Committee, Seymour replied.²

¹ Thomas Mendenhall to Charles Seymour, February 2, 1944, President of Yale University, Records (RU 23), Box 98, Folder 836, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.
² See Seymour’s reply in the same folder.
Across the New Haven campus, Mendenhall’s colleague in the committee debates—philosopher F. S. C. Northrop, a world-renowned comparative philosopher—was even more distraught about the outcome of the debate. Northrop felt that Yale had failed humankind and set up the eventual destruction of all human civilization. With the world watching, Yale had possessed the opportunity to create the rational foundations of a new world republic, he thought. They had squandered the opportunity. Northrop believed the possibilities of this new republic were staggering. Often comparing a reconstruction of intellectual foundations to John Locke’s treatises that helped launched the American republic, Northrop called its potential outcomes “The Coming Comprehensive World.” In a radical departure from the Humanists and most of the Protestant Culturalists, he envisioned a new Yale curriculum as a grand utopia based in world citizenship and cross-cultural communication.³

Northrop thought that the Yale Committee on the Course of Study had a chance to develop an inclusive global ethic, one that would link moral philosophies from around the

world rather than teach an American or Christian moral philosophy.4 Yale might create a foundation for world citizenship, he believed, but its faculty had fallen back on the old Protestant nationalism. After the curriculum was decided, Northrop fired off a letter to Howard Mumford Jones, his friend and fellow world citizen advocate on the Harvard Committee on the Objectives of General Education in a Free Society. “Nothing is more likely to cause the world to go to pieces,” Northrop lamented to Jones, than a “deprecation” of intellectual and rational inquiry toward achieving world citizenship.5 What is particularly stunning about both Mendenhall’s and Northrop’s claims are not just their different hopes for universalism (that Yale would lead), but how far they peered into the future. Both faculty members were not just speaking about the following ten years; rather, they were looking ahead to the following fifty or one hundred years.

The four-year battle (1940–1944) of the Yale Course of Study Committee was intense. Not only were colorful personalities and campus legends involved, but so much seemed to depend on Yale producing a dramatic synthesis of all the world’s knowledge. Yale President Seymour had staked much of his legacy on this curricular reform. Distant memories of Yale’s landmark Yale Report of 1828—which had defined the purposes and content of a liberal education for the mid-nineteenth century prior to Eliot’s reforms—became a crutch to fall back upon as the 1945 reform disintegrated.6 All idealistic visions from committee members were up against science, diversity, and the elective system. Few at Yale seemed happy with the result.

4 See also Northrop’s The Logic of the Sciences and the Humanities (New York: Macmillan, 1947) for an explication of this view, as well as a collection of his 1930s and 1940s essays on world citizenship education.
5 F. S. C. Northrop to Howard Mumford Jones, November 7, 1946, MS 627: Filmer Stuart Cuckow Northrop Papers, Box 4 Folder 108, Yale University Archives.
Why were the battles at Yale different than those at Princeton? Both cases involved the future of Protestant Idealism. Both involved a private group of Humanists who met at a local diner/club to plot out the restoration of the humanities. Yet, at Yale, a more chaotic battle occurred among diverse parties over the philosophy of the curriculum.

There were three primary reasons for the differences. First, something about Yale’s history and particular approach to Protestant Idealism made a battle of minds more likely to occur. Compared to Princeton’s concern for immediate use, Yale’s milieu of Protestant Idealism might be described as more abstract, more contemplative, and more, well, idealistic. If Princeton sought to model how humankind should act, then Yale sought to model how it should think—both after World War II and well beyond.

Second, world events impacted the battles in more direct ways than in the Princeton case. Especially after the Nazis crossed the Maginot Line in France in 1940, Yalies viewed Western civilization as under immediate threat. This threat created a crisis situation on campus that coincided directly with the debates. (The same reaction may have happened at Princeton, but I did not find as much evidence of it).

Third, the debates at Yale were a three-way battle. In addition to Protestant Culturalists and Humanists (the latter represented by a group called the Yale New Aesthetes), a third party of world civilization advocates, led almost exclusively by Northrop, envisioned an entirely new global idealism that largely left the Protestantism (and American power) out of the equation.
The Tensions and Trials of Yale’s Idealism

At Yale, Idealist theology and philosophy was often associated with the legacy of Bishop George Berkeley (1685–1753), the Irish-Anglican philosopher and theologian who had helped to build Yale’s early curriculum and library. As one of the most famous Christian Idealists of the early modern world, Berkeley, the author of *An Essay Toward a New Theory of Vision* (1709) and *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710), was typically contrasted to the British empiricists, John Locke and David Hume, and, later, to the Scottish Common Sense Realists, Thomas Reid and Dugald Stewart.7

In contrast to Locke, Hume, Reid, and Stewart, Berkeley famously developed an Idealist philosophy that was initially called “immaterialism” and thereafter “subjective idealism.” In contrast to both the empiricism of Locke and Hume, and to the later objective or Common Sense Realism of Reid and Stewart, Berkeley seemed to assert (he was always a little vague) that an individual mind, in working communion with God, fully initiates the creation of all reality. In Berkeley’s philosophy, the phenomenal or natural world barely exists at all—the individual mind is king.8

Although it is easy to overstate this philosophical import on Yale’s development as an institution, Bishop Berkeley had a keen interest in Yale and in the early American colonies. He moved to Bermuda and had hoped to develop a college there; when the

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project fell through, he donated his library and much of his fortune to Yale. Early Yale scholarship programs, such as “Scholars of the House,” owed their origins to Berkeley; and Yale’s Berkeley College is named after the Irish “Good Bishop.” As historian J. David Hoeveler notes in *Creating the American Mind: Intellect and Politics in the Colonial Colleges* (2002), Berkeley practically bequeathed the immaterialist philosophy to Yale’s library and early curriculum.9

We can see elements of subjective idealism in Yale’s early, almost completely prescribed, curriculum. In addition to the classics, students at the early Yale College studied a heavy dose of the Cambridge Platonists, English divine William Ames, and other texts of immaterialist moral philosophy.10 They were instructed that the world was the product of a single, indivisible Divine mind. In the 1828 *Yale Report*, the authors famously stated that the classics provided the “discipline and the furniture of the mind.”11

A Yale liberal education before 1900 included a heavy dose of immaterialist Christian ethics, which were neatly summarized in the senior-year moral philosophy course taught by Noah Porter, Jeremiah Day, Timothy Dwight, and other legendary early presidents of Yale.12

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10 Hoeveler, *Creating the American Mind*, 53–78; Warch, *School of the Prophets*.


Beginning in the late-nineteenth century, Yale’s immaterialist ethic suffered from both internal fracture and external criticisms. Internally, it fractured, as scientific naturalists such as Yale’s pioneering sociologist, William Graham Sumner, championed scientific discovery and freedom of choice and individuality over a strict Protestant Idealism. External to Yale, Yale’s brand of idealism fell out of favor, as pragmatists, analytic philosophers, Harvard’s elective system, and many other modern philosophies, methods, and movements took the cultural and educational mantles from philosophical Idealists. However, as historian Bruce Kuklick notes, the philosophy survived at Yale well into the 1950s; this chapter demonstrates that Yalies were searching for a grand restoration.

The Search for Truth

As the Yale Committee on the Course of Study began its work in 1940, they seemed to be hoping for a meeting of the minds. They initially organized themselves around what virtually all of its members opposed in modern intellectual transformation since the late Victorian era. This is not to suggest that all committee members were Protestant Idealists; however, many of them shared criticisms of a corporate-minded modern university and found common ground. The original committee members included some of Yale’s most prominent faculty: Ralph Henry Gabriel (history), William DeVane (Dean of the College, and a professor of English), John Spangler Nicholas (biology), E. 1986); D. H. Meyer, The Instructed Conscience: The Shaping of the American National Ethic (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972).


14 Kuklick, “Philosophy at Yale in the Century after Darwin.”
Wright Bakke (economics), Henri Peyre (modern languages), Charles Hendel (philosophy), A. T. Waterman (physics, and future leader of the National Science Foundation), George Wilson Pierson (history), Henry Rowell (Latin), Alexander Witherspoon (English), and Stanley T. Williams (History, Art, and Literature).  

Committee members identified common problems in American academic life as excessive positivism, pragmatism, behaviorism, functional sociology, and literary realism, among many others. Sometimes summarizing these modern philosophies and methodologies simply as varieties of a single reductive “naturalism,” they believed that they offered no moral ethic and led too easily to materialism.  

Initially, committee members and President Charles Seymour found common targets of scorn in the contemporary social sciences and in American state colleges and universities. Drawing upon criticism leveled at the social sciences and the “godless” state universities by the General Education Board’s Abraham Flexner, New Humanist leaders Irving Babbitt, Paul Elmer More, and Norman Foerster, and former Yale Law School Dean (and University of Chicago President) Robert Hutchins, the Yale congregation marched together against their enemies. Committee chairman Gabriel argued that, “One of the problems in dealing with the public springs from the fact that thousands of

15 Committee membership rotated frequently, especially during the height of WWII. In the chapter, I note the most significant membership changes in the subsequent footnotes.
16 This observation is based on my reading of the entire committee meeting notes from 1939–1945. These notes are collected in RU 20, Richard C. Carroll, Assistant and Associate Dean of Yale College, Records, Yale University Archives. Based on my knowledge of some committee members (such as E. Wright Bakke), some members did not share these beliefs but were not given much of a voice on the committee. According to the notes, Bakke, a social scientist and progressive advocate of labor, rarely spoke.
Americans have derived their ideas of the nature and the values of the liberal arts from...art colleges in the state universities.” These state university “art colleges,” Gabriel continued, were “frankly service institutions” devoted largely to vocational and technological, not truly “liberal,” ends, he stated.\(^{18}\)

Just a few years before the committee began its work, University of Chicago president Robert Hutchins had returned to New Haven to deliver the 1936 Storrs Lectures. Those lectures, which became the basis of Hutchins’s book, *The Higher Learning in America*, had similarly denounced modern higher education and the social sciences as vapid. Modern forms of education, Hutchins lamented, led to utilitarianism, corporate greed, and relativism. Only a higher truth—“metaphysics”—and the “permanent studies” (the classics) would provide a path forward for the American mind, Hutchins had argued.\(^{19}\) His book enflamed cultural and educational wars, inspiring heated critiques and charges of authoritarianism from John Dewey, Brooklyn College President Harry Gideonse, and a host of other scholars and intellectuals.\(^{20}\)

In his 1937 inauguration speech and a subsequent speech at Brown University, Yale president Charles Seymour echoed Hutchins’s criticisms in more religious terms. Seymour called the “contemporary social sciences...positively dangerous” because they

\(^{18}\) Gabriel, “Principles and Policies of the Course of Study Committee of Yale College,” May 7, 1943, Eugene Harold Kone Papers (MS 1221), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

\(^{19}\) Hutchins, *The Higher Learning in America*.

were hurting the superiority of the older humanities. In his inauguration speech, Seymour said that Yale would stamp out false paths and return to its “sacred trust”—its devotion to the “teaching of Christ in our life-and-death struggle against the forces of selfish materialism.” He called upon the community to recognize together “the power of the Christian God” and told them that ungodly knowledge and faculty would be stripped from Yale.  

To understand the context of these words, it must be emphasized that many Christians in the era saw Fascism and Communism as aspects of a larger, godless movement around the world. These words would have been inflammatory to some in the audience, but accepted by others as necessary given the growing world crisis. It was not without purpose that Seymour delivered his inauguration speech in Yale’s historic Battell Chapel, constructed in the late-nineteenth century in the Congregational tradition. Stained-glassed windows commemorating Bishop George Berkeley and Jonathan Edwards flanked Seymour as he delivered his speech.

Yale students, meanwhile, were putting pressure on the leadership and on the Course of Study Committee to formulate what some students called a “new idealism.”

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21 Charles Seymour Inauguration Speech, copy in Charles Seymour, President of Yale University, Records (RU 23), Box 86 Folder 144, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library; Seymour, “The University Curriculum in its Relation to the Public Service,” copy in Eugene Harold Kone Papers (MS 1221), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

22 A helpful examination of this Christian reaction to Communism (and Fascism) is offered in Mark Thomas Edwards, The Right of the Protestant Left: God's Totalitarianism (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

By the late 1930s, some students were lashing out at Yale for failing to uphold its central idealist faith or for deserting God.24

In July, 1940, Paul Boller, a member of the graduating class of 1939, published a letter in the *New Republic* attacking his alma mater for deserting God’s truth in the curriculum. “Youth were brought up in the heyday of naturalistic philosophies of the twentieth century,” Boller wrote. Anthropology, behavioral psychology, and sociology have “complete contempt...to all absolutist values...The standards and values of the great religions of the past were dismissed as being wishful thinking.” Boller asked his Yale “elders” if they had the spine to defend Christianity. “Is there, then, any validity in the heritage of Christian ideals?” Boller’s letter in the *New Republic* anticipated the critique that William F. Buckley would later surface in his conservative manifesto, *God and Man at Yale* (1951), in which Buckley attacked Yale professors, including Course of Study Committee chair Ralph Gabriel, for being godless Communists and collectivists.25

As Gabriel and Boller’s other elders began formulating solutions, they agreed that the imposition of a precise metaphysical system in the curriculum—as Hutchins had suggested—would be unwise, at least publically. “Many of the [curricular] experiments tried elsewhere,” Seymour wrote in an annual report, “seem to me to proceed from an emotional reaction against the partial failure of our traditional methods, rather than from

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a considered educational philosophy that might lead us to improve them.”

Seymour’s predecessor, James Rowland Angell, had also dismissed heavy prescriptions for the university as he departed the office. Writing shortly after Hutchins had delivered his Storrs lectures, Angell wrote that, “Only the doctrinaire will wish to attempt the creation of any fixed, rigid, and narrow channel in which the current of university life will flow, or to hold all universities to a single type. It would be a great disservice to learning to have such artificial restrictions imposed on the living organism that is the university.”

Similarly, while Seymour agreed with Hutchins that universities “must not surrender” to utilitarianism or “bow the knee to a materialistic culture,” Seymour felt that the path forward was clear. “The University must be the custodian of scholarship, jealously guarding the truths which have been ascertained and ceaselessly seeking out unseen truths by study and experiment,” he wrote in another annual report.

This “search for truth”—including those previously ascertained and those gained through research and discovery—meant considering utilitarian subjects and methods as part of the larger truth as well. “Nothing is more absurd for the proponent of the values of a liberal education than to assume a patronizing or disparaging attitude toward technical studies or courses,” Seymour wrote. “It has been our tradition that whatever the skills of the graduates in medicine, engineering, the physical sciences, historical criticism, philology, the expert technique they have achieved is regarded as an aspect of their education and not its final purpose.”

Although they found overlaps, these Yalies were not a fan of Hutchins’s brand of metaphysics; the search for truth was a mysterious and never final quest, they

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28 Seymour, Annual Report, 1941–42.
asserted. What was needed was a living philosophy that fused tradition with progressive and modern methods.

Gabriel, Seymour, and the new Dean of the College, William DeVane, knew full well that supporting this living philosophy in the twentieth century would be a difficult task. Despite the fact that the Yale faculty and committee members were relatively united against what they disliked, deep divisions also separated them when it came to organizing solutions. When Seymour recruited DeVane to become the new Dean of the College, he had to convince him to leave a cozy spot as a professor of English at Cornell. Reportedly, DeVane declined a few times before he relented. When he finally arrived, Seymour wrote to DeVane that he should avoid pressing any “controversial issues” given the deep divisions within the faculty body.31

At the same time, Seymour’s decision to let the faculty fight out their differences seems at least somewhat intentional on Seymour’s part. Seymour viewed a battle of the great campus minds as inevitable for preserving Protestant Idealism. This strategy likely reflected the Protestant Idealist view that humanity is connected by a single intelligence, as well as the belief that all truth is unified. In a telling letter to Yale trustee and Presbyterian minister Henry Sloane Coffin, Seymour even positioned Protestant Idealism as above Christianity itself.

To set the context of this letter, after Seymour’s Brown University speech criticizing the social sciences, Coffin had written to Seymour with some reactions to the

31 Charles Seymour to William C. DeVane, November 1, 1937; November 23, 1937; October 19, 1939, Charles Seymour, President of Yale University, Records, Box 44, Folder Yale College, Dean William DeVane; Seymour to George Nettleton, October 24, 1938; November 4, 1938; copies in the Eugene Harold Kone Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Folder Liberal Arts, Yale University Library.
speech. Coffin felt that Seymour had defined Yale’s mission somewhat erroneously. Coffin wrote, “You make the statement that we are not interested in the conclusions which students arrive at but only in the thoroughness of their methods and in their search for truth. I wonder if you can square that wholly with what you said in your inaugural concerning the teachings of Christ?” Coffin seemed mildly annoyed that Seymour had defended what Coffin called “absolute liberalism” in the Brown speech when he should be consistently defending the “Christian interpretation of life.”

Seymour responded that what he was searching for was the “non-materialistic” approach. He viewed this approach as compatible with, but larger than, Christianity, and that the faculty would grope toward it eventually:

What I am driving at, is that the absolute freedom that I am advocating is one so thoroughly impregnated with thoroughly basic principles that no matter what freedom you allow to opinion, there is inevitable control exercised by the fact of the existence of the central principle. Such a control, however, is very different from the control over this or that particular method which might be claimed by the University and which is often claimed by the sections of organized opinions.

Contrasting Idealism with religious or secular dogmatism, Seymour seemed to suggest that Yale’s philosophy was non-ideological. The central principle—the immaterial unity of truth—would, in Seymour’s view, bring the faculty together in a way that organized religion could not.

32 Henry Sloane Coffin to Charles Seymour, November 22, 1937, Charles Seymour to Henry Sloane Coffin, November 27, 1937, MS 1221: Eugene H. Kone Papers, Box 1, Folder Liberal Arts, Yale University Archives.
33 Charles Seymour to Henry Sloane Coffin, November 27, 1937, MS 1221: Eugene H. Kone Papers, Box 1, Folder Liberal Arts, Yale University Archives.
A Three-Way Battle

Two rival camps of Protestant Idealists battled for control of the 1940s curricular reform effort. The two camps fit the broad categories in this study: Humanism and Culturalism. At Yale, a Humanist group called the New Aesthetes wished to restore the immaterialist philosophy from Bishop Berkeley’s era, with the Christian God as the sole and obvious purpose of all education. The New Aesthetes championed what they called “philosophy”—which merged Plato with Christianity. The Culturalists, however, preferred to describe Protestantism through detailed historical analysis, thus championing what they called “history.” In addition, a third party, led by philosopher F. S. C. Northrop, desired to create a new global idealism that echoed the wishes of left-leaning, socialist-minded students on campus. These three warring visions clashed head on. I will explain each briefly.

The New Aesthetes

The most vocal advocates of immaterialism as it had been thought of in Bishop Berkeley’s era were the Yale New Aesthetes. Educated mainly at Yale in the 1920s, when they were part of student groups launching a spiritual revival, they were now faculty members in the humanities with rising prestige.34 Like the Princeton Humanists profiled in the previous chapter, Yale’s New Aesthetes gathered in a local hangout

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34 On this group, see Pierson, Yale: College and University, 310. They also went under the name of the "New Classicists." See Maynard Mack Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, letters, as well as Box 101, "Dryden Criticism" folder, lecture notes on "Classicism to Romanticism," folder "Classical Tradition," folder "Essay on Criticism."
(Mory’s Temple Bar) and planned a proactive response to place God, Christ, and Plato at the center of the curriculum—a strategy they termed true “philosophy.”

Maynard Mack, a 1932 Yale graduate and, later, Sterling Professor of English, was the primary leader of the New Aesthetes. Named the 1932 Class Poet, Mack’s winning poem was a direct attack on modern science, modernity, and all scientists. “There are things that you / with all your sciences cannot construe,” Mack composed his lines. He warned that, “...We are some, and there are others more / Whose voice will be a thunder at your door / At whose bright passing, stricken dumb, your lips / Shall shudder as it were Apocalypse.”

In the 1930s, Mack would also help bring the New Criticism to Yale’s English Department, recruiting New Critics William Wimsatt, Cleanth Brooks, and Monroe Beardsley to Yale. The New Critics sought a return to close reading and formalism—the immaterial imagination of the poet as separate from history and science—that had been largely abandoned (they believed) by literary naturalists and scientific philologists.

The New Aesthete movement at Yale was bigger than the English department and the New Criticism, however. It also included representatives of the history and American studies departments (in the 1930s, the American studies department was, at first, an interdisciplinary program called History of Arts and Letters. It had a strong Anglican

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35 On the meetings at Mory’s, see Pierson, *Yale: College and University*, 537.
bent). Gathering at Mory’s Bar in the early 1930s, New Aesthetes Mack, Thomas Mendenhall (history), George Pierson (history), Wallace Notestein (history), Norman Holmes Pearson (History of Arts and Letters), and future Yale president A. Whitney Griswold (History of Arts and Letters) deeply lamented Yale’s slide into a research institution. They sought to revive an old Yale spirit that they identified with both Plato and the Divine Being. It is also important to note that many of these New Aesthetes went on to form the Central Intelligence Agency.38

In the curriculum, the New Aesthetes desired a complete and total reform of Charles Eliot’s elective system. From around 1900 to the 1930s, Yale had adopted a modified version of the elective system. Students could select their courses and interests, but only within well-defined rubrics. Still, the scientific subjects had grown in popularity and the classics and chapel surface had been cut. The New Aesthetes desired a unified curriculum centered on “philosophy”—which they considered to be the Greek classics, particularly Plato’s Republic, matched with readings from the Old and New Testaments and the classics of the English Renaissance (roughly 1500–1750).

Additionally, the New Aesthetes did not believe that higher education was for the masses. Like the Princeton Humanists, they believed that higher education should only be reserved for the gifted and the pious. For example, in his edited volumes of poetry, Mack celebrated those artists who understood what real “Reason” was. “Reason,” for Mack,

38 Pierson, Yale: College and University, 392-397; and 537; On History of Arts and Letters, see Sydney E. Ahlstrom, “Studying American Studies at Yale,” American Quarterly, 22, no. 2 (Summer, 1970): 503–517; and Michael Holzman, “The Ideological Origins of American Studies at Yale,” 40, no. 2 (Summer, 1999): 71–99. The references to Plato and the Divine Being will be clearer later, when discussing the program that became known as Directed Studies. On these figures and the establishment of the C.I.A., see Robin Winks, Cloak and Gown: Scholars in America’s Secret War (London: Collins Harvill, 1987); and Holzman, James Jesus Angleton, the CIA, and the Craft of Counterintelligence (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008).
was not synonymous with intellect. “Reason” was even larger and more powerful than everyday intellect. Reason was “simply the name of the universal and permanent,” a quality or power that “[the poet] shares with angels.”\(^{39}\) In another book, a history of Yale’s Scroll & Key Society, Mack associated this view of “Reason” with the “Idealism” of the English Puritans, specifying that it was an all-knowing quality inseparable from God or (in classical terms) the “Logos.”\(^{40}\)

Mack contrasted his view of Divine “Reason” with the lower “reason” of common humanity. He lambasted all of the “free-thinkers” and “Marxists” who elevated this common, “anthropological” view of reason. According to them, Mack wrote, “Many a cherished institution or belief takes its significance and use solely from the cultural framework in which it occurs.”\(^{41}\) The result, he thought, was an “acid eating away at the nonutilitarian concept of life’s purposes—whether the concept stems from patriotism, morals, religion, or love.”\(^{42}\) Instead of an “ideal community achieved through grace,” the ideal community becomes a tool of the “totalitarian state.”\(^{43}\) Mack felt that there was a way out of this “determinism.” Only by combining “modern reason” with “ancient authority” could a key to cultural survival and spiritual salvation be found, he wrote.\(^{44}\) “Ancient authority,” for Mack as for the Princeton Humanists, was a restoration of God’s ultimate mystery and sovereignty.

\(^{44}\) Ibid, 21.
Around campus, the New Aesthetes were highly controversial. Although some student leaders gravitated toward them, progressive and left-leaning students abhorred their rising power and influence. For example, young student radicals associated with a new student publication, the Harkness Hoot, felt that the New Aesthetes should be “deplored and resisted” since their “philosophy of history” was “to be expanded into a full and glorious perspective of cultural change.” They noted that the Yale curriculum, in their opinion, already defended God’s authority and Christian-patriotic rhetoric too highly, even when it included modern skepticism. The last thing Yale and the U.S. needed, they thought, was more religion and more patriotic devotion. The student radicals believed that beneath all of the lofty pronouncements of grace, God, and love, the New Aesthetes had a deeply conservative, anti-democratic conspiracy up their sleeves. The radicals—including a young Eugene V. Rostow, future Under Secretary of State—called instead for a “socialist...idealism.” Instead of an “idealism” defined by a single intelligence or an angelic Reason, their preferred new idealism would be a radical movement of what they called “millions of human wills.”

Early on in the Committee on the Course of Study discussions, George Pierson represented the New Aesthetes on the committee. Later, Mack and his college friend, Thomas Mendenhall, joined the committee in the final stages.

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Protestant Culturalists at Yale

Protestant Culturalists, in contrast, preferred a more historical approach to the curriculum. They wanted to verify Protestant Idealism as a theory that had developed in historical time and in specific cultural and historical contexts; they seemed to consider history as the preferred method of empirical verification. They resisted the notion that Protestantism somehow stood above history as transcendent. The Culturalists sometimes called their position one of “natural law.”

Committee Chair Ralph Henry Gabriel exemplified the Protestant Culturalist position. In Gabriel’s 1940 book, The Course of American Democratic Thought, he helped to launch the field of modern, American intellectual history. Although, like the New Aesthetes (with whom he sometimes congregated), Gabriel critiqued a naturalism of John Dewey and William James that “colored the American sky with pink” (thus accusing pragmatists of being fellow travelers), he also sought to incorporate insights from cultural anthropology into his history of American thought and culture.48 Using insights from Yale’s pioneering cultural anthropologist Edward Sapir, Gabriel portrayed an American intellectual system that had been fractured in the nineteenth century by Protestant and Christian sectarianism. For Gabriel, viewing American thought through a cultural-historical lens was helpful to the cause of Protestantism, as it allowed the historian to view a deeper “cultural unity” based in “fundamental” or “natural” law that

had always been present “under the surface” of cultural mores, surface-level fights, and temporal changes.

Using cultural history as a guide, the Protestant Culturalists preferred a historically oriented curriculum in which certain cultures would be illuminated through historical and literary examples. Greek and Roman classical cultures, for instance, were often mentioned as an ideal exploration of the development of natural law. British culture and literature of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries was also frequently presented as a guide this development of natural law. Overall, Protestant Culturalists hoped that students would grasp the natural and universal laws that had withstood the test of time—but through detailed historical analysis rather than from a direct communion with God.

These two Idealisms at Yale were sometimes united together against their foes, but more often they were at loggerheads with one another. As the Committee on the Course of Study began its work in 1940, committee members immediately argued about whether “history” or “philosophy” would have preference in the Yale curriculum. Would the committee prioritize the temporal and the material, or would it prioritize the transcendent and immaterial? Committee members agreed that both were needed, as both “history” and “philosophy” provided the unity of truth. “History relates things in a temporal setting; Philosophy relates systematically with respect to similarities, differences, and interrelationships,” a 1941 committee draft memo stated. “The two are complementary, and should hardly be competitive...All significant synthesis is inevitably
both historical and philosophical.”

Although committee members agreed that the ideal synthesis was both historical and philosophical, they disagreed about the emphasis placed on these two approaches to Protestant Idealism.

_The Global Idealism of F. S. C. Northrop_

Complicating matters further, another Yale figure played a major role in the curriculum debates. Philosopher F. S. C. Northrop was not, at first, a member of the Committee on the Course of Study; however, he was a rising campus leader and was particularly popular with left-leaning student editors of the _Harkness Hoot_.

His growing involvement in Yale affairs and his eventual membership on the committee transformed the debate into a three-way battle.

Northrop had a very different vision of the curriculum. He pictured the Yale program as a theoretical and scientific integration of all the world’s knowledge. To understand that vision, it is necessary to detour slightly and explain the uniqueness of the vision. The vision itself depended on Northrop’s philosophical thought, which was complex.

As Northrop commented in a letter to a colleague, his entire career was devoted to "get[ting] the [Protestant, Congregational] beam out of my eye[s]."

This meant questioning or even rejecting the education that he had received as a youth, which he recognized as Protestant and nationalist in its very approach to knowledge. Instead,

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49 “Comments — April 1941,” RU 20, Richard C. Carroll, Assistant and Associate Dean of Yale College, Records, Box 10, Yale University Archives.
50 Rodman, “Religion Leaves the Colleges.”
51 F. S. C. Northrop to Francis McMahon, July 20, 1946, Filmer Stuart Cuckow Northrop Papers (MS 627), Box 5 Folders 133-134, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.
Northrop hoped to create a new world citizenship education that used scientific reasoning to solve world problems.\textsuperscript{52}

Northrop believed that, in order to accomplish this radical reconstruction, one needed to work through the philosophy of science itself. In the 1930s and 1940s, the “philosophy of science” was a burgeoning new field, but it was still a field largely dominated by specialists in logic. Members of the Vienna Circle in Austria and the Berlin Circle in Germany hoped to develop a socialist republic and world ethic around the philosophy of science.\textsuperscript{53} Northrop’s vision dovetailed with those circles: he hoped to extend the philosophy of science to become the master philosophy of all humanity.\textsuperscript{54}

In Northrop’s view, cultures were considered anthropologically as relatively unique entities with particular sets of values, worldviews, and systems. Yet, it was not enough for students to simply describe these cultures or experience them. Rather, Northrop believed that it was \textit{science} that conditioned these cultures—every culture through time had developed a “philosophy of science,” or a symbolic system for understanding the world. In Northrop’s view, it was this dominant philosophy of science that shaped a culture’s respective social systems, religious beliefs, and educational systems. How a culture thought about science over time shaped its values. Using

\textsuperscript{52} Northrop, \textit{The Logic of the Sciences and the Humanities}.


anthropology as a path toward universalism, Northrop believed that the philosophy of science was the only truly universal method of inquiry.

The philosophy of science is a field devoted to thinking about the purposes, methods, and outcomes of science. Northrop put a particularly cultural spin on the philosophy of science—placing it in direct conversation with the philosophy of culture. In Northrop’s view, science was the name for all thought—all efforts to make sense of the world, including theology. These sensible and reasonable efforts to understand the world were common to all cultures, religions, and peoples, he thought. Everyone had “science,” or a symbolic way of thinking about nature and culture.

For example, in Northrop’s view, German culture and religion had been largely shaped by a German version of philosophical Idealism. American culture and religion had been largely shaped by the empiricism of John Locke merged with the Protestant Christianity advanced by the Scottish Common Sense school and the Idealism of Berkeley and Edwards. Chinese and Asian cultures and religions had been shaped by what Northrop called “intuitional” thought, which for Northrop seemed to combine Confucian and Buddhist traditions. Northrop saw Mexico as a unique combination of various scientific philosophies. In Mexico, Northrop saw a combination of philosophies that included idealism, empiricism, intuitional and other thought systems. In Mexico, Northrop saw what he called the “Meeting of East and West,” and therefore a model or pathway for a future world ethic, political system, education, etc.55

55 Northrop, The Meeting of East and West. This book should ideally be read in conjunction with The Logic of the Sciences and the Humanities. The former is Northrop’s historical examination, while the latter presents his philosophical system.
Northrop used historical analysis to understand these cultural and scientific philosophies. He did not think these cultural and scientific philosophies were precisely fixed; rather, he believed they had unfolded through time and through cultural contact and exchange (particularly through colonialism). The major issue for Northrop was that, too often, some cultures (particularly Roman Catholic and empirically oriented ones) had imposed their thought systems on others. Foreshadowing postcolonial critiques, such impositions of thought (more than the act of colonialism itself) led to conflict and war, in Northrop’s view.

According to Northrop, the conflict of the twentieth century was not primarily between Democracy and Communism, Democracy and Fascism, or Christianity and Communism. Rather, Northrop believed that the conflict was between the empirical philosophy of John Locke and the scientific idealism that he identified with both Germany and the new Soviet Union. According to Northrop, what the Germans were really fighting for was their holistic and organic view of the world, in which the individual was part of the “one.” Northrop traced this conflict to Kant, whom he positioned as structuring both the thought of German Idealism and the Marxist system of the Soviets.56

Nor was this all. The fractures were deeper and internal within countries and cultures as well. Within the United States, Northrop identified a war between empiricists, idealists, and Catholics. Meanwhile, he viewed the “East” (by which he primarily meant China and India) as viewing the world through “intuition”—pure sensation. Thus, there

56 See The Meeting of East and West.
were for Northrop multilayered philosophical and scientific conflicts—both between and within cultures.\(^5\)

However, Northrop believed that there was a path through the chaos. The Physics of Einstein, he thought, could be used to take the philosophy of science to new heights. To do so, he reduced these various scientific philosophies to set terms such as “intuitional” (cultures mainly of the East, based in pure and immediate sensation) and “postulational” (cultures mainly of the West, based in abstract or pure thought). In effect, Northrop’s system was designed to reduce all phenomena to a single philosophy of science, much the same way that Marxism tried to reduce all phenomena to the class struggle. Northrop’s terminologies—what he termed a governing “logic” of humanity—would enable re-integration and new combinations to emerge from the conflicts. However, first, Northrop believed that people everywhere needed to understand that their conflicts were based in thought and in a complex, symbolic system of thought, not in emotions, religious and ethnic differences, national security, or quests for power. Essentially, Northrop believed that everything could be reduced to figuring out a culture’s primary thought system—then reconciling it with other thought systems.

In order to fix the modern world and its growing fractures, Northrop believed that everyone must delve into their respective, homegrown philosophies of science. They must understand the history of their culture through the lens of how their culture understood science. Such a theory had major implications for the Western curriculum,

\(^{5}\) Ibid.
Northrop thought, taking it away from its literary basis in texts and its emphasis on
individual achievement and toward intercultural understanding.\textsuperscript{58}

The question remains: Why was such an esoteric and complicated theory afforded
so much weight at Yale? There are a few reasons. President Charles Seymour was a
supporter of Northrop, likely because he saw Northrop as creating an American
alternative to Marxism.\textsuperscript{59} In addition, Northrop was combining philosophy and history—
the very synthesis that Yale leaders hoped to achieve for the modern world. He was
creating a world ethic that included both history (the temporal) and philosophy (the ideal,
understood on a natural level) as the main axes.

Northrop’s theory was also not entirely incompatible with Yale’s historic
immaterialist philosophy. In reducing everything to the philosophy of science, Northrop
was also reducing everything to the mind—to how people and cultures think. This was
not incompatible with the immaterialist view that it is perception that shapes reality. In a
later book, \textit{Man, Nature, and God} (1962), Northrop made it clear that his vision included
space for a pantheistic God.\textsuperscript{60}

In addition, Northrop was a prestigious international philosopher with many
contacts abroad. If Yale was going to sell the world on a new curriculum for all
humanity, Northrop might conceivably be a conduit to spreading the curriculum
elsewhere—especially in China, India, and Latin America, where Communism loomed

\textsuperscript{58} Northrop, “Education for World Understanding,” in \textit{The Logic of the Sciences and the Humanities}.
\textsuperscript{59} Seymour wrote enthusiastically about Northrop to Henry Sloane Coffin, believing that Northrop would
capture the searching minds of the undergraduates. Coffin was unimpressed. See Seymour to Coffin,
January 17, 1940, and January 22, 1940, and Coffin to Seymour, January 29, 1940, in Charles Seymour,
President of Yale University, Records, Box 43, Folder Coffin, Henry Sloane, Yale University Archives.
\textsuperscript{60} F. S. C. Northrop, \textit{Man, Nature, and God: A Quest for Life's Meaning} (New York: Simon and Schuster,
1962).
on the horizon. What Yale hoped for, it seems, was a global *Yale Report of 1945* that would help fend off Communism and Soviet education worldwide.

Finally, as a philosopher of science, Northrop had many contacts with Yale’s natural and social scientists. He was perhaps the only tenured faculty member who could communicate equally well with both scientists and humanities professors. If there was a chance to bring the scientists on board to a new curriculum to join the humanists, Northrop might conceivably lead the way.

Northrop began writing and teaching his philosophy in the 1930s. He developed an elective course, Philosophy of Science 37, to advance his views at Yale. The course quickly gained a following and was one of the most popular courses at Yale in the mid-century period. Students called the vision—that the cultures of the world could be united by science and through their scientific thought systems—simply “The Northrop Theory.”

As mentioned, the Northrop Theory entailed a dramatic restructuring of the modern, Western curriculum. In Northrop’s vision, the curriculum would no longer be literary or mathematically based. The entire purpose of the curriculum would now be reshaped, in Northrop’s opinion, in order to solve the problem of world understanding and intercultural communication. As early as kindergarten, students would learn about the philosophy of science and learn about the philosophies of science and thought systems that undergird their respective cultures with a hope of the meeting of East and West as the primary goal of education.⁶¹

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⁶¹ Northrop, *The Logic of the Sciences and the Humanities.*
Battling Over Foundations

To summarize, the Yale curriculum debates featured a three-way battle between New Aesthetes, who wanted to restore an authoritative Christian God as the purpose of the curriculum; Culturalists, who hoped to use historical examples to prove the existence of a Protestant natural law; and Northrop, who represented hopes among some students and faculty for world citizenship and a new global anthropology based in science. Obviously, these visions were bound to clash, and did so.

World events also added to this clash. When the Nazis crossed the Maginot Line and invaded France in 1939, Yalies began to organize themselves more deliberately and quickly. They considered the fall of France to be a major failure on the part of French culture and learning; they believed the French had surrendered because no idealism guided their people. What if the same failure of idealism happened in the U.S.? they wondered. Yalies surmised that a failure of idealism would advance both Fascism and Communism as competing world systems.

An early 1941 letter sent to President Seymour by a Yale donor, John Schoolcraft, exemplifies these tensions. Schoolcraft claimed that, “Harvard and Princeton, Columbia and Chicago, California and Michigan” were “well underway” in the “reconstruction of the cultural structure of humanity as a whole” in order to prevent Fascism from encroaching in the U.S. and Communism from advancing in the lurch. Schoolcraft, the donor (and a Wall Street lawyer), wondered why Yale was not being included in this “reconstruction of the cultural structure of humanity” supposedly being spearheaded by America’s leading public and private institutions. Schoolcraft blamed Seymour for failing
to unite the faculty, claiming that Seymour had done little to solve the “distrust and personal as well as scientific rifts” tearing apart the faculty body at a moment of dire need.  

Schoolcraft provided little evidence of his claims, but his claims are intriguing. What was this “reconstruction of the cultural structure of humanity” that Schoolcraft alluded to? Schoolcraft simply said that Yale needed to develop a “positive philosophy” or “faith” for America and the world. Otherwise, Schoolcraft warned, Communism looms as “the savior of mankind.” Schoolcraft included a petition that was supposedly signed by a large number of Yale faculty, although no signatures were included with the letter.

After the Nazi occupation of France, President Seymour had called for an emergency meeting of all Yale faculty. Reportedly, almost the entire Yale faculty body had attended. At the meeting, Seymour had told the faculty that all “political and social divisions must be blacked out” in favor of immediate “unification” in order to defend Western civilization. Committee on the Course of Study chair Ralph Gabriel also stood up to speak. Gabriel argued that Yale represented a final hope for a “new idealism” for the world. Echoing Seymour, Gabriel called for a swift end to the internal battles and a more urgent and pragmatic vision than Yale’s typically contemplative stance. “Idealism is also a weapon,” Gabriel cried. “Let us use it. The universities must stand before the

62 John Schoolcraft to Charles Seymour, January 15, 1941, RU23: Charles Seymour, President of Yale, Records, Series I, Box 68 Folder 587 (“Faculty Forum”), Yale University Archives. Schoolcraft was a Wall Street lawyer and member of the President’s Committee on University Advancement; I could not find much further detail on his life and career.

63 Ibid.
people of the nation as rallying points for the future of humanistic idealism. We must take the offensive in the war of ideas.\textsuperscript{64}

Within Gabriel’s Course of Study Committee, Northrop indeed took the offensive in Yale’s own war of ideas. Although he was not officially a member of the committee in 1940, Northrop must have persuaded someone on the committee to push his views for world integration forward. In 1940, the committee began studying what they called the “Basic Studies,” which would provide a foundation for the entire curriculum and thus provide the new “furniture of the mind.”\textsuperscript{65}

These “Basic Studies” would provide a modern version of the old scholastic \textit{trivium}—the foundational studies of grammar, rhetoric, and logic that provided the basis of the old \textit{artes liberales} curriculum in the Middle Ages (and thus, it was thought, united Christendom).\textsuperscript{66} The committee defined the general goal of these foundational studies as the “ability of the student to think clearly and concisely in symbols and abstractions,” “mental discipline,” and “responsible thinking.”\textsuperscript{67} This general outline of the Basic Studies was fairly easy for the committee to settle upon, since “mental discipline” and “responsible thinking” could be interpreted in different ways. The committee was groping toward a restatement of the proper rules and objectives of all human thought, as well as the content areas that best provided such rules and objectives.

\textsuperscript{64} Quoted in Eugene Kone’s unpublished “Yale in WWII” Manuscript, Eugene Harold Kone Papers (MS 1221), Box 1, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.
\textsuperscript{65} Potts, \textit{Liberal Education for a Land of Colleges}.
\textsuperscript{67} Committee on the Course of Study Meeting Minutes, September 14, 1944, in RU20: Richard C. Carroll, Assistant and Associate Dean of Yale College, records, Box 10 Folder 122, Yale University Archives. See also the minutes from April 1941, and May 5, 1941, in Folder 120.
Judging from later syllabus notes, the New Aesthetes on the committee—represented early on by George Pierson—were not entirely happy with even this definition of foundations. They disliked the phrase “ability of the student to think clearly and concisely in symbols and abstractions,” which implied an abstract logic or science as the unifying element. Instead, the New Aesthetes wanted a prescribed curriculum that began with a deep, personal study of Plato.⁶⁸

Protestant Culturalists, meanwhile, would have preferred to begin with math, modern languages, and historical methods. They viewed these areas as very much related, since they would teach students how to think clearly and in a disciplined fashion. Students would understand that there are precise rules to thought: rules of grammar, logic, and relationships between events that had their basis in the natural world.

However, Northrop’s surrogates pushed hard to have the philosopher’s Philosophy of Science 37 course serve as the main foundation of the Basic Studies. They renamed Northrop's course “Introduction to Logic.” Northrop had an idiosyncratic view of “logic”—as previously described, he meant bringing the philosophy of science in conversation with the philosophy of culture.

In the course description that was offered to the committee, Northrop wrote that the new Introduction to Logic course would teach students to use the “scientific method” and “symbolic logic” to examine the “sphere of value.” In the second half of the course, “an attempt will be made to elicit and define the standards we use in judgments of right

⁶⁸ Yale College Records of the Dean (RU 126), Accession 1964-A-003. Records of William Clyde DeVane as Dean, Box 1 Folder 21 (“Directed Studies, Correspondence and Clippings”), Box 2 Folders 22–27 (curricula, syllabi and reports), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.
and wrong, good and bad, the beautiful and the ugly, to study the ways in which judgments may be validated, and to reflect on the difficulties that arise from conflicts of taste and opinion.” The course would also examine “the nature of justice” and the “basis of rights.” This analysis, Northrop proposed, would lead students to reject the old Western “standards” and to adopt, instead, Northrop’s theory of what he called an “epistemic correlation” between Eastern “intuition” and Western “postulation.” By defining the Basic Studies this way, Northrop implied that the entire Yale curriculum—every course, every department—would then be devoted to a rational meeting of “East” and “West” according to his own grand philosophy.

In the Logic course, Northrop also specified that he would focus on “symbolic logic,” rather than classical, propositional (Aristotelian) logic. Among other alterations to the old Aristotelian *Organon*, symbolic logic removes ordinary language (specifically English) from the equation in favor of neutral, visual symbols. Northrop’s proposals were consistent with his hopes to turn the entire Yale education into a new symbolic

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70 Ibid.

71 For a further explanation of Northrop’s view of “epistemic correlation,” see *The Meeting of East and West*, 436-478.

72 The *Organon* is the name given to Aristotle's six works on logic. The name roughly translates to “instrument” or “tool,” and is thus much larger in meaning than the modern meaning of “logic.” It refers to a singular method by which to understand the natural world (including the arts and sciences), and it was used in the old Greek academies. Although Aristotle's teachings, too, were often contested, the *Organon* formed a key part of curricula and learning in the medieval, Renaissance, and early modern eras. During the Renaissance, Humanists often critiqued Aristotelian logic, and logic in general, as abstract and authoritarian. See Mirella Capozzi and Gino Roncaglia, "Logic and the Philosophy of Logic from Humanism to Kant," in Leila Haaparanta, ed., *The Development of Modern Logic* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 78–158. Symbolic logic is also called “mathematical logic,” “logistics,” or simply the “new logic.” See Paolo Mancosu, Richard Zach, and Calixto Badesa, “The Development of Mathematical Logic from Russell to Tarski, 1900-1935,” in Haaparanta, *The Development of Modern Logic*, 318–470. Some of the more radical and socialistic aspects of symbolic logic are also explored in Purcell, *The Crisis of Democratic Theory*. 
language. As will be seen later, the New Aesthetes contested this proposed shift away from English, as they did most of Northrop’s proposals.

Northrop expressed high hopes for his Logic course. He viewed it as a kind of master key.\(^73\) Writing to Howard Mumford Jones of the Harvard Committee on General Education, Northrop expressed his feelings that, “The mere return to the old tradition is obviously inadequate. I think we are doing a little more here at Yale by getting a course with the title ‘Logic.’” He believed symbolic logic and the philosophy of science would allow students “to go beneath the bare presentation of the past into its basic assumptions, thereby learning how to pass judgment on it and also to create a more adequate education and culture for the future.”\(^74\) Northrop viewed this course as a Copernican step on the ladder of global peace and harmony.

The New Aesthetes fought back on the Logic course. They tried to expand the options under the Basic Studies, convincing the committee to change the title of the requirement from “systematic thinking” in “symbols and abstractions” to “the organization and expression of ideas.” This new title took the Basic Studies out of the direct purview of the Philosophy Department under Northrop and Charles Hendel. In this formulation, “The Organization and Expression of Ideas” would now include more

\(^{73}\) Indeed, this is how Peter Galison explains the Northrop Theory, as a master key, in “The Americanization of Unity.”

\(^{74}\) F. S. C. Northrop to Howard Mumford Jones, November 7, 1946, MS 627: Filmer Stuart Cuckow Northrop Papers, Box 4 Folder 108, Yale University Archives.
options in each of the four areas: logic, mathematics, English and English literature, and languages.  

Few committee members seemed satisfied with this result, however. They hoped to avoid a vague distribution system, whereby students selected their courses from lists and many options. New Aesthete George Pierson asked the committee, “Are our Liberal Arts subjects and methods really calculated to fit men for twentieth century life? Our current theory seems to be that one specialization, plus a random group of superficial experiences, will meet all needs.” Pierson argued for independence from a group distribution scheme. He went on to suggest that Yale needed to be different from the rest because the institution was special and elite. “Yale is so placed, with regard both to student body and Faculty, as to be able to give a superior and even perhaps a different Liberal Arts training. We do not have to conform to the average,” he stated. “If we could solve the old riddle of the Liberal Arts program, and make it modern and satisfactory, we should do America, and Yale, no harm.” For Pierson, a logic course as Northrop envisioned it would do harm, while the New Aesthetes viewed their own proposals as protective of American interests.

Using Theodore M. Greene’s Humanism as a Mediator

In the debates that followed, Yale Dean of the College William DeVane attempted to use Theodore M. Greene’s (the Princeton Humanist’s) philosophy as a

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75 Committee on the Course of Study Meeting Minutes, October 11, 1941, RU 20: Richard C. Carroll, Assistant and Associate Dean of Yale College, Records, Box 10 Folder 120, Yale University Archives.
76 George Pierson, “Two Proposals for the Revision of the B.A. Curriculum,” October, 1940, Committee on the Course of Study Meeting Minutes, RU 20: Richard C. Carroll, Assistant and Associate Dean of Yale College, records, Box 10 Folder 120, Yale University Archives.
77 Ibid.
mediator between these three conflicting views. That is, he drew upon Princeton
Humanism and Greene’s intellectualization of Protestant Idealism (described in the
previous chapter) to try and settle the debate. This attempt at mediation did not go over
well, especially with Northrop.

In the late 1930s, Greene had chaired an American Council of Learned Societies
(ACLS) Commission on the future of the humanities and undergraduate education. The
Commission included linguist Charles C. Fries and Brown University president Henry M.
Wriston, although Greene had done the majority of the writing of the final document. By
1940, Greene had prepared a draft of the document, titled “Liberal Education and
Democracy." He sent a copy to Dean DeVane and other private college leaders.\(^78\)

The Greene draft defined liberal education and democracy in Humanist terms.
Greene wrote that the ACLS “has become increasingly aware of various forces in
American culture, and trends in American education, which threaten the very basis of all
scholarship.”\(^79\) Greene wrote specifically that progressive education, science, and
naturalism were undermining American ideals of “individual liberty.”\(^80\) Instead of
science and naturalism, Greene argued that liberal education and democracy must have
its basis in “intrinsic values” of “truth, goodness, and beauty” that were at the heart of
American idealism.\(^81\)

\(^78\) See Theodore Meyer Greene, Liberal Education and Democracy: Preliminary Draft of a Report to Be
Submitted to the American Council of Learned Societies by Its Committee on Educational Trends in the
Humanities (New York: Offset Printed by Colorite Offset Printing, 1940). This document was edited and
later published as William Dighton, Theodore Meyer Greene, Henry M. Wriston, and Charles C. Fries,
\(^79\) Greene, Liberal Education and Democracy, 4.
\(^80\) Ibid, 6.
\(^81\) This precise wording is actually from Liberal Education Re-examined, 32–33.
According to Greene, the proper order and weight of studies in a curriculum should always be related to the universal standards of “truth, goodness, and beauty” and “true morality.”82 Therefore, in Greene’s view, each discipline should be evaluated on its worth—and sequenced in the curriculum—depending upon its contribution to intrinsic moral principles, especially what Greene referred to as the “belief in the value and dignity of the individual.”83 Greene further specified that the “belief in the dignity of the individual” was a value above plain rationality or science:

We have seen that morality, religion, and art engage the innermost regions of man’s personality. They determine and express his thought, desires, and emotions about what is most valuable in human life. They penetrate beneath mere sensation and ratiocination, mere knowledge of an external world and of social phenomena, to those central experiences of value which condition human individuality and endow human life with meaning.84

Greene’s writings reflected a staunch Humanist stance: the view that these moral values were not only transcendent but also authoritative. In Greene's view, an essential morality, religion, and art “determine” all else, including the philosophy of the disciplines themselves.

Greene wrote that the humanities were truly American, because they were the only subjects that access this realm of authoritative value. “Men differ, no doubt, in native aesthetic ability,” Greene wrote, “but all men have some innate endowment for aesthetic response and each individual can, with suitable exercise, develop his native

82 Ibid, 45–46.
83 Ibid, 63.
84 Ibid, 69–70.
aptitude and acquire the capacity for more deeply satisfying aesthetic enjoyment.” The humanities develop man’s goodness: his ability, small or large, to grasp these higher moral values. The humanities therefore must have a central role in the curriculum, both as the provider of values and the guide toward values that are just and good, Greene wrote in the “Liberal Education and Democracy” draft.

Greene’s ideal curriculum, like his stage system described in the previous chapter, moved from “atomistic awareness” to “historico-philosophical synthesis.” It began with mathematics, which Greene wrote provided “mental training.” Greene returned to the faculty psychology to argue that mathematics provided a mental discipline that could then be applied to other parts of the curriculum. Since “mental processes are essentially the same…precise analysis, valid inference, cogent synthesis, intuitive insight” possessed a “common character,” he wrote. The curriculum then moved to the natural sciences, the social sciences, and, finally, to the humanities and religion, which provided man’s true values. A culminating moral philosophy course—a total synthesis of all “philosophy” and “history”—would organize man’s knowledge and values as a cohesive whole.

In the ACLS draft of “Liberal Education and Democracy,” Greene departed slightly from the Humanism he had previously outlined and developed while at Princeton. At Princeton, as we have seen, only select students read Plato and the Bible. For the national ACLS-recommended curriculum, Greene instead emphasized the disciplining quality of mathematics and the authoritative values given to students from Humanist philosophers and historians. He also noted the importance of the Greek and

85 Ibid, 63.
86 Ibid, 48.
87 Ibid, 70–78.
Latin classical languages, the English language, and the ability to think about different cultures in different contexts.

Dean DeVane tried to use this draft to unite the Yale faculty. DeVane thought that Greene's draft was a promising start to providing cultural and intellectual unity, and he warned the Committee on the Course of Study that time was running out. Soon, the U.S. would likely join the war, and Americans would need a common “faith.” Greene’s blueprint for the humanities as beginning in mathematics and ending in moral philosophy, DeVane indicated, seemed just fine. It might satisfy both the Culturalists and the Humanists. Why not just copy that outline?

By the point of U.S. entry into World War II, the committee, however, was still divided on the Basic Studies. Since these foundational studies would help determine the rest of the curriculum, this unresolved issue vexed the committee. The Culturalists preferred a more historical and variable curriculum than the one that Greene had outlined, while Northrop continued to push for his Logic course. Nonetheless, with the pressures of possible war increasing, in November 1941, DeVane and Gabriel pushed to have the Yale faculty approve a preliminary program. They fleshed out a set of distribution requirements that included the Organization and Expression of Ideas (with four options), studies in Classical Civilization, the Inorganic and Organic Sciences, Social Sciences, and, finally, Arts and Literature. According to Gabriel, the committee felt “finished” and wanted to present their reform to the faculty, perhaps before it could be shelved or debated further. Pearl Harbor, and its aftermath, changed this plan.

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88 Committee on the Course of Study Meeting Minutes, RU 20: Richard C. Carroll, Assistant and Associate Dean of Yale College, records, Box 10 Folder 120, Yale University Archives.
The Rise of the New Aesthetes

American entry into the war shifted the Yale debates considerably. No matter what side of the curricular debate they were on, faculty on the committee believed that Protestant Idealism itself might actually perish with American involvement in the war. Protestant Idealism as a way of life and a way of thinking could be lost forever, they believed, with American entry. If the United States took on a more instrumental role in the world, devoted more to technical and scientific achievement than big philosophical ideas and morals, Protestant Idealism as a whole would inevitably decline, they surmised.

Shortly after Pearl Harbor, senior faculty member Chauncey Brewster Tinker, a philologist who tended to support the Protestant Culturalist position, formed an emergency committee on “preserving the liberal arts” in American life. Not many records survive from Tinker’s emergency committee, but the few records that do survive suggest that his emergency committee was devoted to three tasks: uniting the faculty, giving special scholarships and fellowships out to humanities professors across the nation, and advocating for salary increases and senior positions for junior humanities faculty at Yale. 89

In addition, after American entry into the war, competition to define the postwar world (especially educational policies and practices) increased. Already a heated competition, the war led to a full-blown ferment. Several national committees and university committees (such as Harvard’s) formed to define “general education” or

89 The records that do survive were thankfully kept by Kone for his "Yale During WWII" manuscript; see Kone Papers. I attempted to look in other locations for additional records, but it does not seem as though minutes or records of the meetings were kept.
“liberal education” for the nation—and for the free world by extension. The emphasis on science and technology also increased dramatically.\textsuperscript{90}

Two specific developments—one on-campus, one off-campus—catalyzed these fears that Protestant Idealism was on the verge of collapse. On campus, Yale became heavily involved with the government’s war effort and foreign area studies. Foreign area studies “invaded the undergraduate curriculum during the war,” historian Daniel Catlin, Jr. observes.\textsuperscript{91} These courses—largely imposed by the military and federal government offices—were narrowly designed to quickly understand the Axis powers and prepare for wartime leadership as efficiently as possible. These courses almost uniformly drew upon the “sociological and anthropological sciences” and were thus sharply resisted as too modern and material by most Course of Study Committee members. When combined with other new programs in military and applied research, applied foreign area studies courses contributed to the committee’s collective belief that Yale was losing ground in the larger battle of ideas.

Off-campus, committee leaders Gabriel, DeVane, and Hendel were attending high-level meetings of national leaders at the Princeton Inn on Nassau Street. There, they joined forces with Harold Dodds, Christian Gauss, Greene, and the rest of Princeton’s Humanists, as well as with a Columbia University humanist faction led by Great Books advocate Mark Van Doren. These individuals and leaders wanted to join together and overcome any philosophical/religious differences, in order to resist progressive and

\textsuperscript{90} See Charles M. Dorn, American Education, Democracy, and the Second World War (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) for an overview of these developments.

naturalist approaches to the American curriculum. Attacking proposals for a wartime and postwar curriculum put forward by the progressive oriented American Council on Education (ACE), the group joined a commission established by the Association of American Colleges (AAC) to defend a more traditional (and Christian oriented) liberal education for the nation. The AAC Commission included familiar figures like Greene and Van Doren, as well as Hendel and Gabriel. In 1943, the AAC Commission produced a statement on “The Nature and Aims of General Education” that reiterated many of the same ideas as Greene’s ACLS draft.\(^2\) In addition, Van Doren’s celebrated book *Liberal Education* (1943) was part of this joint, coordinated effort.\(^3\)

As the war dragged on, this AAC Report was lost in the mix. The ACE, and a related government-level committee headed by Cornell President Edmund E. Day, advocated for a tighter relationship between higher education and the federal government and its military programs. The Day and ACE proposals led to the establishment of the Army Specialized Training Program (ATSP), the Navy Specialized Training Programs (V-12 and others), and a variety of progressive oriented general education programs for returning veterans and civilian students. Although Hendel, DeVane, and Gabriel had some luck in convincing the Navy in maintaining a traditional, Christian-oriented liberal education in their programs, the Yale group felt that they were losing a battle to influence the future of education in the nation as a whole. They referred to themselves as the

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\(^3\) Mark Van Doren, *Liberal Education* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1943). On the tight coordination between these efforts, see Kone’s drafts and papers for his unpublished manuscript, “Yale During WWII.”
In one of his annual reports describing the educational debates around the country, Dean DeVane wrote that, “Essentially, our freedom was taken from us; or, to put it more handsomely, we gave our freedom to the great cause of our country.” Meanwhile, there were rumblings that President James Bryant Conant and Harvard University were going to make a splash in the general/liberal education debates.

As some of these developments were occurring in the fall of 1942, the Yale Corporation (the body of trustees) issued a rare public statement on “The Liberal Arts.” It read:

The Corporation wishes to impress on Yale graduates and upon the general public the danger of the impoverishment of the nation’s mind and soul, should less tangible values of our culture be allowed to shrivel while our energies are devoted to the task of winning a war to maintain them. Of what worth is freedom from want, if our minds be on a lower intellectual level; or freedom from fear if we have a less cultured life to defend; or freedom of speech if we have poorer thoughts to express; or freedom of religion if we bring a less enlightened faith to the worship of God?

This statement was joined by a more organized effort on the part of the New Aesthetes at Yale to re-take the momentum on the University's curriculum. Two days prior to the release of the Corporation’s statement, the New Aesthetes wrote a letter to President Seymour. Signers of the letter included Maynard Mack (English), Thomas Mendenhall (history), and George Pierson (history), as well as New Aesthete allies Louis Martz

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94 Commission on Liberal Education meeting minutes, Eugene H. Kone Papers, Box 2 Folder Liberal Arts, Yale University Archives.
96 Yale University, "Statement by the Corporation, 12 December 1942" (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942).
The letter demanded that Yale issue a “declaration of faith.” This “declaration of faith,” the New Aesthetes argued, should be “a sign to the believers in the Great Western tradition that Yale stood, and did not buckle, at the moment when it became most difficult to stand.” It charged Seymour with abandoning this faith—with a failure to uphold “liberal education as an organic element in the commonwealth, no more to be dealt with lightly and carelessly than the interests of the farm, the factory, or the church.” If Seymour himself did not issue a clear “manifesto” to the Yale community and to the world, the New Aesthetes warned, “what happens to us as a collective body may be tragic and enduring.”

Shortly after Christmas 1942, Seymour did write a memorandum to U. S. government and military leaders. He urged government and military leaders to reconsider their plans and make a “declaration of the permanent value of the liberal arts in our life.” Seymour’s memo likely fell somewhat short of the New Aesthetes’ expectations, however; it called on the government to take the lead, not the universities—and not Yale (although Seymour did attach a few sketches of the new Yale curriculum, circa 1942-43).

Following this exchange, the New Aesthetes launched broader attacks on the Protestant Culturalists and on Northrop in particular. These intensified attacks were not 

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97 George Pierson to Charles Seymour, December 10, 1942, MS 1221: Eugene H. Kone Papers, Box 2 Folder Liberal Arts, Yale University Archives.
98 Charles Seymour, “On a Program of Studies in the Liberal Arts, Following the Cessation of Hostilities,” December 29, 1942, MS 1221: Eugene H. Kone Papers, Box 2 Folder Liberal Arts, Yale University Archives. Seymour sent this memorandum to Army General Frederick Osborn, National Resource Planning Commission chairman Floyd Reeves, the Navy's Joseph Barker, the War Department's Harvey Bundy, and U. S. Commissioner on Education John Studebaker.
exclusive to Yale. At Kenyon College, the New Critic leader John Crowe Ransom was engaged in similar efforts with his committee members; the same with Allen Tate at Princeton, who joined the Princeton Humanists in advocating for the traditional humanities as the basis of the curriculum. Ransom wrote to Tate that, “We’ve had a lot of turmoil here—as doubtless at Princeton, most at Princeton of all places as we hear in these parts—over speed-up curriculum. The liberal education is imperiled, though here at least we’ve tried to save it. Conferences, committees, faculty meetings, have made life pretty terrible.” Ransom and his fellow New Critics around the nation opposed what Ransom referred to as literature’s “co-option” in the war effort.99

As a strategic response, the New Aesthetes began to devise an entirely separate curricular program along the lines of Princeton’s Special Program in the Humanities. This program, written up by George Pierson at the behest of Maynard Mack and Thomas Mendenhall, was initially called the “Planned Experiment in Liberal Education.” The program would involve a prescribed sequence of courses covering all four years of college, catering to the gifted and most pious students. Its professed goal, Pierson wrote, was to show the “One that underlies the many.”100

In April 1943, Pierson presented the idea for the Planned Experiment in Liberal Education to the Committee on the Course of Study. Claiming that, “All is not well with us,” Pierson wrote that Yale is being “attacked from within and attacked from without.”

100 George Pierson, “The Planned Experiment in Liberal Education,” April 1943, RU 20: Richard C. Carroll, Assistant and Associate Dean of Yale College, records, Box 10 Folder 121, Yale University Archives.
The triumph of naturalism and secularism, he said, is leading even Yale professors to think that, “all studies are equally broadening and valuable.” Pierson continued:

The present method of grouping subjects categorically under roman numerals is as confusing to all concerned as the dishes in a cafeteria would be if there were not a well recognized order and subordination in one’s conception of a meal. There is at present time no such order and subordination in most people’s conception of an education, and we must therefore educate them—and possibly to some measure ourselves—to perceive one.  

Arguing that the “present performance of American higher education in the crisis may someday be described as little short of disgraceful,” Pierson wrote that the Planned Experiment would correct the “anarchy of the past fifty years.” “Here is an opportunity,” he wrote, “not to bring about the millennium, but to move a little closer to it by radical experiment—that is to say, an experiment which aims to get back to the roots...To restore the words ‘liberal education’ to their true meaning would seem to be one of the imperious demands of our time.” Pierson’s idea for the Planned Experiment seemed to mimic, or at least build upon, Princeton’s Special Program, in using the Plato to bring Americans closer to the “millennium.” It was also envisioned as a small honors program for elite humanists who would receive special training apart from the rest of Yale undergraduates—just as at Princeton.

Pierson clarified that true “philosophy” would be the unifying agent of this new honors program. His view of philosophy, however, was now positioned atop the Protestant Culturalist view of history. Guided by a “synoptic philosopher” who “stands by, so to speak, like the Commentator in Wilder’s play, ‘Our Town,’” select students and

Ibid.
faculty, he said would examine the “laws and principles which operate in our natural world” but, more importantly, the larger “moral laws which bind together the individual and society,” and which stood above nature and natural laws. The proposal also equated true “philosophy” with Plato, saying that all Western philosophy was merely “footnotes” to Plato.102

This fully prescribed curriculum would begin in freshman year with courses on the natural sciences, to be paired with a philosophy course on “universals.” This latter course would introduce major categories of thought: “monism, dualism, pluralism, materialism, idealism, realism, and so on, so that [the student] may have a means of recognizing typical points of view, which he will always be encountering, and so that he will come eventually to some position of his own,” Pierson wrote. In sophomore year, these select students would examine the “raw materials” of social thought, arts, and literature along with philosophical courses in “aesthetics and ethics.” In the final two years, they would select one of four possible “field majors”: History of the West, Modern Society, The Humanities, and General Science. Each of these majors would involve a set of both content and philosophical courses designed to illuminate the highest “moral laws,” Pierson wrote of the new honors program.103

Meanwhile, the Committee on the Course of Study was still warring over the standard curriculum for the rest of Yale. They still needed to figure out the final course—one intended to update and reestablish the old president’s course in moral philosophy.

102 Ibid. (The phrase "footnote(s) to Plato" seems to have been attributed to the Harvard metaphysician Alfred North Whitehead.)
103 Ibid.
From the Unity to the Disunity of Knowledge

In his own emergency committee, Chauncey Brewster Tinker was furious at the New Aesthetes for taking a separate path. Tinker accused them of “whoring after I. A. Richards,” a well-known Harvard leader in the New Criticism. Tinker urged swift reconciliation between Yale’s warring Idealists.

The final deliberations on the Yale curriculum began in the spring of 1944 as an effort to reach consensus on what was initially termed the senior-year “synoptic course.” The “synoptic course” in the standard undergraduate program was another key battleground, since it was the course designed to synthesize student learning into a meaningful whole.

As Gabriel stated in a 1943 document, “Principles and Policies of the Course of Study Committee of Yale College,” Yale was trying to “hold fast to the values of the old liberal arts education of the first half of the 19th century.” A renewed “emphasis on religion and particularly philosophy, is a 20th century effort to recover the values of the old president’s course in moral philosophy,” he wrote. Gabriel further stated that, “The senior course in moral philosophy taught by the president disappeared partly because the influence of science had undermined some of the old assumptions and values on which it rested.” He went on to specify that, “The rise of naturalism in American thought reaching its high point in the decades of the 1920s and 1930s” had led to “the relative decline of religion and philosophy, of disillusionment and cynicism, and of the widespread and emphatic affirmation of the doctrine of ethical relativity.” Gabriel hoped this document

104 Tinker quoted in Paul H. Fry, “A Very Brief History of the Yale English Department, Excluding the Present,” http://english.yale.edu/about-department/history-department
would refocus the debates on challenging ethical and cultural relativism rather than on
metaphysical or theological disputes.\textsuperscript{105}

To prepare for these final deliberations, both the New Aesthetes and the
Protestant Culturalists put forth their leading representatives to argue their cases. For the
New Aesthetes, Maynard Mack and Thomas Mendenhall joined the committee to speak
for a transcendent and immaterial Reason as the basis of the Christian mind. For the
Protestant Culturalists, Gabriel argued for a historical course in Western civilization that
would instead show patterns and natural laws. Joining the three-way battle, F. S. C.
Northrop also joined the committee officially to argue for his own curriculum as the very
hallmark of modern integration.

As these combatants geared up for a final battle, the committee began to discuss
the design of the “synoptic course.” Committee members were committed to making the
final requirement both “philosophical” and “historical,” but they were hesitant to
designate whether the Philosophy Department (represented now exclusively by Northrop)
should take the lead in planning it.

As the representative of the Philosophy Department, Northrop was asked to have
a first try at designing the synoptic course. Three weeks later, he returned with a
“Proposal for Logic and Philosophy in the Freshman Year and Yale College.” This was
an aggressive title, since it suggested that the synoptic course could only be properly
defined by restoring the earlier emphasis of the committee on a foundational science and
logic (and specifically, Northrop's own system). Marking the proposal “Confidential!!!”,

\textsuperscript{105} Ralph Gabriel, “Principles and Policies of the Course of Study Committee of Yale College,” May 7,
1943, Eugene Harold Kone Papers (MS 1221), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.
Northrop hoped to use this opportunity to take the committee all the way back to the beginning of their debates and conflicts. Sensing disintegration, Northrop pushed again to have his system be a modern unifier.106

Northrop again tried to take over the whole curriculum. After Northrop’s Introduction to Logic course, students, he said, should take courses in Greek Civilization and Greek Science and Philosophy. In addition to teaching students a wide swath of Greek science, literature, and philosophy, these courses would also teach students the “Northrop Theory:” that a culture’s philosophy of science conditioned everything else: its values, religious beliefs, political systems, and worldviews. This was a highly controversial position, then as now. Northrop’s position could easily be viewed as morally relative, since it suggested that scientific reasoning designated the direction of entire cultures and belief systems.

The Aristotelian logic learned in these Greek civilization courses was then the key, in Northrop’s proposal, to understanding Medieval philosophy of science and its “attendant Medieval Roman Catholic culture,” Northrop wrote. Finally, in junior and senior year, this curriculum would move on to modern thought, with primary emphasis on two opposing (but conceptually related) modern cultures and their philosophies: Anglo-American and German-Russian. Each analysis would follow similarly: it would

106 F. S. C. Northrop, “Proposal for Logic and Philosophy in the Freshman Year and Yale College,” February 1944, RU 20: Richard C. Carroll, Assistant and Associate Dean of Yale College, records, Box 10 Folder 122, Yale University Archives.
seek to uncover the relationship between a culture’s philosophy of science and its values.\textsuperscript{107}

In the proposal, Northrop sought to connect almost every course at Yale to his theory. In economics, the ideas of William Stanley Jevons (“the founder of Anglo-American economic theory,” according to Northrop), would be connected to what students learn in Economics 10, and also related to the philosophies of Bishop Berkeley, David Hume, John Locke, and the science of Newton. The course of study would then move to German-Russian attempts to work around the “errors” of Locke and Newton, through the philosophies of Kant, Hegel, and Marx, and similar efforts by American Pragmatists to work around the divorce of science and values. This would lead to an analysis of the modern social sciences and social thought.\textsuperscript{108}

If time in the curriculum allowed, Northrop thought about concluding his ideal curriculum with the major shifts in modern science—especially the New Physics of Einstein. He believed that truly understanding the Einstein revolution would lead to the “major, contemporary task of our time, that, namely, of integrating Western civilization with Oriental civilization,” or the “intuition” with “postulation.” All of this synthetic work would be based in Northrop’s ambitious theory, aided by insights from modern physics.\textsuperscript{109}

Northrop further specified that the whole curriculum and every department would undergo a dramatic transformation. Instead of individual courses having their own special

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
terminologies and methodologies, “extemporaneous literary metaphors are being replaced...by logical analysis and a technical, logical terminology” similar to the use of symbolic logic and logical positivism. A unified, symbolic logic would therefore define the Yale curriculum if not the entire university, in Northrop’s proposal. He continued:

Not merely the connections between science and philosophy but also the connections between philosophy and literary criticism, political theory, and religion would be treated, the student being made aware of how the positions in the given system in physics, biology, psychology, metaphysics, literature, politics, and theology all hang or fall together since all are grounded in a common set of basic technical, philosophical concepts and assumptions.110

Here, Northrop asserted that every subject, including religion, could be reduced to a universal, logical, and scientific language. Northrop’s “basic technical” assumptions were hardly shared by everyone, however. The New Aesthetes and other committee members saw them as a perverse form of totalitarianism.

Reacting to the proposal, DeVane called it “brilliant” but felt that it was “too much of a straightjacket.” Other committee members, while admitting that Northrop’s proposal was intriguing, felt that “the approach to synthesis through science did not provide the only way to achieve synthesis.”111

The New Aesthetes, however, balked at the idea of some absolute Idealism taught by a lone faculty member.112 Taking a strategy of advocating for pluralism and

110 Ibid.
111 Committee on the Course of Study Meeting Minutes, February 3 & 17, 1944, RU 20: Richard C. Carroll, Assistant and Associate Dean of Yale College, records, Box 10, folder 122, YUA.
112 Absolute Idealism is a version of Idealism typically associated with the German philosopher Hegel and, to some degree, with the British Idealists of the late nineteenth century and the Harvard philosopher Josiah Royce. Unlike Subjective Idealism, it posits that there is no division between “thought” and “being.”
individualism, they viewed Northrop’s curriculum as too restrictive. “Under modern conditions, and with a class of over five hundred students, a single attempt at unity, similar to the president’s course in moral philosophy of a hundred years ago, is impractical,” Thomas Mendenhall stated emphatically. “Certain more modest, more limited approaches to the problem, however, can be made.”

The New Aesthetes began to argue for their version of intellectual pluralism. “Even though the courses cannot in any absolute degree achieve the full goal, they will start the student thinking about synthesis and the real emphasis in these courses should be in this direction,” Mendenhall argued. Further, the New Aesthetes posited that unity might be conditionally achieved by teaming two faculty members together.

Northrop responded that the central purpose of the entire Yale curriculum would be lost if a single organizing field—the philosophy of science—failed to provide the foundation of unity. Classifying courses as “interdepartmental” or making them “cooperative” would not translate into a unified, global idealism, he asserted, but rather...
produce intellectual and global chaos. What was needed was a “theory” of the curriculum, which Northrop said could only be supplied by the philosophy of science.

DeVane and Gabriel desperately tried to dissolve the argument. They suggested that the “troublesome term ‘synoptic’ be abandoned and another rubric, ‘The Unity of Knowledge,’ be substituted in its place.” Perhaps realizing that the “Yale Reform” was at risk, they also considered abandoning the senior-year course altogether, citing “any attempt at controlled synthesis by Faculty legislation” an “apparent impossibility.”

Yet, the committee pushed on with discussions, attempting to regroup and achieve some kind of compromise. “In the discussion that followed, an attempt was made to define what the Committee meant by ‘Synthesis’ and what qualities a synthetic course should have,” the Secretary recorded. “On some points the Committee appeared to be agreed; on others, vague and uncertain.” The committee generally saw eye-to-eye on a few points. First, synthesis “is a reality,” meaning that the committee believed that knowledge was, indeed, unified. Second, they agreed that, “Synthesis does not necessarily mean a consolidation of all points of view upon a single topic, nor does it imply that compromise is a prerequisite to synthesis.” Most of the Committee members also acknowledged that synthesis “will differ from field to field, and that certain courses

115 This is actually F. S. C. Northrop to Howard Mumford Jones, November 7, 1946, MS 627: Filmer Stuart Cuckow Northrop Papers, Box 4 Folder 108, Yale University Archives. I am using his words here to communicate similar arguments he made in the committee meetings.
116 Committee on the Course of Study Meeting Minutes, October 26, 1944, RU 20: Richard C. Carroll, Assistant and Associate Dean of Yale College, records, Box 10 Folder 122, Yale University Archives.
117 Ibid.
now offered in the curriculum are achieving the goal which the Committee had in mind.”

Beyond this, the committee agreed on little else. Central questions still remained. Would the unity be achieved by a Humanist philosophy, by history, or by a global idealism through the philosophy of science such as Northrop suggested? Should the final course be on a concrete topic or a specific work of art or literature, or should it be on a more general epoch or culture? Would the committee insist that the culminating course be team-taught, or might a single instructor furnish the synthesis? Again, Dean DeVane and Gabriel pushed for some kind of reconciliation between these many avenues.

Northrop continued to insist that “unity” must come from pushing the philosophy of science into the humanities. For Northrop, “scientific philosophy” defined what it meant to be modern and cosmopolitan, while the older humanities were protecting the status quo. Northrop and Mendenhall started to battle. Northrop proposed that only a select few courses emphasizing the philosophy of science and “theory” should be included in the synoptic requirement. “Mr. Mendenhall dissented and suggested that even if the approach is through [scientific] theory a touchstone is necessary and the end result much the same,” reported the Secretary of the Committee. Mendenhall seemed to acknowledge that both he and Northrop were grappling for the same Idealism.

Northrop pushed further. He issued a statement attempting to clarify his views. “Since the integration of knowledge is not given as an observable fact, but is attained only by recourse to theory, courses in this group are limited to those departments which

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118 Committee on the Course of Study Meeting Minutes, October 17, 1944, RU 20: Richard C. Carroll, Assistant and Associate Dean of Yale College, records, Box 10 Folder 122, Yale University Archives.
have such established theory, and to courses which are concerned with the integrative theory of their subject matter,” Northrop stated. Here, Northrop implied that the Philosophy Department, and particularly his version of its mission, could only supply the unity needed to move Idealism forward into the future because its theory was non-ideological. “In the humanities and social sciences, at least, there are different schools of thought, and several rival influential theories of how the subject matter in question is to be integrated,” he said. Northrop argued that the philosophy of science was beyond these different schools of thought because it provided an integrative theory of all thought. Any synoptic course “must not be restricted to one specific theory or school of thought, but must include [all] the major theories.” This was a role that Northrop envisioned only for a “scientific philosophy.” He continued:

Since the aim of [the synoptic course] is to aid the student in integrating the various departments of knowledge, and since each of the rival theories of any one department usually designates the relation between its subject matter and that of other departments, any course in this group must pursue an integrative theory of its subject matter with respect to the light this theory throws on the interconnections of human knowledge.

Claiming that the philosophy of science represented a vehicle of global objectivity, Northrop concluded his statement by referencing global, cultural integration. “We can hardly judge...between the Anglo-American and Russian communistic theory of economics, politics, history, or philosophy if any one of these subjects has been presented

119 Northrop, “The Interconnections of Knowledge”, November 16, 1944, RU 20: Richard C. Carroll, Assistant and Associate Dean of Yale College, records, Box 10 Folder 122, Yale University Archives.
120 Ibid.
in terms of the theory of but one of those two rival schools of thought.” \(^{121}\) Scientific philosophy, however, could integrate these theories (and their respective sciences, cultures and political systems) into a comprehensive whole.

The last recorded statement on the synoptic course came from James Leyburn, a sociologist who had signed the New Aesthetes’ letter on preserving the liberal arts. Leyburn weighed in strongly against Northrop’s aggression, yet he also expressed frustration with the entire effort. “Philosophy, both historically and actually, is a study based upon and constantly stressing the unity of knowledge,” Leyburn wrote. The Committee’s proposals have been broadly “arguments in favor of philosophy.” But, for Leyburn, the committee meetings had revealed the desperation of the times, which for Leyburn reflected battles to preserve an old Idealism. \(^{122}\) Leyburn put Northrop into that category as well.

Leyburn found that all three parties were being protective, obnoxious, and/or territorial. The committee meetings had exposed bitter “criticism of the philosophy department” and “criticism of teaching in other departments.” No party had emerged with a halo. Instead of finding a positive way forward, Leyburn thought that the committee put all of its faith in “the compelling power of a rubric—a belief that because a professor teaches a course under the heading of ‘The Interdependence of Knowledge’ he will suddenly become more synoptic than he had theretofore been.” Claiming that, “the tendency to regard the undergraduate as an unreflective child here receives its crowning

\(^{121}\) Ibid.

\(^{122}\) James G. Leyburn, “Comments on Exhibit E (The Interdependence of Knowledge)”, December 15, 1944, RU 20: Richard C. Carroll, Assistant and Associate Dean of Yale College, records, Box 10 Folder 122, Yale University Archives.
achievement,” Leyburn criticized all three camps for pandering and indoctrination. “If the student is, on the other hand, intelligent enough to make his own discriminations (as I think him), should he not be rather encouraged to delve more deeply into specific subjects, by taking existing courses, than urged to let faculty members do the discriminating for him?” he asked. Independent study on the interconnections of knowledge would be far better than “listening to lectures by a man determined to prove them.” Just as the new senior-year requirement “underrates the intelligence of the student,” so too does it insult the faculty, “which seems to be becoming a group of sentimental Big Brothers,” Leyburn concluded, in an interesting pre-Nineteen Eighty-Four reference.123

American Conservatism

The final curriculum, released in August 1945 alongside Harvard’s Redbook, was a hodgepodge on paper. It included the Basic Studies of English, languages, and a vaguely defined “Systematic Thinking” requirement (logic and mathematics). After the Basic Studies, students would then move to study Classical Civilization. The final report specifically stated that the study of Classical Civilization should not include Greek and Roman science; that it should only include Greek literature and aspects of literary philosophy (a blow to Northrop). In the social sciences, students were to focus on the classics of social thought, such as Plato’s Republic. Rounding out the requirements were the categories of inorganic science, organic science, and, finally, arts and literature.124

123 Ibid.
124 Yale College: Report of the Committee on the Course of Study.
In addition, the Yale Reform of 1945 introduced two new honors programs organized by the New Aesthetes: The “Planned Experiment” and another new program, “Scholars of the House.” In Scholars of the House, students wrote an ambitious senior thesis that was similar to the grand thesis culminating Princeton’s Special Program in the Humanities. Scholars of the House also recalled the same program named for Bishop Berkeley in Yale’s early history.\(^{125}\)

This is how the disparate new curriculum looked on paper. In practice, however, the curriculum tended to confirm a social and political conservatism and a resolute defense of American individualism. Idealism was turned into a weapon of American conservatism and a defense against Socialism and any form of collectivism.

Just as Dean DeVane had proposed, the Yale Reform ended up mimicking Theodore M. Greene’s ACLS document. It moved from the Basic Studies to the natural sciences, the social sciences, and, finally, to the humanities. As Humanist Charles Hendel explained it, Yale’s program took students through the story of Western “Man and Civilization.” The science and mathematics courses at the beginning of the curriculum would teach “Man in Nature,” including “knowledge of the nature and laws for the inanimate world and animate world we live in.”\(^{126}\) Chemistry would instruct students in “man’s destiny.” Then, students would move to study “Man in History,” a history of the Christian West through great books and texts. Guided by the Humanists’ judgment of


“philosophy and history,” Hendel said, students would be inculcated into an overall "philosophical history." The social sciences would cover "Man and Society," while the final courses would affirm the transcendent "Man as an Individual" and would be the sole province of the humanities, particularly literature. Since the humanities taught "values," Hendel indicated that they would give the student "a realization of himself, his powers and his limitations, his taste and his judgments, his hopes and his ideas."\(^{127}\)

In discussing the program, Hendel explained that the curriculum moved from "facts and laws of material life" to "the ultimate imponderable and immaterial ideas and values that rule the decisions and actions of the individual," confirming what he called a "conservative," "religious" outlook. The Yale Reform would not be "indoctrination," he said; rather, it would non-dogmatically affirm "Man" as a spiritual entity that transcended environment and history itself. Hendel preferred to call the curriculum "speed[ing] up the process of living" rather than the smear word "indoctrination."\(^{128}\)

Although the curriculum examined "Man in History," it also sought to go beyond history. "One must go beyond history to deal with this question of its meaning," Hendel wrote. "Beyond history is philosophy, poetry, religion. In them man deals more directly with the things of personal concern...Here man looks into the sheer meaning of

\(^{127}\) Hendel, "The Nature and Aims of General Education’’; and Course of Study Meeting Minutes, February 25, 1943, Richard C. Carroll, Assistant and Associate Dean of Yale College, Records (RU 20), Accession 1971-A-003, Box 10, Folder 121, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

destiny.” Hendel’s comments echoed Princeton’s Protestant Idealism in restoring it as above history.

The final report stated that:

In the past the traditional subject matter of the liberal arts curriculum as a whole was regarded as serving a proper social purpose, and accomplished its object for many years. It is now necessary to create courses for that purpose, for the present body of learning in its separate parts has failed to serve any recognized social purpose. This point is clearly revealed by the uses which varying political states have made of the sciences, the social sciences, history, art, literature, and philosophy.

In saying that “the uses which varying political states have made of the sciences, the social sciences, history, art, literature, and philosophy,” the authors were acknowledging that Fascism and Communism ordered the arts and sciences for particular social ends. Their conclusion, after all that squabbling and fighting, was that education in a Democracy now needed to be ordered as well, for its own social purposes—a goal they related back to the antebellum college curriculum. Although the senior-year requirement would not be “indoctrination,” the report clarified, it would seek to “understand the intellectual outlook of a democratic society, its assumptions, its rational structure, its functional habits, and its spiritual aims.” Most of the courses spoke to a conservative outlook on American individualism and capitalism.

In addition, the American Studies program was bolstered to teach a conservative and Anglo-American, Protestant outlook. The financier William Robertson Coe gave a

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large donation in order to fend off what Coe called domestic “state socialism” as well as international Communism. Coe considered homegrown “state socialism” as large a threat as Communism, saying that it would “result in the destruction of individual liberty, and Freedom of Enterprise, and the American Way of Life.”

Yale historian Samuel Bemis wrote back to Coe, saying that, although Yale would not state it officially, they would use the American Studies program to protect and perpetuate the “fundamental principles and virtues of American liberty that flow out of our Anglo-Saxon background.”

**From Philosophy to Literature**

In the aftermath of the Yale Reform, the New Aesthetes also changed their allegiance from philosophy to literature. They took over the Planned Experiment (now renamed “Directed Studies”). Although philosophy was intended to be the basis of the program, literature and New Critical textual analysis became the organizing principles.

Directed Studies shared many similarities with Princeton’s Special Program in the Humanities. The goal of the program was “training in thought and its limitations,” according to one former student. Just as the Special Program in the Humanities taught students the limits of human reason and the power of Divine intuition, Directed Studies taught its trainees the limits of human thought and the moral will of God. As in the Special Program, Directed Studies instructors used Plato and the Old and New

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131 William Robertson Coe to Charles Seymour, June 1, 1949, Charles Seymour, President of Yale University, Records, Box 43, Folder Coe, William, #2, Yale University Archives.
132 Samuel Bemis to Coe, October 12, 1949, Charles Seymour, President of Yale University, Records, Box 43, Folder Coe, William, #2, Yale University Archives.
Testaments as guides toward self-enlightenment and the merger of the secular and Divine worlds.¹³³

Directed Studies students took a fully prescribed curriculum in their first two years (freshman and sophomore years), followed by close advising and personal attention during their final two years. In those first two years, students enrolled in eight yearlong courses: Philosophy I, Mathematics I, Literature I, and Science I (freshman year), and Philosophy II, History I, Society I, and (either) Science II or Science III (sophomore year).

Like the Special Program in the Humanities, this curriculum followed Plato’s *Republic*. Students first encountered, in Philosophy I, various “ways of knowing” and popular secular philosophies, such as pragmatism, existentialism, Marxism, and naturalism. This exploration was compared to what Socrates says in the *Republic* about the nature of truth and justice. Students were exposed to common sense (meaning everyday, accepted) notions of reality, especially ideas about science, relativity, diversity, and progress. This material, too, was related to what Socrates says about higher knowledge in the *Republic*. Much like the Special Program, students were treated like children (albeit privileged children) who first experienced the world with their senses and their reason as average students did. As Philosophy I exposed these fallacies of thinking, students began to understand connections between the highest stage of what the New

¹³³ Yale College Records of the Dean (RU 126), Accession 1964-A-003. Records of William Clyde Devane as Dean, Box 1 Folder 21 ("Directed Studies, Correspondence and Clippings"), Box 2 Folders 22–27 (curricula, syllabi and reports), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library. See also Maynard Mack Papers, Box 106 (syllabi for Literature I and Mack's teachings on the Old and New Testaments), Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Another helpful resource is a thesis by Justin Zaremby, “Directed Studies and the Evolution of American General Education” (New Haven: Whitney Humanities Center, 2006).
Aesthetes called “Platonic Idealism” (also called "Intuition" or “beatific vision” in syllabi and seminar notes) and their correlating courses, Mathematics I (“Pure Mathematics”) and Science I (Chemistry and Physics). Directed Studies thus mimicked the Platonic ascent from Pure Mathematics to Moral Philosophy. In addition, Literature I provided students with “values” by teaching them lessons from the Bible (especially the Old Testament), Shakespeare, Milton, the *Odyssey*, and Alexander Pope.\(^{134}\)

In the second year of the program, students moved from the abstract to the concrete, and from the past to the present. They studied modern history and the social sciences, examining contemporary theories, methods, and data. They even engaged in an experiential learning project in the Connecticut River Valley. In the Science courses, they explored contemporary theories of biology and psychology.\(^{135}\)

In analyzing the lessons of Directed Studies, it is important to move on a semester-to-semester basis rather than a course-by-course basis. Each semester was designed to get students to a higher realization of Platonic Idealism. In the first semester, for instance, Mack used Literature I to provide organizing values for the program as a whole. Mack covered the Old Testament (spending a week on the Book of Job) and the Greek tragedies, while Beardsley, in Philosophy I, introduced students to Plato’s *Republic* and *Apology*. Hence, the course began by presenting a synthesis of the

\(^{134}\) Yale College Records of the Dean (RU 126), Accession 1964-A-003. Records of William Clyde Devane as Dean, Box 1 Folder 21 (“Directed Studies, Correspondence and Clippings”), Box 2 Folders 22–27 (curricula, syllabi and reports), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library. See also Maynard Mack Papers, Box 106 (syllabi for Literature I and Mack's teachings on the Old and New Testaments), Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

\(^{135}\) Ibid.
Christian-Hebraic and classical worlds, comparing this synthesis to the contemporary disunity.\textsuperscript{136}

In Philosophy I, Beardsley then used Charles Sanders Peirce’s essay “Fixation of Belief” (1877)—which advocated for pragmatism as the best way to fix belief—as a foil to explore superior ways of forming and integrating truths. As Beardsley explained to Directed Studies students, “Conflicts between different sources of belief, and between people professing access to same source, and between apparent data of sensations, intuitions, etc., reveal the part played by inference in forming and justifying beliefs.”

Inference and science, however, could be faulty, he said. Beardsley then introduced other ways of believing, knowing, and thinking “briefly as a start,” foreshadowing that Directed Studies as a whole would try to answer the questions of, “Can all acts of knowing be reduced to a single principle?” and “What sorts of claims on our belief are made by various fields of study, and how are these claims to be adjusted?” In Literature I, Mack moved to Shakespeare’s King Lear (devoting two weeks to Lear), Othello, and Antony and Cleopatra, while Beardsley began discussing the process of logical reasoning, introducing the concepts of scientific method (using John Dewey’s How We Think and Ernest Nagel’s and Morris Cohen’s Introduction to Logic and Scientific Method as guides—two popular naturalist textbooks).\textsuperscript{137}

Meanwhile, Mathematics I (Pure/Exact Mathematics) taught students to view mathematics as a “unified whole rather than a group of many separate and more or less unrelated parts.” The “care-little-for-ideas notion is abandoned,” the instructors declared.

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
so that mathematics can be thought of as “deductive thought, as logical system, as expression of relationships not otherwise definable.” Similarly, Science I combined the principles and methods of chemistry and physics to demonstrate that science was an integrated and common sense system of relationships between seemingly disparate parts.\textsuperscript{138}

In the second semester of freshman year, Directed Studies trainees spent four weeks on Alexander Pope’s \textit{The Rape of the Lock} (1712) and a week on \textit{Tom Jones} (1749) in Literature I, while continuing to explore the limits of “Empiricism and Naturalism” in Philosophy I. Critiquing empirical science as a source of knowledge, Beardsley reserved particular scorn for John Stuart Mill, Karl Pearson, and the recent book \textit{Naturalism and the Human Spirit} (1944). He related “Empiricism and Naturalism” to a general philosophy of “Determinism,” linking them to Communism (as well as to John Dewey and the Columbia Naturalists, who were largely represented in \textit{Naturalism and the Human Spirit}).\textsuperscript{139} Like the Princeton Humanists, the New Aesthetes equated naturalism with Communism and considered their mission to be dethroning it as world’s heavyweight champion.

From here, Beardsley explored Plato’s theory of mathematics (“the non-natural, non-empirical Ideal,” he said) and “Rationalism as a theory of knowledge,” as well as contemporary logical positivism. Beardsley explained that a major conflict existed between rationalism and empiricism, as well as between “transcendental idealism” and

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.  
naturalism. In Literature I, Mack finished the year with T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Man*. Beardsley concluded the year by having trainees study what he called the “Poetic Statement.” According to Beardsley, the “Poetic Statement” was higher than both empirical examination and rationality. Poetic statements were “beatific visions” (visions of the Divine) that he said constituted the “fusion of poetry and philosophy.” In the final project of the course, Beardsley asked students to compose a “statement of your own tentative philosophy.”

In the second year, the foundational courses were Philosophy II and History I. Both courses worked together to give students a sense of the overall stability of Christian individualism through time, despite the conflicts and controversies explored in the first year. Philosophy II, covering “values,” served as a “central clearing house for all questions of the direction and purpose of human existence.” Part of its task was to analyze and refute biological and anthropological theories of “man,” and to do the same for modern Catholic and liberal Protestant theories of God and Christianity. Meanwhile, History I covered European and American history from 1500 to the present, focusing especially on intellectual and political exchanges between Britain and the U.S., and the “rise of the individual” in British thought. Classical economics was covered—and restored—as the ‘correct’ economic theory.

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140 Yale College Records of the Dean (RU 126), Accession 1964-A-003. Records of William Clyde Devane as Dean, Box 1 Folder 21 (“Directed Studies, Correspondence and Clippings”), Box 2 Folders 22–27 (curricula, syllabi and reports), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library. See also Maynard Mack Papers, Box 106 (syllabi for Literature I and Mack’s teachings on the Old and New Testaments), Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. 141 Ibid.
Society I covered contemporary social science, while Science II (or Science III, alternatively) dealt with biological and psychological theories of man. Society I examined the anthropological concept of “culture” as developed by Bronislaw Malinowski.

According to course notes, Directed Studies students challenged the rise of anthropology:

By employing Malinowski’s theory of institutions culture was described as the whole fabric of man’s adjustments to the life conditions with which he is inevitably confronted. This element of relativity in culture has philosophical repercussions and led many students to challenge such apparent determinism.142

After establishing that liberal theories of economics, welfare society, and culture were “determinist,” Directed Studies concluded by establishing a proper “philosophy of history” that was idealistic, individualist, heavily Anglo-Saxon, and free-market. It reviewed rival “philosophies of history” from liberals F. S. C. Northrop, Arnold Toynbee, Erich Fromm, and Charles Stevenson (another Yale professor who had developed a pragmatic theory of ethics), in order to refute those theories.143 It sought to “rise above earnest common sense,” which Directed Studies attributed to pragmatism and naturalism.144 Even C. S. Lewis, the Christian apologist, was deemed inadequate. A better “philosophy of history” integrated these rival theories into a more unified whole: what the program called the idea of “Pluralistic Idealism.”145 It attributed this idea to Bishop Berkeley. Thus, Directed Studies defended what the New Aesthetes believed to be the

143 Ibid, and syllabi.
true American philosophy: an immaterial and subjective Protestant Idealism, now restored to its roots in Berkeley.

**Conclusion**

Despite official pronouncements, few Yalies seemed satisfied with the Yale Reform of 1945. Just seven years later, a new president, and New Aesthete, A. Whitney Griswold, led his own “President’s Committee on General Education.” Griswold claimed that, “The adequate definition of a liberal education is certainly still to be made” while his final report stated that, “‘Systematic Thinking’ tends to exist in a vacuum, to become (through its separation from English composition and from other work one might legitimately think about) either an unused tool or an esoteric specialty.”\(^{146}\) The Yale Faculty rejected the “Griswold Revolution,” although Griswold succeeded in removing any trace of “Systematic Thinking” and “logic” from the curriculum.\(^{147}\)

F. S. C. Northrop resigned as the Master of Silliman House and left Yale College for Yale Law School, where his radical ideas found somewhat of a home. Theodore M. Greene moved from Princeton to Yale to lead and teach in Directed Studies. Thomas Mendenhall became the sixth President of Smith College, and James Leyburn left Yale to become Dean of Washington and Lee University.

The attempted restoration of Protestant Idealism at Yale coincided with the Inner Revolution as a whole. In this battle, President Seymour believed he had kept Protestant

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\(^{146}\) Yale University President's Committee on General Education, *Report of the President's Committee on General Education, Yale University* (New Haven: The Committee, 1953), 5.

Idealism alive simply by the men he chose to carry it forward and the clash of their personalities. This clash of personalities itself reflected Protestant Idealism’s historic concern for the character of the people who carry the faith forward. Ultimately, it was “character,” more than quality or consensus, which determined what programs and ideas won out over others.

Seymour was convinced that he had kept Protestant Idealism alive through this clash of personalities. He believed that a stronger and more widespread Protestant Idealism would emerge, not from some grand blueprint or metaphysics, but from the effort to achieve it. Seymour seemed to think that the effort alone—to strive toward knowledge of God—was worth the fight itself and any fractures caused by it. Protestant Idealism would seem to exist effortlessly in the air and water, so to speak. It would be so impregnated in American thought and culture that it would seem foolish to discard it—or even to recognize that it existed.

Reflecting on his presidency upon retirement, Seymour himself seemed satisfied with the overall outcome. He wrote to American Studies financier William Coe that the “only sure guarantee” of Yale’s mission of “the cultivation of the human conscience through the study of the arts and sciences by her Puritan founders” was the “character of the men engaged in it.” Well-formed philosophies and “pious claims,” he said, were “nothing compared” to Yale’s cultivation of idealistic leaders, he told Coe.\(^\text{148}\) The battle of ideas itself had, perhaps, re-energized the Protestant Idealist vision.

\(^\text{148}\) Charles Seymour to William R. Coe, November 27, 1951, Charles Seymour Papers (MS 441), Box 3 Folder 170, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.
Yale alumni, donors, and trustees were generally happy with the outcome. Clergymen, in particular, applauded the effort. They congratulated Seymour on simultaneously defending Christianity and “the capitalistic system.” Frederick Grandy Budlong, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut, honored Seymour for protecting the “citizenry of America.” Alumnus George Dahl wrote in to congratulate Seymour on his “service to church and state.” Alumnus Noel Dunbar applauded Seymour for refusing to allow the “scientists and educators” who “have become too ‘international’ in their thinking” from taking over Yale and America. He felt that Seymour was a “real American” who “shall not sacrifice our democratic institutions on any international altar.” Dunbar also believed that Seymour had helped to “reawaken us to true Americanism, and to inspire us to look more carefully into every foreign influence brought to bear on us.” Others, such as former State Department official William R. Castle, wrote in to say that Seymour had admirably defended the citizenry from “socialism.”

Of all the accolades he received, Seymour might have treasured one from Princeton president Harold Dodds the most. Dodds wrote, “I will always remember you for your staunch upholding of the values of the liberal arts during the war. Science as a cure for all human ills had a great spurt for a while. The humanists seemed to be under a cloud and were suffering from an acute attack of defeatism. Your refusal to succumb to

149 Frederick Budlong to Seymour, May 20, 1949, Charles Seymour Papers (MS 441), Box 3 Folder 123, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.
150 George Dahl to Seymour, October 19, 1950, Charles Seymour Papers (MS 441), Box 3 Folder 159, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.
151 Noel Dunbar to Seymour, June 5, 1949, Charles Seymour Papers (MS 441), Box 5 Folder 255, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.
152 William R. Castle to Seymour, January 30, 1952, Charles Seymour Papers (MS 441), Box 3 Folder 141, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.
those pressures and your insistence that Yale continue to stress humane values was a
memorable service indeed.”

153 Harold Dodds to Charles Seymour, October 25, 1950, Charles Seymour Papers (MS 441), Box 4 Folder 243, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.
Chapter Three
“The Task We Are Attempting is Impossible”: The Hidden Theology of Harvard’s Redbook

The members of the famed Harvard Committee on the Objectives of General Education in a Free Society found themselves in a stalemate about the future of American education and intellectual life. It was nearing Christmas in 1943. Each committee member seemed to have a different idea of general education for the “free society” of the future. Classicist John Finley Jr., a Harvard institution and Humanist, wanted Plato’s Republic as the philosophical basis of all general education. Educational philosopher Robert Ulich, in contrast, hoped to merge progressive educational methods with liberal Christian beliefs in change and progress. Educational scientist Howard E. Wilson had a different approach. Wilson hoped to lead a major ethnographic research project, interviewing Americans to better understand what they thought general education was, and ought to be. These conflicting views, as well as others, often had committee members raising their hands in frustration or resigning from the committee. Finley, and Ulich, in particular, were quarreling back-and-forth with each other. Finley had called Ulich a socialist; Ulich had called Finley a “snob.”¹

How did the Committee on General Education in a Free Society arrive at this point? There are many ways of answering this question, including both secular and theological ways of answering it. From a secular point of view, in 1943, Harvard president James B. Conant had formed this blue-ribbon committee to guide the nation and

¹ January 20, 1944 Meeting Minutes, Material Presented to the Committee, 1943–1945, UAI10.528.10 (hereafter “Committee Files”), Box 1 Serial Numbers 79–89, Harvard University Archives.
the free world with recommendations on democratic education. With Democracy under attack, Conant hoped to bolster it by defining the objectives of Democracy and education. He was supported by the Harvard Corporation, which gave $60,000 toward the project. In 1945, just before the end of the war, Harvard released the committee’s final report, *General Education in a Free Society*. Nicknamed the “Harvard Redbook” for its crimson cover, the report gave recommendations on the curriculum for both high schools and colleges.²

At the time, most of the American newspapers gave front-page coverage to the Harvard Redbook.³ Viewing it as a brave statement of educational freedom, they lauded Harvard educators for taking a broad view during a time of crisis. The *New York Times* deemed the report a “landmark in American education,” one that fulfilled the “highest expectations expressed when the committee was established.”⁴ By 1950, the report sold around forty thousand copies.

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³ Indeed, the findings were considered so important that the *Louisville Courier-Journal* leaked the contents of the report before its publication, setting off something of a media firestorm across the country. See Craig Kridel, “General Education in a Free Society (Harvard Redbook),” in Kridel ed., *Encyclopedia of Curriculum Studies*, vol. 1 (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2010), 400–401.

According to this (secular) interpretation, the committee had reached consensus solely through dialogue and critical give-and-take. Historian David Hollinger attributes the committee’s success to the “scientific attitude” of John Dewey and William James. According to this interpretation, the committee may not have agreed on all points, but they used their collective reason to recommend that Americans should be introduced to classics of Western civilization, to American history and literature, and to the basics of mathematics, biology, chemistry, and other sciences in order to come in contact with all types of learning and diverse ways of knowing. They agreed that students should have an open mind; that no *a priori* principles should govern their thought. Rather, according to this secular interpretation, students should try to think as social scientists think, try to think as literature professors think, and try to think as biologists think—with an open mind. This was democratic openness and freedom in contrast to the authoritarianism of Communism and Fascism. Harvard University itself sold this message to the public; in the report, openness in thinking is mentioned as a virtue.

Using the archival records of the committee, I offer a revisionist, metaphysical or theological interpretation of the report that stresses its authoritarian aspects. In my interpretation, the journey to the Redbook had an ancient and classical origin. Around half of the committee members viewed the committee’s work as an ancient conflict between good and evil, Christianity authority and pagan barbarism. In more recent times, they viewed the committee’s work as a major reform of the secular, elective system of Harvard’s own Charles Eliot and the pragmatic attitude of Dewey and James. They also

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viewed it as a work of Protestant Idealism, and particularly as a correction to the mistakes of Princeton and Yale in interpreting God’s will.

According to the committee vice-chair, Humanist Finley, Princeton and Yale had erred by seeing Idealism as too abstract and detached from the secular world—as too focused on pure thought above lived experience. “Nothing but assumptions are made,” Finley stated of a similar effort from Columbia’s Mark Van Doren in his book *Liberal Education* (1943). Harvard must avoid “…the difficulties that Dean DeVane of Yale, or [Theodore] Greene, fell into,” he said. According to Finley, what was needed was more passion—more of a connection between religious authority and basic human desires. “It seemed to me that we should have a little more accurate knowledge of the relationship of mind to emotion, attitude and value,” he told the committee at one point.  

Although Finley did not elaborate here, his view of Idealism being a primarily emotional experience or one concerned with “attitude” rather than pure thought or intuition would come up again and again—and be afforded substantial weight—in the committee’s deliberations.

The committee deliberations also featured another unique, religious element. Unlike Princeton’s Harold Dodds or Yale’s Charles Seymour, President Conant was a national figure that had gained substantial power and visibility. He was the chair of the National Defense Research Committee—the civilian scientist committee overseeing war projects. Conant had strong views on education, ones that were both secular and

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6 Meeting Minutes for December 14, 1943, and December 21, 1943, Committee Files, Box 1 Serial Numbers 67–78, Harvard University Archives.
theological/metaphysical; he had written about some of those views in a series of 1930s articles that I explore in this chapter.

Conant added a unique element to the deliberations. He was convinced, as other Protestant Culturalists in this study were, that Protestant Idealism required empirical verification in history and lived experience. However, Conant also saw experimental science (what he took to be natural science as well as aspects of social science) as a guide for Christendom—if not its core ingredient. Taking Francis Bacon as his guide, Conant spoke from the Scottish Common Sense tradition that placed a high value on experimental science.  

For Conant, experimental science and Christianity were very much related; in his 1951 book, Science and Common Sense, Conant defined science as the perfect union of “speculation” and experiment that he attributed to Bacon. He viewed science as simply an extension of humanity’s universal “common sense.”

Conant seemed to view the committee itself as a kind of laboratory of humanity’s common sense. Although he must have known that committee members would battle amongst each other, he seemed to view the best kind of verification as a test of first principles. Although Conant championed experimental science, he also believed there was only so much that science could accomplish and that certain rational principles (especially “liberty”) came first. However, this “Aristotelian” position, which denied

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8 Conant acknowledged his debt to Bacon in Science and Common Sense (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), 18. Bacon was a key figure for Common Sense thinkers; see Bozeman, Protestants in an Age of Science. For secular interpretations of Conant’s view of science, see Justin Biddle, “Putting Pragmatism to Work in the Cold War: Science, Technology, and Politics in the Writings of James B. Conant,” Studies in History and Philosophy of Science 42 (2011): 552–561; and Christopher Hamlin, “The Pedagogical Roots of the History of Science: Revisiting the Vision of James Bryant Conant,” Isis vol. 107, no. 2 (June 2016).

9 Conant, Science and Common Sense, 25–32.
subjective intuition, put Conant in potential conflict with John Finley, a Platonic Humanist.\textsuperscript{10}

This theological/metaphysical interpretation of the Harvard Redbook is a fairly dramatic departure from current scholarship. It seeks to investigate how religion has played a role in contemporary education since World War II. The Redbook arguably shaped the curriculum that most Americans followed in the decades following the war. If that curriculum was shaped—at least in part—by theology, what assumptions is it based on and what new questions should we ask about recent educational history? As I show, the assumptions that found their way into the Redbook were based on an ancient conflict between body and mind, the depravity of the human condition, and a deep suspicion of open inquiry. They raise the question of whether American education is informed by civil religion rather than by secularism.\textsuperscript{11}

The Committee Members and Their Positions

It is not possible to fully detail all of the members and their positions on the Harvard committee. There were twelve members of the committee and committee membership fluctuated fairly often over the two years of the project. However, for the purposes of general categorization, I will summarize some of the major positions on the committee as: (1) world socialism, (2) progressivism, (3) Protestant Culturalism (4) Conant’s own Common Sense position, and (5) a more emotionally-inflected Platonic

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\textsuperscript{10} C.f. Hershberg, \textit{Harvard to Hiroshima}.
\textsuperscript{11} The idea of an American “civil religion” tying the nation together is typically associated with sociologist Robert Bellah and his 1967 essay, “Civil Religion in America.” It also has a long and controversial history dating back to the creation of the Constitution and the Federalist system. For an excellent recent history of these debates, see Jonathan Den Hartog, \textit{Patriotism and Piety: Federalist Politics and Religious Struggle in the New American Nation} (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014).
Humanism than so far observed in this study and represented best by John Finley. Thus, the Harvard committee involved (at least) a five-way battle, if not a twelve-way one.

In the descriptions that follow, I do not delve into great depth about these positions. My concern is rather for the clash of positions and how and why decisions were made. Readers interested in exploring these committee members in more depth may be interested in Anita Fay Kravitz’s excellent doctoral dissertation, “The Harvard Report of 1945: A Historical Ethnography” (1994) as well as the primary and secondary sources cited in the footnotes.

(1) *World Socialism*

I interpret philosopher Robert Ulich (Harvard Graduate School of Education) and American Studies professor Howard Mumford Jones as committee members holding strong world socialist positions on the committee. Robert Ulich was born Heinrich Gottlob Robert Ulich in Germany and had been among the many exiles forced to leave Nazi Germany in the 1930s. Ulich openly opposed the right-wing Nazi government, fleeing the German state to settle at Harvard where he became a celebrated philosopher and historian of education. He described his own educational vision as “utopian,” based in an idealist philosophy of knowledge centered on a worldwide community of what he called “man, nature, and spirit.”12 One of his big pushes on the committee was to get the committee to philosophize or to think historically about different philosophies of

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12 Robert Ulich, “Definition of General Education,” in Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 1–17, Harvard University Archives.
education as they developed over time; like F. S. C. Northrop at Yale, Ulich seemed to believe that this work would lead to a confluence of all humanity and religions.\textsuperscript{13}

Ulich saw his own idealist vision as compatible with many educational philosophies, especially with progressive education and the pragmatism of Dewey and James. He told the committee that they should be searching for an “organic combination of progressive education with the American Christian liberal-democratic-tradition.”\textsuperscript{14} Ulich also viewed his philosophy as supporting labor rights and social equality. “We ought to break down class distinctions,” he told the committee. “The basis [of education] should be work, practical work, with intellectual studies branching off. The basis ought to be labor in our society.”\textsuperscript{15} Here, Ulich sought to break down the inherent dualisms, which the Humanists supported, between pure thought and experience. Echoing the German educational philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm August Fröbel, who had created the concept of kindergarten, Ulich’s international Christian vision was one of uplift, vocation, and communitarianism.

Ulich was not the only utopian on the committee or who consulted with the committee. Selma Borchardt, former vice president of the American Federation of Teachers, and attorney for the American Federation of Labor, also visited the committee to espouse her views. She told the committee, “We of the labor movement are desperately


\textsuperscript{14} February 16 and February 23, 1943 meeting minutes, Committee Files, Box 3, “Committee on General Education Minutes through May 1943”, Harvard University Archives.

\textsuperscript{15} October 28, 1943 Meeting Minutes, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 30–46, Harvard University Archives.
concerned about the fact that our educational system, both in structure and in purpose, is not educating in a real social sense.” She criticized teachers for ignoring race and class inequalities, and for ignoring “real facts” about the world. Borchardt outlined a vision of a comprehensive system of critical education stretching from childhood to adult education, in which all learners were rewarded, and in which teachers would possess broad social consciousness and work experience. “We are asking for help in developing a form of community attitude which does not just make noble statements about the importance of work, which recognizes that American is emotionally a classless society,” she told the committee. “The labor movement hates the phrase ‘working class.’”

Howard Mumford Jones felt similarly to Ulich and Borchardt. In his 1947 book, *Education and World Tragedy*, Jones built upon F. S. C. Northrop’s theories to construct what he called an entirely new curriculum for world citizenship. He believed that his fellow literary humanists were hanging on to the past by putting pure thought above experience, which Jones related to “nationalism.” In contrast, Jones constructed a curriculum that would introduce students to the different thought systems of Asian, Russian, British, and American cultures. He also sought to collapse the boundary between vocational training and the liberal arts. “The imputation of inferior intellectual status to vocational or professional training is astonishing,” Jones wrote, “in view of the patent fact that medical students, law students, engineering students and other students who know their own minds work about twice as hard as students in the liberal arts.

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16 Meeting minutes for October 13, 1943, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 18–29, Harvard University Archives. For Borchardt's biography, see the finding aid to her papers at Wayne State University (https://reuther.wayne.edu/files/LP000357.pdf).
courses.” Like Ulich, Jones was grappling for a curriculum that would make “work” the sole purpose of education and unite humanity as one. Jones stressed the rational instead of the liberal Christian goal of such a view.

These summaries are not offered to suggest that the world socialist group was perfectly united themselves. However, they capture a (failed) effort on the committee to use the bully pulpit of Harvard to flatten out distinctions between the academy and the world, and to use education as a tool of experiential social change. Something about the way that Conant had approached them to serve on the committee must have convinced them that this goal was possible to achieve—or at least that progress could be made.

(2) Progressivism

As mentioned, the socialist vision seemed compatible, to the socialists, with progressive education. Most of the progressive educators on the committee agreed. Progressive educators on the committee included Howard E. Wilson (Harvard Graduate School of Education), and later—after Wilson resigned—educational scientists Alfred Simpson and Philip Rulon (the acting dean of the Education School). Wilson led an early effort to synthesize progressive education with the world socialist vision.

By “progressivism,” I do not mean just one vision. Even within the progressive education movement, there were often large divisions. Yet, as historian Benjamin Justice notes (paraphrasing Diane Ravitch), a commitment to progressive education principles typically involved commitments to “the activity method, which encouraged students to

18 Ibid, 92.
19 On Jones, see Peter A. Brier, Howard Mumford Jones and the Dynamics of Liberal Humanism (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994).
learn in active situations related to their interests, the project method, which organized learning around the solution of real problems in society (and was very popular in the Soviet Union during the early 1930s), and the integrated curriculum, which sought to abolish the traditional, atomized assortment of traditional academic subjects.” In contrast to the humanities grounding the curriculum, progressive educators typically looked to a unified social or human science—conceived of as total system of inquiry that transcended traditional academic subjects and departments—as a guide.

An assistant professor at the Education School, Howard E. Wilson was a rising star in the progressive education movement. He had written a book researching the new social studies of the 1930s. The new social studies went against academic tradition by advocating a curriculum centered around world problems and other racial- and class-based problems. It emphasized the modern social sciences, and scientific exploration, over the more traditional humanities, classics, traditional citizenship and government studies, or literature. During the late 1930s, Wilson had also led the New York Regent’s Inquiry into citizenship education in New York City, using primarily ethnographic and qualitative methods.

In the 1940s, Wilson began to formally link world citizenship education to the new social studies. He viewed the modern social sciences as a path toward world citizenship and unity. By thinking of education in anthropological terms, Wilson believed that students could acquire a diverse appreciation for other cultures and points of view. He was named the chair of the General Education Committee of the East and West Association, which was advocating for a new, world citizenship curriculum across the nation. Like Northrop in the previous chapter, Wilson represented dreams of a more international core curriculum that incorporated global perspectives and alternative cultural epistemologies rather than restored old traditions. Later, he became one of the founders of UNESCO and a founder of the field of international and comparative education.23

(3) Protestant Culturalism

As previously described, Protestant Culturalists hoped to preserve Protestant culture by guiding students through historical examples—usually examples of great men and leaders of the American past. Protestant Culturalists advocated for the study of American history taught in a more traditional manner as the history of events, biographies, and leadership. Protestant Culturalists hoped that this historical education would show—in a non-dogmatic way—that Protestantism was a powerful force in American life that should be respected and understood on its own terms. In particular, they hoped that it would demonstrate the natural laws guiding Protestants: “laws of

23 Comer, “Contributions of Howard E. Wilson to Education for Citizenship and International Understanding.”
nature” that governed the natural world and provided Protestantism with its salience as a
religious and cultural creed.

Based on the archival records, I place committee chair Paul Buck (history) and
Benjamin Wright (government) into this category of Protestant Culturalism.24 In his early
messages to the committee, Buck told members that, in his view, the curriculum should
have its basis in history and “historical concepts” or “patterns.” (This view of history as
“patterns” echoes Ralph Gabriel of Yale in the previous chapter). Buck preferred a deep
study of American history, divided up into what he called “historical concepts,”
“dynamic trends,” and “immediate actual factors such as state, local and federal
relationships, the impact of war, etc.” Buck viewed this as an “objective” or reasonably
objective approach to history, mixing history with sociology. From this study, laws or at
least solid “patterns” of natural human behavior would emerge.25

(4) Conant’s Common Sense

I view Conant’s own Common Sense position as a rational system of thought
similar to the one that Theodore M. Greene initially outlined for Princeton Special
Program students in the first chapter (but was deemed by Greene to be inadequate). As I
explain later in the chapter, Conant told the committee that his educational philosophy
revolved around first principles of “liberty,” “individual responsibility,” and

24 I do not place Arthur Schlesinger, Sr. (history) into this position. Schlesinger often advocated for more
liberal views, and did not seem to have much of an active voice in the deliberations. C.f. Kravitz, “The
Harvard Report of 1945.”
25 Paul Buck won the Pulitzer Prize for History for his book *The Road to Reunion, 1865-1900* (Boston:
Little, Brown and co., 1937), a history of Reconstruction after the Civil War. As dean of the Faculty of Arts
and Sciences, he was also the acting president of Harvard during WWII when Conant was called away on
war duties. This responsible as acting president of Harvard, it seems, caused conflicts with Buck’s own
position on the curriculum.
“preservation of the dignity of the individual.”

Conant did not elaborate to the committee on what these principles meant. He only specified that these three principles were a priori and absolute, conditioning all approaches to science, religion, and knowledge.

Accordingly, Conant held on to the older Common Sense view that by a “transfer” of training, students could take these value principles (provided by literature) and apply them to other fields, especially the scientific fields. “I admit there is implicit in my thesis a hypothesis that cannot be proved, and which is closely related to the hypothesis involved by those who claim that there is a transfer of training from one special field to another closely related one,” he told the committee. “I doubt if it is possible to assemble data to prove or disprove the hypothesis involved.” Here, Conant drew primarily on the old faculty psychology, which was predicated on a direct transfer of training from the classics and the Bible to other fields.

Thus, Conant hung on to the division of labor idea typical of Common Sense philosophy. Religion—now infused into the humanities—would provide common values and moral sense for all free people, while science would work to improve and understand the natural world. In a 1945 interview, Conant specified that, “Men must use the basic knowledge of human beings in solving today’s social problems as was used a hundred years ago.” This position was slightly different from the Protestant Culturalists; Conant

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26 James Conant, “Memorandum on the Teaching of Literature and Fine Arts,” dated December 6, 1943, Box 1, Serial Numbers 67–78, Harvard University Archives.
27 Ibid.
championed the humanities as the sole providers of first principles of human nature, not historical patterns.

Conant did think that some aspects of experimental science could be beneficial in human affairs and educational philosophy. Experimental science could might confirm some value judgments, improve bodily health, and lead to some experimental work in philosophy and social science. This is perhaps part of the reason why Conant included progressive educators and scientists on the committee. However, when it came to judgments of right or wrong—when it came to making a large moral decision—science fell short and the humanities took over.²⁹ He told the committee: “It would be my thesis that the proper study of art and literature must involve a consideration of the whole problem of value judgments. Such a study can be used to illustrate the difference between disciplined and informed value judgments, on the one hand, and ignorant and extravagant positions on the other...This appreciation may illuminate a subsequent discussion of what criteria can be used in passing judgment on complex social and ethical problems.”³⁰ For Conant, only aesthetic appreciation, fostered by great works of art and literature, could provide a free people with concrete and objective ethical principles. For Conant, the traditional humanities had to ground the American course of study because they were the field that provided American morality.

Another potential reason for including progressive educators, naturalists, and socialists on the committee was that Conant also championed individuality and freedom

³⁰ Conant, “Memorandum on the Teaching of Literature and Fine Arts”.
within universities. While a university might march to a common drummer, the different players should not be all playing the same tune, he thought. Conant related this view of diversity to the latitudinarian strain of Puritanism. In a series of 1930s articles, Conant argued that the strength of the Puritan system of learning in the 1600s was not its absolutism but its (relative) tolerance. Conant was fond of quoting John Sedgwick, a seventeenth-century Puritan divine and fellow of Christ’s College, Cambridge: “Learning is no enemy to any honest interest of truth or any true Christian piety...Gifts of learning are necessary to an accomplish’d dispenser of the Word of God.”31 For Conant, it would be a mistake to discount the learning of the progressive and utopian reformers just as it was a mistake to immediately discount the learning of the ancients. This, Conant believed, was true radicalism—the radical belief in the unity of truth.32

Conant’s articles of the 1930s were devoted to understanding what made the Puritan system of learning so vibrant and attractive (in Conant’s view). Why did the Puritan system unite England and her colonies (in his view) into a common heritage and unity of truth? What had happened to that system? Conant concluded that it was the Puritan restlessness against simple reductionism and ideology that made the faith so vibrant. “Man’s restless spirit of inquiry has always been disconcerting to those who demand a final and unchanging picture of the universe,” he wrote in 1935’s “Free Inquiry or Dogma?”33 According to Conant, the true Puritans were those Independents,

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32 Ibid; and, see Conant, “Wanted: American Radicals,” Atlantic 171 (1943).
33 Conant, “Free Inquiry or Dogma?” Atlantic, 155 (January 1, 1935).
Latitudinarians, and free thinkers who stood slightly outside the Puritan system and made it grow more tolerant and expansive.  

Conant specifically named English natural philosopher Robert Boyle, Puritan divine Sedgwick, and Cambridge Platonist Nathaniel Culverwell as these members of this independent and tolerant group of Puritans. It was they, he said, who forged a middle way between God’s absolute authority and naturalism. It was their ability to take all knowledge as part of a larger truth that made them truly puritan, he wrote.

Conant used these moral and historical lessons to educate his peers about the potential strength of Harvard. It could be a truly world university, he said, because of its ability to fuse together all truth. Thus, it would avoid charges of dogmatism or politicization:

"Our colleges and universities must not only guarantee the right of free inquiry, they must also see that the various points of view are represented so that a conflict of opinion really takes place. From such clashes fly the sparks that ignite the enthusiasm in the students which drive them to seriously examine the questions raised. We must have our share of thoughtful rebels on the faculty. It will not suffice if each college or university has its own brand of doctrine."

In his 1930s articles on Puritanism, Conant continued on to observe that Oxford and Cambridge retained their relevance in English society because they fostered “an arena for combat.” He noted that, “It is no accident that the English universities attracted the largest number of students, in proportion to the population, when they were centres of a

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35 See Conant, “Free Inquiry or Dogma?”, “Friends and Enemies of Learning”.
36 Conant, “Free Inquiry or Dogma?”. 
vigorous theological controversy which soon developed into civil war.” Similarly, a
Harvard synthesis of learning might directly promote, and engage with, the major conflict
of mid-twentieth-century America: the uses and meanings of science.

Conant hoped that Harvard and the leading private universities could continue a
major role in the American state and the world. By fostering controversy on the major
philosophical and scientific questions, they would set thought continually in motion and
never cease to extinguish the quest for truth. This is where Princeton and Yale had erred,
in Conant’s view. A truly puritan university would instead proclaim that the “non-
material sustenance” of “civilization” came from “free inquiry,” not strict “dogma,” he
wrote. This meant “creative work, unshaken by...faith in man’s intelligence.”

(5) *Platonic Humanism*

However, as we have seen, Conant and the rest of the committee members had to
engage with a powerful strain of Platonic Humanism that was slightly different from the
ones on the march at Princeton and Yale. I characterize this strain as more subjective and
emotional in conception than the Humanisms at Princeton and Yale. It relied on a
subjective communion with God, rather than on a small community of minds. It also
relied less on intellectualization and more on what John Finley called “attitude.” Finley
best represents this more subjective, emotional Humanism.

John H. Finley, Jr. was already something of a Harvard legend when he joined the
Committee on General Education as its vice-chairman. He had graduated and received his
doctorate from Harvard, writing his dissertation entirely in Latin. In 1941, he became the

37 Ibid.
Master of Eliot House, a position he would occupy until 1968. Once compared by a student to Ralph Waldo Emerson, Finley “taught a generation of Harvard men how to live,” according to his obituary. He was rumored for the Harvard presidency on numerous occasions.

Like the other Humanists in this study, Finley believed that education was knowledge of God. There was no arguing with Finley on this point. In his view, since God created the universe and still actively shapes it, all education is knowledge of the Divine will. Like the other Humanists, Finley gave Plato a major role in that process of enlightenment and transcendence.

However, as will be shown, Finley believed that this knowledge of God was passionate and emotional. It depended not so much on the character of the individuals involved as on an emotional union with God. He told the committee that his view could be summarized as “emotional coloring,” a poetic experience of such magnitude that it necessarily overshadowed attempts to capture it in words or systems.

**Beyond Social Science: The Lost Anthropology of Education**

For almost the first full year (January to November 1943) of committee meetings, members of the committee debated about how to approach the task at hand. For some committee members, the five views outlined above seemed completely incompatible. The five views clashed directly. Howard Wilson was planning to conduct a social scientific study of American education, and he brought several of his fellow progressive educators

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38 Robert McG. Thomas, Jr., “John H. Finley, Jr., 91, Classicist at Harvard for 43 years, is Dead,” *New York Times* (June 14, 1995).
39 December 14, 1943 Meeting Minutes, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 67–78.
around the country and the socialists on board the project. Together, they had visions of making the entire project an ethnographic research project, perhaps even creating what Robert Ulich called, in the spring of 1943, a new Harvard "Institute" of education that would draw the university and the country together around progressive educational reform.\(^{40}\)

Wilson, in particular, assumed that the committee was conducting original field research, which might be used to create a Harvard Institute of Education. Conant and Buck had created a research budget for such work, hired a full-time researcher (Byron Hollinshead, another notable figure in the progressive education movement), and discussed the hiring of a research consultant (which became Robert Havighurst, a leading progressive and human development specialist from the University of Chicago).\(^{41}\)

Likewise, other committee members assumed that the committee would be conducting mostly field research (interviews, classroom and school observations, questionnaires) and/or on-site interviews in Cambridge, as well. This is what the budget and early plans had called for. Wilson proceeded to lead this research project, one that he clearly imagined as one of the most ambitious studies in American history.\(^{42}\)

This early focus on establishing some kind of Harvard Institute of Education helps explain the unique organization of the committee’s archival records. Someone (probably Wilson or the committee's Secretary) assigned a serial number to each piece of “data”—

\(^{40}\) February 23, 1943 Meeting Minutes, Committee Files, Box 3 Folder "Committee on General Education Minutes through May 1943."

\(^{41}\) This analysis is based upon the Meeting Minutes in the Folder "Committee on General Education Minutes through May 1943" and upon the Meeting Minutes and materials in Box 1, Serial Numbers 1–17.

\(^{42}\) Ibid. This was not just a pipe dream. As mentioned, Wilson had led a similar large research project for the State of New York. See Wilson, *Education for Citizenship*. He may have easily assumed that he would be conducting a national study of citizenship education.
be it a memorandum, a meeting transcript, an interview, a proposal, an article, or a file. This data was catalogued as “Material Presented to the Committee.” In addition, most of the committee’s meetings over the two years were transcribed verbatim. This unique organization of the archives, something I have not encountered elsewhere, suggests that Wilson, and perhaps other committee members, envisioned the project itself as a kind of ethnography. Not only their interviews, but also their own memos and deliberations, would be recorded and processed as data and were originally intended to be reassembled and analyzed by education researchers (as this researcher is doing now). This would have been a very different Redbook: an ethnographic study that would have included, to some degree, the psychologies and perspectives of the committee itself.

Conant may have promised Ulich and Wilson that the Harvard Graduate School of Education might benefit from such a research project. At the time, the Education School was struggling, and Harvard leaders had recently considered closing the school.43 As will be noted later, Conant and Wilson seemed to have discussed some kind of quid-pro-quo deal in which the Education School might benefit from being involved in the project.

In the summer of 1943, Wilson organized most the content for the committee meetings. Although Finley and Buck were in charge, they allowed Wilson to take the lead in organizing the content and general approach. Wilson responded by bringing many teachers and high school principals to Cambridge, where the committee ‘interviewed’ them (these interviews ended up being more like interrogations). Wilson favored

progressive educators, who spoke reflectively but positively about their experiences in reforming high schools. Many of these educators were former collaborators of Wilson himself. A number of labor leaders, such as Borchardt, and labor advocates, also interviewed with the committee.

In addition, Havighurst, who was hired in the fall of 1943, began providing the committee with research briefs. These research briefs summarized the latest research in human development and psychology. Havighurst provided briefs on topics such as “developmental tasks of adolescence,” “social composition of the school population,” “the assessment of human abilities,” and the “development of character and ideals in adolescence.”\(^{44}\) He sometimes related these findings to adjustments that might be made in educational theory and practice.

By the fall, this scientific approach led to problems and stalemates. When Havighurst presented some of the latest research on human development and psychology and suggested that the latest advances in human development entailed a new restructuring of education in a Democracy, philosopher and Humanist Raphael Demos charged his findings as “behaviorism, of course, and fatal to any conception of human freedom,” while Humanist Finley worried that modern psychology failed to provide standards of “discipline.”\(^{45}\) This position on human nature reflected the Humanist psychology, in which humans are considered as Divinely created by a single Mind.

\(^{44}\) October 26, 1943 Meeting Minutes.
\(^{45}\) “Comments on No. 43, Mr. Havighurst’s Memorandum on the Development of Ideals and Values, by Raphael Demos,” November 13, 1943, Box 1, Serial Numbers 47–66; John Finley, “Revision of #61,” Serial Number #65, December 8, 1943, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 47–66.
For Finley, God was the only entity that could provide what he called the "Good." Without this standard of goodness, humanity inevitably suffered, he said. Finley called attention to the “great potential danger in the lack of social anchorages for individuals and the dangers and weaknesses inherent in our floating and footloose population.”

Committee chair Paul Buck agreed with this general assessment of potential dangers in a “lack of social anchorages.” Buck agreed that progressive and scientific positions were value-free; in November 1943, he told the committee that the group had “probably wasted some time” interviewing teachers and reviewing psychological research.

Although Havighurst continued to give the committee research summaries on human development, it was not clear how those summaries were going to be used in future deliberations. Finley suggested that, instead of beginning with psychology research, the committee members write up their own views on general education and cease interviews and data collection, at least temporarily.

In November 1943, interviews with everyday citizens and teachers subsided. Instead, Buck suddenly announced that the project itself was “not necessarily a research job.” He also announced that Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, and President Conant himself, would be coming to visit the committee to impart some wisdom that potentially transcended (or augmented) science and research.

Directly after this announcement of Buck’s, Howard Wilson resigned, claiming that he had been called to war work in Washington, DC (he had been). Although it is not

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46 July 15, 1943 meeting minutes, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 1–17.
47 October 26, 1943 meeting minutes, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 30–46.
48 October 19, 1943 meeting minutes, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 18 - 29.
confirmable, the timing of Wilson’s resignation from the committee suggests that he believed the leadership was rejecting the value of research and data altogether.

Conant was furious; he clearly wanted Wilson on board. “This news is quite contrary to the discussion we had in my office,” he wrote to Wilson the surprise resignation. “I must say I am deeply disappointed in your decision. I had hoped the University could get effective cooperation from the School of Education in this enterprise which seems to me so important and for which the Corporation is putting up $60,000. As I told you, I thought you were the one person on the staff who could carry out this task.”

Wilson responded to Conant (with a copy to Buck) that he thought that the ambitious project would likely fail under the current leadership of the committee. 49 Although I have summarized these events very quickly, the reader should keep in mind that Wilson had been working on the project for almost a year—organizing interviews, collecting research and data, and, perhaps, planning field visits.

Earlier that first year as well, two other liberal social scientists (John Dunlop and John Gaus) had also resigned from or left the committee. 50 By this point, not even a full year into their work, committee morale was shaky and three liberal members of the committee had submitted their resignations. “We don’t know what the mandate of this Committee is,” professor of government Benjamin F. Wright complained in November. “We haven’t yet vaguely described, much less defined, what is meant by general

49 Folder “General Education, Committee on Objectives of, 1943–44,” UAI 5.168, Box 245, Harvard University, President’s Office. “Records of the President of Harvard University, James Bryant Conant, 1933–1955,” Harvard University Archives.
50 These early committee members are thanked for their time in the Redbook. John Gaus was a leading political scientist and president of the American Political Science Association. John Dunlop would later become Secretary of Labor under Gerald Ford and advisee to several democratic presidents.
Similarly, Howard Mumford Jones felt that, “The task we are attempting is impossible.” Jones complained that the project was too ambitious and chaotic, and he suggested that Harvard was simply finding some fashion of protecting its own interests.

A “Leap into the Higher Dialectic”

After Wilson’s resignation, the committee’s deliberations gradually morphed into a theological or metaphysical debate. They also became increasingly acrimonious. Committee members locked into a battle between universal notions of faith, “emotions,” and “reason.” The battle also began to concern Conant, who perhaps feared that it would become too acrimonious.

In December 1943, theologian Reinhold Niebuhr was first scheduled to visit the Committee. He had fallen ill, however; he sent in a memorandum instead. Titled “Religion and the Study of the Humanities in the University,” Niebuhr’s memorandum charged all colleges and universities with deserting God. “Modern universities, like modern democracy, are secular in the sense that they do not raise [the] religious question explicitly,” Niebuhr wrote. “Both found no way of establishing freedom without disregarding the ultimate, that is, the religious questions.” Echoing the Princetonians, Niebuhr called for a “place in a university curriculum for the Christian-Hebraic answer to the meaning of life.” Committee members reacted in various ways to Niebuhr’s memo, with some claiming that it had validity while others arguing that it would take the

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51 October 19, 1943 Meeting Minutes, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 18–29.
52 December 21, 1943 Meeting Minutes, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 67–78.
53 See the Meeting Minutes for December 1943.
54 Reinhold Niebuhr, “Religion and the Study of the Humanities,” dated December 6, 1943, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 47–66.
committee in what Wilson’s replacement, Alfred Simpson (Education School), called an “evangelical” direction.\textsuperscript{55} Benjamin Wright simply quipped, “He means that they took Hell out of the curriculum.”\textsuperscript{56}

Shortly after the presentation of Niebuhr’s memo, Conant visited the Committee. He called for a curricular philosophy that he labeled “enlightenment.” It would begin, he said, with certain common sense principles. These principles (“liberty,” “individual responsibility,” “preservation of the dignity of the individual”) he suggested were self-evident. They were not empirical facts; they were higher, common sense ideals inherent to what Conant called the “free mind.” Conant suggested that the Harvard curricular philosophy be organized around the humanities, which in his view provided “an appreciation of criteria that can be used in judging values.” He said that such higher ideals are not meant to be “dogmatic,” but rather provide the “fundamental premises of a free society”—first principles by which to evaluate science, change, and progress.\textsuperscript{57}

Conant warned the committee that, “moderns” and “nihilists” were in danger of ruining education. These “moderns” and “nihilists” believed that, “One is at liberty to choose any set of standards more or less from the air and apply them to the problems at hand.” Conant called this “modern” view that of the “irresponsible idiot.” Common sense principles, on the other hand, allowed for judgments of value on an “informed and rational basis” without dogmatism.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{55} December 6, 1943 Meeting Minutes, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 47–66.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} Conant, “Memorandum on the Teaching of Literature and Fine Arts”.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
After the presentation of the Niebuhr memo and Conant’s visit, Buck seemed eager to reconcile Niebuhr’s view of God in the curriculum with Conant’s view of common sense “enlightenment.” Buck told the committee that, despite their differences, both Niebuhr and Conant had realized that, “Many of the things that govern our action are not based on scientific, objective truth, but on value-judgments that rest on something quite different.”

Buck further explained that he felt that the committee’s project was part of an “old and ancient conflict” between “reason” and “value.” In previous eras, he said, committees, philosophers, and theologians had debated the proper hierarchy of natural knowledge and revealed religion as Harvard was doing today. Battles today, he said, between “reason” and “value” were merely continuations of the same conflicts. Specifically, Buck related the Harvard committee battles to those of the Puritan colleges and schools of the seventeenth century. Echoing Conant’s own 1930s articles, Buck told the committee that, “The battle today, as it was in the seventeenth century, is to emphasize the validity of general education.” Buck did not elaborate on this point. However, it seems that he viewed mid-twentieth-century Protestants as engaging in the same battles as seventeenth-century Protestants, and that some “validity of general education” would emerge from the melee.

Finley agreed with Buck’s observation, saying that the ancient conflict was over the nature of man. “Man,” he said, was threatened from without (by Fascism and Communism) and from within (by new and modern methods, and perhaps by diversity).

59 November 18, 1943 Meeting Minutes, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 47–66.
60 April 20, 1944 Meeting Minutes, Box 1, Serial Numbers 99–112.
Only what Finley called a “leap into the higher dialectic” could solve the dilemma of what he called the modern, doubting “intellect.”

When committee members asked Finley to explain what he meant by a “leap into the higher dialectic,” Finley explained it as a deep emotional or spiritual experience, which he personally experienced, which then seemed to condition all knowledge and reality. He described this emotional communion as beyond reason and intellect. Finley defined it as “emotional coloring...which has carried over from a momentary or specific experience where it existed strongly and then continues to pervade one’s reaction to a certain class of things.” He told the committee that this experience was “higher than reason.” Therefore, Finley’s “faith” itself must be joined with “reason,” and “the resulting combination is value.” Finley seemed to suggest that his own spiritual experiences provided the foundation of a free society and the free mind.

In trying to respond to these ideas, Ulich described Finley’s viewpoint as “the notion that faith reaches beyond nature into the metaphysical.” Ulich recognized that some individuals are more than welcome to possess such a viewpoint, but that it certainly could not supply the entire rationale for the committee’s project. Ulich urged Finley to also consider “faith which remains on a natural or sociological level” as well.

Finley continued to make syllogistic leaps. He asked the committee, “Do we want a purely intellectual result, one that fits into America as she exists today, or one with

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61 December 14, 1943 Meeting Minutes, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 67–78.
62 Ibid.
63 John Finley, “Revision of #61,” Serial Number #65, December 8, 1943, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 47–66.
64 December 21, 1943 Meeting Minutes, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 67–78.
emotional coloring and that transcends America as she is today?”65 This “emotional coloring,” as already demonstrated, was Divine experience. Not only would the answer determine “all our future thought on what people should study,” according to Finley, it would also determine the fate of the West and Harvard’s own mission.66 “With the destruction of the great European universities,” Finley said, “if there is any place where high standards remain, it must be Harvard.”67

Finley continued on to say that the Harvard philosophy of education should go beyond facts. “Metaphysically, there is no such thing as a ‘fact,’” he said. There are things that “transcend fact.” Yet, at the same time, we must be “regulated by fact.” A proper general education, he surmised, would not present a precisely “clear view of the world,” but rather one that was also “emotional” or “directed” in some fashion.68

Despite possessing different views himself, Buck agreed that, in order to prevent the “state” from collapsing, some direction of education was required. “You cannot have a free society unless these people are habituated into a certain pattern by which you can build a free society,” he told the committee. “Unless we have integration in our philosophy of education, our state is going to collapse.”69 Like the Protestants of old, Buck seems to have assumed Protestants provide the people with a common welfare.

65 December 14, 1943 Meeting Minutes, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 67–78.
66 Ibid.
67 February 9, 1944 Meeting Minutes, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 90–98.
68 November 18, 1943 Meeting Minutes; December 6 Meeting Minutes; and December 8 Meeting Minutes.
69 December 30, 1943 Meeting Minutes, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 67–78.
The Religion of Plato

In describing the “leap into the higher dialectic,” Finley also recalled the Platonic dialectic. According to Plato’s dialogues (as described in Chapter One), gifted men pass through the stages of higher awareness. They first pass through the world of the senses (empiricism), then the world of rational thought, and finally to a world that exists beyond both reason and the senses (the shadows, the Ideal). Buck and Finley seemed to be leading the committee through the Platonic stages of truth, which they seemed to equate with Christianity itself. In fact, at one point, a new committee member, literary critic I. A. Richards, joked that Conant was wasting his time, since the Republic had already been written.70

In December 1943, Buck and Finley began comparing the Platonic ideal to the Fascist and Communist systems. They felt that Americans needed an inner guide that was comparable to the strength of those systems. Somewhat surprisingly, given the headway that the Allied Powers were making against Hitler, Buck and Finley seemed especially worried about Fascism as a competing philosophy of life for the future. The two men contrasted Plato, who, they said, gave “Man” the “ideal standard by which you view the world,” with “Fascism,” which, they said, does not possess the ideal standard.71 In Fascism, Finley said, everything (art, science, politics, education, etc.) is organically related together in order to serve the state and serve the national race. Whereas, Finley

70 February 24, 1944 Committee of Detail Meeting Minutes, Box 3, Committee of Detail, 1–20.
71 December 30, 1943 Meeting Minutes, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 67–78.
indicated, in a Platonic system everything (art, science, politics, education, etc.) has a “similar structure,” but is “varying in content and application.”

Both Buck and Finley assumed that a Platonic system, not science, history, or reason, provided the strength of American education. This strength included providing authoritative ideals for the rest of humanity—who, Finley believed, were at the lower stages of development and awareness. As Finley explained it, the less-gifted individuals are not able to understand abstract ideals; their intelligence, stuck on stage one of atomistic awareness, disables them from understanding values and the whole of humanity. “If a fellow has a low IQ, one wonders what he lives by,” Finley stated. “Mr. [John] Dewey says everybody should think things out, no one should receive authority from the top. But that is possible only if you have a high I.Q., and the reason we have come back to values in this discussion is that if you have a low I.Q., you have to have an education based primarily on the inculcation of values and concepts.”

Professor of Government Benjamin Wright was no friend of Humanism, but he agreed with Finley that the “lower groups” (as Finley called them) “cannot see nor understand the abstract.”

Using Plato in this fashion—as a kind of authoritarian figure—was not necessarily new to Protestant moral philosophy. As we have already seen, both Princeton Humanists and Yale New Aesthetes used Plato in a similar fashion. Plato could be both a guide to self-enlightenment and a model for the just state ruled by philosopher-kings. As historian David W. Robson writes in *Educating Republicans: The College in the Era of*

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72 November 18 Meeting Minutes, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 47–66.
73 November 10 Meeting Minutes, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 30–46.
74 Ibid.
The American Revolution, 1750–1800 (1985), early collegiate college presidents and moral philosophers used Plato to support the “authority of an oligarchy,” showing young American leaders that good government depended on the existence of objective moral standards carried out by the few.75

Similarly, Buck and Finley used Plato to justify rule by the Protestant gentry. To the committee, they said that the “lower groups” support the democratic “Ideal.” Whereas, they said, in the Fascist state, the “lower groups” serve the master race. “Our difference is that utility in our system is simply a ‘means,’ not an ‘end,’” Buck told the committee contrasting “Platonism” to Fascism.76

Objections and Resignations

As one might imagine, committee members reacted strongly to these ideas. Some, such as Howard Mumford Jones, resigned from the committee not long after this discussion. In a letter to Yale’s Northrop, Jones called the Redbook “anemic,” claiming that it was written to protect the “bourgeoisie.” Others—such as acting dean of the Education School, Philip Rulon, and Radcliffe College president Wilbur Jordan—tried to prevent the leadership from going down this path. Other committee members, such as historian Arthur Schlesinger, Sr., viewed it as a violation of religious freedom. Schlesinger acknowledged, and preferred, that American education be broadly Christian, in the sense that Christian texts and ideas had interacted with scientific and secular ideas

76 December 30, 1943 Meeting Minutes, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 67–78.
77 Jones to Northrop, November 20, 1946, Northrop Papers (MS 627), Box 4 Folder 108, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.
in American history. But, he viewed the path the committee leadership was arriving at, which seemed to actively mix religious experience with secular facts, as deeply disturbing.

Dean Rulon seemed almost baffled by the turn of events in the project. Rulon argued, “There is nothing mystical about these things we decide are good” and wanted the committee to firmly reject “metaphysics.” Rulon, Jordan, and Jones equated the leadership’s embrace of a “higher dialectic” directly with Fascism. They now viewed the project as “cunning manipulation” of American minds and emotions, something far worse than any list of Great Books. “Even St. Johns has not tried to tell the public school what it should do,” Education School professor Simpson pointed out. President Jordan warned the committee leadership that they were in danger of copying Germany and going down the German path against Democracy.

Jones tried to get Buck and Finley to reconsider the project altogether. “I wonder if it would be a better part of virtue and good sense to say to Mr. Conant, ‘Would it not be a good scheme for you to remake the mandate of this Committee?’” Jones urged. “We cannot even agree on the term ‘general education,’ and I still don’t know what is meant by a ‘free society.’” He also said that, “I would not sit on a committee that said that education from beginning to end is concerned with attitudes.” He called Finley

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78 December 2, 1943 Meeting Minutes, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 47–66.
79 December 30, 1943 Meeting Minutes, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 67–78.
80 Jordan warned the Committee leadership that, “In Germany the state imposed authority and myth, a deliberate development in certain disciplines,” and “[forced] students into highly specialized disciplines of immediate service to the state.” He hoped Harvard would not advocate for something similar. December 21, 1943 Meeting Minutes, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 67–78.
81 December 21, 1943 Meeting Minutes, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 67–78.
“prejudiced” and “smug.” However, Buck replied that, “The cure is to retreat into simplicity...I think this committee is showing a certain amount of timidity. We are after a few simple approaches that seem to have the wisdom of experience of generations and common sense.”

Finley returned to classical examples to add weight to the committee’s Christian-Platonic direction. Comparing the modern American republic to the Roman Empire, he said that the “great failure of the Romans” was their “inability to pass down” the “culture” of the “aristocrats” to the “mass of Roman people.” The installation of a Platonic religion was, for Finley, the only way to pass on “the qualities that the upper middle class has to the general run of people.” Yet, at the same time, since not everyone was destined to be “Matthew Arnold,” he said, Harvard needed to outline a system in which commoners and “lower groups” were “responsible,” but not “necessarily cultivated in the upper-class sense,” Finley stated.

Byron Hollinshead, the Committee’s research fellow, ultimately agreed. “Unless we can do this job of getting the mass of people to be responsible citizens,” he concurred, “we are going to lose everything, even this educated gentleman.”

In early 1944, Buck and Finley formed a “Committee of Detail” (mimicking the creation of the U.S. Constitution) that would hammer out the final drafts in seclusion. These drafts would then be presented to the committee and to other Harvard faculty, as

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82 December 14, 1943 Meeting Minutes, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 67–78.
83 December 9, 1943 Meeting Minutes, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 67–78.
84 December 21, 1943 Meeting Minutes, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 67–78.
85 Ibid.
86 January 4, 1944 Meeting Minutes, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 79-89.
well as to a few outside guests, for comment. Shortly after, Alfred Simpson (Howard Wilson’s replacement), resigned from the committee. Meanwhile, Buck encouraged Conant to “begin to come into the picture somewhat more, both to help to shape the outcome and to freshen the Committee’s outlook when in danger of becoming jaded.”

Buck continued:

The fact is clear that a first-rate report based upon a program put in effect at Harvard College would be a very great factor indeed in the future leadership of Harvard. In fact I think that outcome is essential to prevent Harvard from slipping backwards. On momentum inspired by you, I believe I have successfully steered the Committee into the mid-stream of the problem. You will understand, but most people would be greatly surprised to find out how much effort it required just to get the Committee off the shore. But certainly now the Committee has for some time been dealing with the heart of the problem and is beginning to see the way to the conclusion.

Led by Finley, the Committee of Detail worked over a period of two weeks to compose early drafts of the report. These drafts would go through a number of subsequent revisions in order to remove the explicit language suggesting Christian-Platonic foundations of the report.

In addition, Conant stepped in as Buck suggested—not only to prevent a loss of morale but also to shape the final document more according to his own philosophy. For Conant, there was not quite enough pragmatism and scientific ethos in the committee’s philosophy. The committee had made a moral choice, but they had not, in Conant’s mind, provided enough space for science as well as diversity of views. To solve this problem,

87 Buck to Conant, April 17, 1944, Folder “General Education, Committee on Objectives of, 1943–44,” UAI 5.168, Box 245, Harvard University, President’s Office. “Records of the President of Harvard University, James Bryant Conant, 1933–1955,” Harvard University Archives.
88 Ibid.
Conant added elements from Francis Bacon. It was Bacon, Conant thought, who recognized that induction and experimental science were necessary to take Protestantism forward. Bacon was the favorite natural philosopher of the Scottish Enlightenment, so Conant’s choice here seemed to fit with his own Common Sense philosophy.\footnote{See Bozeman, \textit{Protestants in an Age of Science}.}

\textbf{“The Best Ideals of the Race”: Drafting the Redbook}

“How far should we go in the direction of the open mind?” the Redbook authors stated in the second chapter of the published book. “Especially with youth, open-mindedness without belief is apt to lead to...fanaticism...A measure of belief is necessary in order to preserve the quality of the open mind.”\footnote{General Education in a Free Society, 78.} The Redbook authors thus recommended a set of curricula prioritizing the humanities, the great men of American history, and heroic stories of adventure and conquest. These curricular frameworks would find the mean between open-mindedness and dogmatism, they wrote, as well as allow the “able” and the “slow” to each have their respective needs met while sharing common adventures together.

In the published Redbook, the most important passages, in my reading, are on pages 167–175, in a section called “Education and the Human Being.” In this section, the authors describe the “general theory of human nature and of human values” that undergirds the book and its recommendations. The authors state that, “...such a theory had to be assumed rather than explicitly formulated in this report,” and they position their
theory of humanity as a middle way between “practical” and “Great Books” models of education and, apparently, those respective theories of “human nature.”

They state this “general theory of human nature and of human values” as something higher than the intellect. “According to the ancient myth,” they write, “reason is the charioteer that directs but is not the horse that pulls the chariot.” The “horse,” rather, is “molding of native powers to ideal aims.” Although the authors (primarily Finley and philosopher Raphael Demos) do not mention it, the “horse” seems to stand in for Idealism. The authors call this “theory of human nature”—in which “values” are once again merged with “facts”—the “final secular good.”

Yet, in the archived drafts of the Redbook, Finley and Demos were more explicit about this “theory of human nature” and its foundations. In addition to comparing the report to the Nicene Creed (A.D. 325), an early draft of Finley’s noted that the aim of education was clearly to “mold students to a received idea of the good.” He described this aim as Christian, since “the essence of historical Christianity...[is] the pragmatic testing of the love of God.” Similarly, Demos, in another early draft, wrote that, “Like an ellipse, an educational institution has two centers, not one.” These “two centers,” Demos wrote, were “the abstract and impersonal values of truth and beauty on the one hand, and the concrete values of human personality on the other.” Demos and Finley identified the former with religious experience, and the latter with secular experience or naturalism.

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91 General Education in a Free Society, 176.
92 General Education in a Free Society, 169.
93 Finley, "Highly Tentative Draft of Chapter II."
94 "Chapter II, partial revision by R. Demos, beginning with section 3 of Chapter II”, Committee Files, Box 2 Serial Numbers 118–131.
Another philosophical blueprint for the final book was also unpublished and “assumed rather than explicitly formulated.” In his draft, Demos wrote that, in deciding upon the underlying structure of the Redbook’s theory of knowledge, he and Finley followed a Baconian analysis made by Conant himself:

Here we follow with some modifications an analysis made by President Conant who has himself drawing on a similar analysis by Bacon in the second book of the *Advancement of Learning*. This analysis divides learning into three parts, two of which are most closely related to each other than either is to the third. Thus the division is at the same time into two parts. These two parts are, in Mr. Conant’s terminology, accumulative and non-accumulative knowledge. Though, as will appear presently, accumulative knowledge includes more than science, it consists largely of science and for purposes of convenience may be thought of as such. Non-accumulative knowledge is further divided into philosophy and what Bacon called poesy. These terms also have a somewhat wider meaning than is ordinarily given them, but their essential difference is that philosophy deals with concepts and poesy with symbols.  

Conant did not fully explain what he meant by this Baconian scheme. In some 1930s articles, he had vaguely specified that “non-accumulative knowledge” was subdivided into “philosophy” and “poesy,” but he had not elaborated. He seemed to equate these fields with the older Puritan system. However, he also specified that certain parts of history, modern philosophy, the sciences and the social sciences came under the designation of “accumulative knowledge”—knowledge that grows and advances. Accordingly, Conant seemed to hope to preserve the element of experimentation that he deemed necessary for a free society to thrive.

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95 Ibid.
96 Conant elaborated somewhat in “The Advancement of Learning in the United States in the Post-War World,” *Science* 99, no. 2562 (1944), the title of which mimicked his earlier 1930s article on Puritanism.
For general education, however, it was of upmost importance to teach permanent, intrinsic values. Demos wrote that, “The true concern of general education must be with ends and non-accumulative knowledge.” The goal, he wrote, is a “total philosophy of life” which teaches “morals” along with “straight thinking.” Finley had previously associated these “morals” with what he called “the best ideals of the race.”

Committee members who were left off the Committee of Detail deplored these drafts, but their votes or thoughts seemed to be overturned or ignored. Visitors and Harvard faculty, who were invited to make comments, also reacted negatively. “I am so afraid from this document someone will feel that we have a plan of humanism up our sleeves...I fear...the acceptance of an official philosophy [of general education],” admitted Theodore Morrison, a Harvard faculty member who was invited to comment. Surely, Morrison agreed, there can be a “Platonist” on the faculty of a university, someone who tries to “indoctrinate” people. “But I don’t believe a university should, and I don’t believe that general education should,” he wrote in a message to the committee.

Similarly, Committee member George Wald (biology) equated the drafts with indoctrination, while a visiting panelist, Amherst philosopher Gail Kennedy, told the Committee that Harvard was trying to make American thought “a substitute for religion,” which was “reintroducing authority and an element of indoctrination” into education.

Many of these objections seemed to have been overruled—by Conant or by someone else. In March of 1944, Charles Hendel, who was a key figure on the Humanist
side of the Yale debates, came to visit the committee and link its work with what was happening at Yale and at the national level. Hendel was also chair of Yale’s Committee on Post-War Problems, which corresponded with a national University Committee on Post–War Problems that included membership from a wide variety of institutions. In addition, Hendel had been chair of a Rockefeller Foundation-funded study of American philosophy. In his meeting with the Harvard committee, Hendel claimed that many American university leaders were involved in an organized reconstruction of American thought.\textsuperscript{101}

Hendel acknowledged that there had been some heated debates about the nature of this reconstruction, although he described them nonchalantly. He said that university presidents were seeking “the modern form of the old course in moral philosophy” and that there were mainly “two ways of doing it”: through contemporary problems or through a more Christian, traditional approach. Hendel also acknowledged that a small group of outliers wanted to “synthesize” thought through “logic and science,” as well as outliers who wanted to base the new synthesis in a radical “social philosophy.” Hendel discounted these outliers, saying that the most difficult battles were between those who wanted to synthesize through contemporary events and those who wanted to synthesize through morality and Great Books.\textsuperscript{102}

Hendel seemed ambivalent himself on which view won out. He said that while he could not “claim to know what is taking place at all institutions...they are all seeking this synthesis or integration or synoptic view of integration and the place of values.” His view

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.
was that certain institutions would be taking a more contemporary focus, but that even they would be adjusting that progressive approach in order to teach students what he called “constitutional laws.” He offered this advice as encouragement for Harvard to speak.

Similarly, Finley stated to the committee that Conant was viewing Harvard as leading the nation. “The thing that dignified him,” he told the committee, “is that he did see the university existing not as an end in itself for the perpetuation of higher knowledge, but as an active part of the state.” Buck concurred, explaining that the Redbook project was part of the war effort itself—an inseparable part of war defense. The committee itself, Finley said, was working on behalf of the “total organism.”

Again, Buck compared the Redbook to Nazi education, saying that Harvard was doing the same thing as the Fascists but with different ideals and outcomes. Like the Nazis, the Americans were, Buck argued, outlining a final blueprint of society and education that would combine “reason” and “emotion.” “In Nazi Germany they combined reason with emotion, but in a different pattern.” Buck told the committee. “In a free society we can combine the two for our objectives.”

Conclusion

The Inner Restoration was an attempt, by high church Protestants, to restore the authoritarian aspects of humanity over and above free inquiry, via a metaphysical system. The Redbook recommendations of humanities, social studies, and science courses were

\[103\] December 21, 1943 Meeting Minutes, Committee Files, Box 1, Serial Numbers 67–78.

\[104\] March 16, 1944 Meeting Minutes, Committee Files, Serial Numbers 90–98.

\[105\] December 21, 1943 Meeting Minutes.

\[106\] December 2, 1943 Meeting Minutes.
based on a metaphysical system, not a secular one. Although compromises between views were made (and the Redbook itself eschewed a precise blueprint of studies, likely through Conant’s intervention), ultimately Humanists at Harvard controlled the direction of the metaphysical system. Conant’s precise vision of a grand unity of common sense did not go quite as planned, but his insistence that non-material values guided the nation survived. More importantly, this study opens up the question of whether the racial achievement gap and the gap between the highly educated and the masses were actually metaphysical beliefs—and planned ideals.
Conclusion

This study chronicles an attempt by Protestants to save what E. Digby Baltzell called the elite “Protestant Establishment.”¹ Leaders at Harvard, Princeton, and Yale were in the process of losing their privileged positions. They no longer felt as though they were the masters of their fate and the shapers of the common welfare. Protestantism itself had fractured—tied together in the larger world only by a loose set of commitments and histories. In order to save their caste and preserve their beliefs, Humanists in this study argued that Protestantism is a metaphysical essence above time and history. Culturalists acquiesced to this belief. As such, Protestantism became something in the air and water, a part of all general education itself rather than a topic in the history books.

Leaders at these three universities protected Protestantism by placing it above science and history. This did not mean that it was above criticism, since Baltzell’s book and subsequent scholarship on the elite have exposed material privileges of the caste. However, the non-material essences of modern Protestantism and Protestant Idealism have gone virtually untouched by scholarship. Leaders at Harvard, Princeton, and Yale placed these essences in general education itself, privileging knowledge and learning that they believed was both godly and American. This was the final “errand in the wilderness”—to infuse Protestant Idealism in the meaning and purpose of all education.²

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² The phrase, “errand in the wilderness,” can be traced back to a 1670 Massachusetts election sermon. Perry Miller used this phrase to anchor a celebrated supplement to The New England Mind, Errand into the Wilderness (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1956). The phrase is ambiguous, but it generally refers to a Puritan belief that the colonists, in settling in New England, were performing an errand of God.
Inadvertently, however, they exacerbated the divisions of knowledge rather than unified it. Fights within Protestantism (and with scientists and naturalists) led to the growing fracture of faith and reason, and the division between the humanities and the sciences increased. Worried about the future of the humanities, leaders placed the humanities in a realm above science and history. The humanities, they argued, represented timeless values of individualism and inspiration.

Yet, this separation of value from fact, while necessary for preserving Protestantism, also haunted them internally. The Protestant leaders in this study seemed afraid of a future in which truth was severed. They felt they had no choice, however, but to sever it.
Suggestions for Further Research

Because this is an exploratory study, this dissertation seeks to raise questions that might interest educational researchers, historians, sociologists, theologians, and the public. How deep and how wide was the Inner Restoration described here? Was it indeed confined to Harvard, Princeton, and Yale, or are these case studies records of a wider movement? Were Hendel and Yale donor Schoolcraft correct when they suggested that many university leaders were involved in an organized reconstruction of humanity? Were there also transatlantic or transnational aspects of the Inner Restoration?

After conducting this study, I am especially interested in researching connections between these Protestant elites, the Reformed churches, and the Church of England in order to investigate possible stronger connections between church, state, and higher education. As historian Douglas Sloan suggests:

By the 1950s the Protestant churches were beginning to carry out an enthusiastic and many-sided engagement with American higher education in a variety of ways and on a scale of which many persons, both in churches and outside, have not always been aware. Theologians, college and university faculty and administrators, church leaders, denominational and ecumenical religious groups, political action movements, campus ministers, and laypersons were all involved.¹

Sloan was speaking about mainline Protestant churches that included liberal denominations and factions. I am extending his analysis to focus on the Reformed and high church traditions. What was their involvement?

To flesh out these questions, I have brainstormed three areas of future research:

- **Intellectual biographies of the Humanists.** One of the limitations of this study is a lack of deep inquiry into the individual philosophies of the actors. Each person profiled or mentioned here was a scholar of significant stature. Individual biographies of John Finley, Theodore Greene, Charles Hendel, Maynard Mack, and others mentioned here would be illuminating. In addition, analyzing and tracing their scholarly networks (both domestic and international) would be a major contribution to the literature.

- **How were some of these plans and programs received and implemented?** By and large, the study deals with conceptualization and debate. Although I cover the syllabi of some of the more prominent courses, further research could inquire far more about pedagogy and courses. In addition, further research might explore how students received and processed the teachings, how policy makers received plans and ideas, and how, in other words, these ideas were implemented on the ground.

- **Connections with the Reformed churches.** Were there more formal or informal connections between the Reformed churches (primarily Presbyterian, Congregational, and Episcopal—as well as perhaps elements the Unitarian faith) and these universities? Given the somewhat secretive nature of the Inner Restoration, one might profitably ask why plans were kept quiet or vague. Given the established links between these Humanists, trustees, and the churches, were there broader connections to church doctrines or leadership?
Or, were these Humanists acting independently from (or in opposition to) the churches?
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