Charles Eliot: An Historical Study

John A. O'Connor
Loyola University Chicago

Recommended Citation
http://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/1046

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License.
Copyright © John A. O'Connor
CHARLES ELIOT: AN HISTORICAL STUDY

by

Brother John A. O' Connor

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

June, 1970
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The encouragement and assistance of three members of the faculty of Loyola University of Chicago are especially appreciated: Professor Gerald Lee Gutek, Chairman of the Department of Educational Foundations; Professor Ralph Eldin Minger, Associate Professor in the Department of History; and Professor John M. Wozniak, Dean of the School of Education.

This dissertation was written primarily under the direction of Professor Gutek, and major thanks are due him for generously expending considerable time and energy in overseeing the completion of this work. The writer was further fortunate in having the assistance of Professor Minger as an associate reader, and Dr. Minger's brilliantly led seminars also served in part as valuable historical background for the study. Thanks must also be expressed to Dean John M. Wozniak, who took time out of an extremely busy administrative schedule to serve on the dissertation committee.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION ......................................................... 1

## PART I. ELIOT: HIS ROLE IN AMERICAN EDUCATION

### Chapter

#### I. CREATION OF HARVARD UNIVERSITY AS A MODEL FOR AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION ....... 6

- His Recognition of the Need for Reform
- His Program for Reform
- Graduate Studies
- Professional Education
- Academic Freedom
- Aims of the American University
- Appraisal of Eliot's University Model

#### II. POPULARIZATION OF NEWER MODELS OF THE EDUCATED MAN .......................... 86

- Breaking up the Prescribed Curriculum and Deemphasis of the Classics
- A Larger Curriculum
- Scientific Culture
- Professional Education
- Popular Education
Eliot's Model of the Educated Man: the "Expert"

Evaluation of Eliot's Educational Models

PART II. ELIOT: HIS ROLE IN AMERICAN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL HISTORY

III. ADVISOR TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE.............. 152

Eliot and Individualism

Eliot and the Secularization of American Thought

IV. AN ACTION-INTELLECTUAL....................... 227

Trusts and Finance Capital

Labor Conditions and Labor Unions

Bosses and Popular Control of Politics

America's Role as a World Power

Prohibition

Rights of Negroes and other Minorities

Nativism and Immigration

Income Tax and Tariff

Characteristics of His Social and Political Views

Historical Evaluation of Eliot

CONCLUSION........................................... 270

BIBLIOGRAPHY....................................... 300
INTRODUCTION

Although Charles Eliot was surely a major figure in American education, there has been no extensive or in depth historical study and evaluation of the quality of his contributions. This is even more surprising because Eliot was, for a generation, a leading private citizen and an associate and friend of top men in American public life - Grover Cleveland, Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and Woodrow Wilson, among others. Although Eliot was frequently called the best known private American citizen during the first quarter of this century, his role and views in the forming of American social and political policy have never been adequately explored.

This dissertation will attempt to fill a real gap in educational history by analyzing and appraising Eliot's role as an educational

---

\footnote{D. S. Miller, "Life of Harvard's Greatest President," \textit{New Republic}, LXVI (March 4, 1931), 77.}
leader so as to provide a critical interpretation from an historical perspective. The findings of this study may also be of interest to scholars of American history who have not seriously studied this "custodian of American culture," to use the words of Henry May.

This study will have two major parts. The first part of this historical analysis will be primarily concerned with Eliot's role in the development of American education. The central purpose of the first part of this dissertation will be to attempt to assemble solid evidence that will indicate some judgments about the quality of Eliot's contributions to American education. For investigative purposes, Chapter One will examine and assess Eliot's role as an educational leader, especially in the field of higher education. His efforts to display at Harvard University a specific type or model for American higher education will be critically investigated. Chapter Two will analyze his views and role in the evolving of newer models of the educated man - specifically, models other than the traditional aristocratic, linguistic, and classical conception of a

liberal education. Again, the hope of the first two chapters is that some evidence may be found to indicate some judgments about the quality of his contributions to American education.

Academic historians have not been particularly interested in Eliot. Generally they have quickly dismissed him as just another captain of industry, "a ghost of the 1870's," according to Henry May. The implication seems to be that Eliot was a conservative who made little or no permanent contribution to American life and thought. The second part of this dissertation then will examine the adequacy of this hypothesis by analyzing the nature and character of his attempts to help the American people come to grips with the problems of twentieth century life. Part Two of this study will evaluate in detail Eliot's stand on the major issues in American history during the first quarter of this century, along with the quality of his social and political views.

Chapter Three will examine Eliot's role as an "advisor at large to the American people on things in general," in the words of

3Ibid., p. 36.
Ralph Barton Perry. This chapter will investigate Eliot's efforts to alert his fellow citizens to the transformations being wrought by science, industrialism, and democracy. Chapter Three will focus on Eliot's considered views on two rather persistent social problems of twentieth century life in the United States - the role of the individual in an increasingly organized society and the secularization of American life and thought. Since Eliot was generally regarded as the foremost private American citizen during the first quarter of this century, Chapter Four will investigate his role in the larger context of American social and political and intellectual history. It is hoped that Chapters Three and Four may provide some concrete evidence so as to infer some reasonable judgments about the effect of Eliot's life and work on the country as a whole.

This study of Eliot's work as an educator is somewhat unique in that the perspective taken will be that American educational history is a part of the broad sweep of the American past. The view of the author is that the shaping of higher learning in the United States, and

Eliot's role in it, can be properly understood only by relating American education to the economic, religious, social, and political currents that influenced its development. In view of the historical perspective to be taken, the dissertation should be of interest to both educational and academic historians, since the development of Harvard University under the leadership of Charles Eliot was an event of major significance in the educational history of the United States.

The materials used in this study will include the writings of Eliot himself, commentaries on his work by contemporaries, and the reactions of subsequent scholars and public figures to his role as an educational leader. Every effort will be made to keep in mind the larger context of the social, economic, and political background of American history. This dissertation then is surely unique in that it seems to be the first extensive and critical historical study ever made of Eliot's role in American education and in American life. Consequently, it will hopefully be of considerable interest to educational historians.
PART I. ELIOT: HIS ROLE IN AMERICAN EDUCATION

Chapter

I. CREATION OF HARVARD UNIVERSITY AS A MODEL FOR AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

II. POPULARIZATION OF NEWER MODELS OF THE EDUCATED MAN
CHAPTER I

CREATION OF HARVARD UNIVERSITY AS A MODEL FOR AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

The development of Harvard University under the leadership of Charles Eliot was a major event in the educational history of the United States. During his forty years as president (1869 - 1909), Eliot transformed Harvard from a provincial college with a few undistinguished professional schools into one of the great universities of the world. Educational historians have tended to give so much attention to the pioneering work in graduate studies done by Daniel Gilman at Johns Hopkins that Eliot has too often been overlooked as perhaps the outstanding figure of nineteenth century higher education.

This chapter will document and evaluate his role in the creation of Harvard University as a model for American higher education. Special attention will be given to the following points: Eliot's recognition of the need for a real American university; his creation
of a quality graduate school and excellent professional schools; his role in deemphasizing the classics and strengthening the modern studies, particularly science; his work in fostering an atmosphere of scholarship and academic freedom; the physical expansion of Harvard; the assembling of a brilliant faculty of scholars; and the ideal of service, along with culture and scholarship, as a principal aim of the American university.

His Recognition of the Need of Reform

By the time of the Civil War, a number of perceptive Americans realized that the traditional American college needed drastic reform, even transformation. For one thing, the classical curriculum was becoming increasingly obsolete. While the emphasis on Latin and Greek had for centuries been useful for the oratorical training of the wealthy man for public service, the spread of technology, knowledge, and democracy had led to newer concepts of liberal education. Training in the classics and public speaking might have been a suitable education in early America, when most college students were preparing for either law or the ministry and thus needed skill in public speaking. The increasing industrialization that swept the United States after the Civil War meant that the American college had to come to
grips with the problem of preparing students for vocations other than the law or the ministry. The prospective physician, chemist, engineer, businessman, and administrator needed a program of studies quite different from the classical rhetorical program.

The rise of science was one of the hallmarks of the nineteenth century. By the time of the Civil War, most of the intellectual creativity of the time was going on among the scientists — but outside the college walls. The classics professors and their students tended to scoff at scientific and technical studies, and castigated them as not truly "liberal" and therefore not worthy of parity with Greek or Latin. An example will indicate the hostility of the old American college to the quickly maturing sciences. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology was founded in 1861 in response to the needs of the industrial firms of the Boston area for men with scientific and technical training after Harvard had refused to set up quality programs in science and technical education.

The old, provincial American college, modelled after the English fashion, looked particularly inadequate to those Americans who had studied in Europe, especially at the German universities. With the end of the Civil War, a surprising number of Americans had
already completed studies in Germany and had returned to the United States to spread the good news about the German excellence in research, scientific training, and freedom of choice in studies, and graduate work.

The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 ensured that public institutions, with wide social obligations, would eventually compete with the private colleges. This meant a much larger supply of college students and a need for more college teachers. For the land grant colleges, in particular, service to the community in forms like vocational and agricultural education seemed far more important than classical studies.

With the close of the Civil War, the industrial boom of capitalism created tremendous private fortunes. Many of the captains of industry (Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, and Henry Ford, among others) had received little, if any, college education and they tended to particularly scorn the traditional classical program. They did tend to admire education that would emphasize the sciences and business administration and similar "practical" subjects. Consequently, they could be induced to give generously of their vast wealth for the "right kind" of education.
It is understandable that Eliot, a very persuasive fund-raiser, was able to increase the Harvard endowment tenfold by appealing to the good sense of the new captains of industry.

The foregoing remarks indicate that by the end of the Civil War, the birth of a real American university was imminent. The man who was able to build the most outstanding university of the United States was Charles Eliot, and his creation of Harvard as a model for American higher education is the theme of this chapter.

When the Reverend Thomas Hill died in 1868, the post of president of Harvard College went the next spring to a thirty-five year old chemist by the name of Charles Eliot. His background indicated that there would be radical changes at Harvard during his administration. First of all, the choice of Eliot was remarkable for the time in that he was a layman, although every Harvard president up to 1869 had previously spent some time in the pulpit. Eliot was not only not a clergyman but a scientist who was sympathetic to the Darwinian evolutionary theories that were then confronting organized religion. Further, his comments on the inadequacy of a clerical career as a preparation for a college presidency hardly endeared him to the clerical presidents of most
American colleges of the time.

Eliot was also conspicuous for his unusual, for that time, academic background. An 1853 classics graduate of Harvard, he had done extensive private work in chemistry under Josiah Cooke. So brilliant were his chemistry studies that Eliot became the first Harvard undergraduate to study chemistry through the laboratory method. After graduation he was invited to stay on at Harvard as an assistant professor of chemistry and mathematics. His interest in laboratory methods prompted him to write a textbook which became a standard text at most American colleges for a quarter of a century.

Despite his obvious talents as a teacher and administrator, Harvard rejected his 1861 bid for a permanent professorship. The post went instead to an internationally renowned researcher, J. Walcott Gibbs, a holder of a German doctorate. Very much disappointed at Harvard's rejection, Eliot went off to study research

---


methods at the University of Marburg in Germany and the European educational system in general. The newly opened Massachusetts Institute of Technology offered him a full professorship in 1865 and Eliot returned to the United States with better scientific training and great admiration for the German universities. As both a student and teacher of science, he had opportunities to feel the disdain of the classicists for technical training but his own practicality and European experience convinced him that the American college had to grant the new sciences full parity with traditional Greek and Latin.

His observations of the German people convinced him of the desirability of universal education, and he was reinforced in his belief when he saw at first hand the sad state of popular education in England. This belief in the desirability and power of universal education was a bit unusual among American college presidents around 1869. So was Eliot's belief in the desirability of equality of educational opportunity, but his thoughts blended nicely with the views of the great American middle class and the newly emerging captains of industry.

---

3 James, I, p. 115.

4 Ibid., p. 135.
His personality also differentiated Eliot from the usual college president of the Civil War period. He was unusually young (only thirty-five at the time of his inauguration), innovative, practical-minded, and a natural expert in administration. As one might expect of a Harvard president, he had the usual virtues of college chiefs - keen intelligence, impeccable character, good judgment, and a cosmopolitan attitude fostered by four years of European studies. His abundant natural gifts were enriched with lifelong good health and moderate living.

Textbooks on American educational history generally grant Eliot credit for breaking the classical monopoly on higher education by the introduction of the elective system. What is not usually made clear is the fact that Eliot's work with the elective system was successful for the most part, while earlier attempts at Harvard and elsewhere had been disappointing. Even more important is the often overlooked fact that he built the first really complete university in the United States. (Johns Hopkins was an excellent graduate school but its "symmetrical" development as a university

5 Ibid., p. 67.
lagged behind that of Harvard.) Why was Eliot able to succeed with the elective system while earlier attempts had failed? Why is it correct to say that Eliot's success at Harvard served as a model for all of American higher education?

The answers to these questions lie partly in luck and partly in Eliot's considerable competence. He took office in 1869 at a time favorable to modernization and reform. The time was ripe for the introduction of a more modern curriculum. The Civil War was such a catastrophic experience in American life that the physician, engineer, scientist, and businessman could no longer be denied professional status and opportunity. The old American college, with its aristocratic and linguistic heritage, had little choice but to open its doors to the more modern studies - science, English, modern languages, economics, history, and so on. For the large number of students eager to study something other than classics, there was a sufficient supply of young American teachers with experience in the modern studies at the excellent German universities. When Eliot at Harvard gave students freedom of choice in their studies, they usually passed up the classical offerings. Consequently, he has since been associated with the dethroning of
the classics in American education.

His observations in Germany and his own practicality convinced Eliot of the need for a real American university. A mere transplant from Germany would not work; it had been tried at Michigan by Tappan before the Civil War and failed conspicuously. At Harvard however Eliot had the practical plans, a favorable atmosphere, and the money to convert his institution from a colonial college to a university of world eminence, one that would serve as a model for American higher education.

Eliot seized the initiative in American higher education after the Civil War in the way that John D. Rockefeller seized it in oil, Andrew Carnegie in steel, Washington Duke in tobacco. In various ways he responded to the needs and the demands of a society that was experiencing an increase in material wealth, in the standard of living, in industrialization and urbanization. He responded to the unleashing of new impulses to social and economic mobility, to the emergence of a more democratic psychology which stressed individual differences and needs, and to a more democratic philosophy.

which recognized the right to learning and character-training of women, farmers, merchants, and the great, aspiring middle class. He recognized that a new society needed new agencies of instruction, cohesion, and control.

For Charles Eliot, the old ways and the old curriculum were too narrow, elementary, or superficial. There was insufficient attention to the German university ideals of free teaching, study, and research. There was insufficient attention to the technical and practical. The American colleges were too sectarian, too undemocratic. Their faculty psychology was faulty; their philosophy, wanting.

7 According to the orthodox view of "mental discipline," education consisted in strengthening or developing the powers of the mind by exercising them, preferably on difficult or abstract material such as Latin, Greek, and mathematics. For disciplinary purposes, the content of school subjects was held to be of secondary importance, since their mastery was thought to be efficacious in the creation of minds able to operate well in any field of endeavor.
Under Eliot's leadership, Harvard became a university, eventually surpassing even Johns Hopkins in the strength of its graduate work. With the help of Christopher Langdell in the Law School, Eliot pioneered in establishing new standards in the teaching of law. In medicine he set examples that would profoundly improve medical education in the United States. He made Harvard a national rather than a provincial institution. He took advantage of his position to assert leadership in raising the standards of secondary education. But the movement with which he was most identified was the movement that substituted a broadly elective course of study for the old prescribed classical curriculum.

There were several parts to his plans for a first-rate university: a brilliant faculty of scholars distinguished by their research ability; a liberal arts college flanked by a graduate department and professional schools; hardware in the form of libraries, laboratories, and similar facilities; and an atmosphere of scholarship and freedom favorable to good teaching and research.

---

8 As dean of the Harvard Law School during Eliot's administration, Langdell is credited with introducing the case method of teaching law.

9 James, I, p. 236.
The elective system and its implications figured prominently in all of these parts.

His Program for Reform

The American college curriculum began as an adaptation of the English college's version of the medieval course of study. A prescribed curriculum had developed in England and western Europe because the church wished her clergymen and teachers to be orthodox in belief and educated in the literary and philosophical studies inherited from Greece and Rome, and partly because it was assumed that there were certain things that all liberally educated gentlemen should know. The prescribed curriculum was thus associated from the outset with the concept of a more or less fixed body of knowledge and rapidly became linked with the idea of education for a community of gentlemen.

A college curriculum is significant chiefly for two things: it reveals the educated community's conception of what knowledge is most worth transmitting to the cream of its youth, and it reveals what kind of mind and character an education is expected to produce.

The curriculum is also a barometer by which we may measure the cultural pressures that operate upon the school. The American college curriculum before the Civil War consisted chiefly of studies in Latin, Greek, mathematics, logic and moral philosophy, with occasional smatterings of Hebrew and elementary physics and astronomy. Three assumptions underlay this system of education:

(1) Education was for gentlemen; it was designed to create among them a common core of central knowledge that would make of them a community of the educated. A gentleman's education was a classical education in part because it was, in Veblen's terms, honorifically wasteful - because the time it took to acquire was highly disproportionate to its limited usefulness. Neither the people nor the educators were altogether blind to a certain incongruity in schools of Greek and Latin in a raw culture like that of the United States in the nineteenth century. This awareness finally expressed itself in a strong revolt against the old curriculum.

(2) A particular conception of knowledge was also tacitly or explicitly assumed. Knowledge was thought of as a certain more or less fixed quantum of truth, and the primary function of education was to get as much as possible of this corpus of Christian truth into the heads of the undergraduates. The relatively static character of truth outside the natural sciences was taken for granted. The concept of knowledge as a progressive field of inquiry and acquisition, associated with scientific research, was inconsistent with this ideal. The modest amount of worthy scientific work among a few college faculties in the pre-Civil War era existed independently of and in contradiction to the prevailing pedagogical theory and practice.

(3) Finally, a particular theory of the nature of the mind was assumed. This was the so-called faculty psychology, which held that the human mind can be analyzed into a set of "faculties" such as memory, reason, imagination, attention, judgment, and the like. The object of education was to exercise a form of mental discipline

\[\text{12} \text{Gladys Bryson, "The comparable interests of the old moral philosophy and the modern social sciences," Social Forces, 11 (1932-1933), 19.}\]
which would train the faculties for their use, much as an athlete trains his muscles. The powers of the mind were to be developed through discipline, and it was assumed that drill in the classics had some special advantage over all other subjects in developing these powers.

The growth of scientific knowledge went on with such rapidity that it confounded the old idea of a fixed body of study. There was so much that could be known, there were careers in so many specialties, that the idea of some satisfactory overall educational "coverage" became increasingly untenable. In one of his arguments for the elective system, Eliot pointed out that it would take an industrious student some forty years to cover the fields of knowledge if they were all prescribed.

In an educational system that was abandoning the notion of an all-sufficient mental discipline and the nurture of gentlemanly and Christian character in order to launch upon the task of creating specialists for a world of specialization, the prescribed curriculum was doomed, and with it the familiar emphasis on the classics. The

---

13Butts, p. 172.
student needed a range of courses among which he could choose in the light of his interests and his probable future career. Eliot said in his inaugural address that:

The civilization of a people may be inferred from the variety of its tools. For the individual, concentration, and the highest development of his own peculiar faculty is the only prudence. But for the State, it is variety, not uniformity, of intellectual product, which is needful. 14

The elective system had initial advantages over the prescribed curriculum not simply because of its alleged superiority in preparing students for specialized careers, but also because its rationale seemed more consistent with the most enlightened ideas of the nineteenth century. Indeed, Eliot's elective system seemed like an academic version of liberal capitalist thinking. It added to the total efficiency of society by conforming to the principle of division of intellectual labor. It was pluralistic in the sense that it recognized spontaneous differences in individual interests, tastes, and ways of doing things.

It was democratic in a double sense: first, in that it

candidly accepted the decline of a gentleman's education and the need of educating people of all origins for their working careers, and second in that it expressed its faith in the common student's capacity to choose wisely in making his educational plans. It was competitive in that the various course offerings of the college vied for the interest of the students. Finally, as Eliot argued, "it provided on a large scale an invaluable addition to human freedom." 15

By the end of Eliot's administration in 1909, the benefits of the elective system were widely agreed upon. It had blown through the American college like a gust of fresh air, and had swept out innumerable features of the old regime that could hardly be justified - its rigidity; its archaic content, its emphasis on discipline and memory rather than inquiry and criticism, its tendency to constrict the lives of faculty members as well as students by limiting their opportunities to deepen themselves in a special field of learning. The elective principle facilitated the growth of the American college into a university, and helped to raise American scholarship in many fields to a par with European standards.

15 Ibid., p. 701.
It was also apparent by 1909 that the elective system had opened the door to excessive vocationalism and a lowering of standards. The elective system became interwoven with the mass character of American education in such a way as to compound undesirable characteristics - for instance, students who came to college for other than serious educational purposes were free to load their curricula with easy courses containing a minimum of conceptual material.

The old prescribed curriculum had been excessively dedicated to archaic content, and was inspired by a religious conservatism that could hardly have been expected to survive the age of Darwin and Spencer. The debate over the elective principle made clear the relationship between the community at large and higher education. What was involved was never an educational problem pure and simple but a clash in social philosophies over the kind of mind and personality that higher education was expected to produce. The fundamental issue was one of values.

The elective curriculum grew up in an age of optimism, expansion, competitiveness, and materialistic satisfaction. Such facets of the American spirit fell under criticism, particularly
during the intellectual and moral crisis of capitalist society brought on by the Depression of the 1930's. There is even today, some believe, a need to restore some of the spiritual content of education and to return to the supremacy of the intellect as opposed to all the utilities that have crept into the educational system.

The university era in American education, dominated by Eliot, brought decided improvements in American education but it carried most colleges to opposite extremes in an effort to eliminate old failings. The strait-jacket curriculum was abandoned but too often in favor of a disorganized elective system. The classics were divested of their monopoly but the value of classical culture was almost forgotten. Excellent new methods of teaching came into use but in larger institutions they were swamped by the exigencies of mass education. Theology and dogma were largely displaced but education lost too much of its emotional and spiritual content. Science won a larger place but science teaching was too often given a sharp preprofessional slant to the neglect of its broader intellectual possibilities. The idealistic old college gave way to a new one with an excessive vocational bias.

In his inaugural, Eliot had made a frontal attack on the old
faculty psychology which had been one of the strongest foundations of the prescribed course of study:

In education, the individual traits of different minds have not been sufficiently attended to. Moreover, the young man of nineteen or twenty ought to know what he likes best and is most fit for. When the revelation of his own peculiar taste and capacity comes to a young man, let him reverently give it welcome, thank God, and take courage. Thereafter, he knows his way to happy, enthusiastic work and, God willing, to usefulness and success.16

His adherence to a psychology of individual differences led him to suggest how the elective principle might meet the problem of student motivation:

The elective system fosters scholarship because it gives free play to natural preferences and inborn aptitudes, makes possible enthusiasm for a chosen work, relieves the professor and the ardent student of the presence of a body of students who are compelled to an unwelcome task, and enlarges instruction by substituting many and various lessons given to small, lively classes for a few lessons many times repeated to different sections of a numerous class.17

The rationale that Eliot offered for the elective system rested on a combination of desire, necessity, principle, and preference. While his rejection of faculty psychology was even then finding some

16 Ibid., p. 608.
17 Ibid., p. 609.
support in the work of pioneer experimental psychologists, his commitment to self-reliance and self-expression needed no academic credentials in order to appeal to American habits of thought. The psychology of individual differences recognized the fundamental importance of the individual and in doing so Eliot merely stated in psychological terms what Americans had already come to believe through experience. Jefferson, Jackson, and Lincoln had already expressed on the level of democratic belief what Eliot was now saying should be an operative principle in higher education.

Eliot needed such a principle in order to achieve at Harvard a substantial lease on life for the natural and physical sciences. He needed it in order to move Harvard from its essentially narrow, New England orientation to a position in which it could become not only national in its clientele but national in its contributions. Harvard could become neither until it was free to develop departments of study in depth, until it was free to encourage scholarship and learning.

All these purposes were served by the elective principle. While Eliot might have sold the elective principle in one instance as a natural application of the American belief in the free individual
and in another as an expression of the new psychology, what he really fashioned at Harvard was a device for bringing science and the other new disciplines into equality with the old subjects, a device for bringing a new spirit of inquiry and scholarship into the life of the university and for bringing Harvard into a position of commanding leadership in American life.

Around 1900, a decade before Eliot's retirement from Harvard, the elective system seemed all important. Colleges stood or fell in popular estimation on their record in this matter. To progressives like Eliot, the elective system represented the hope of the earth. They pictured a sort of battle between the forces of good and evil: on one side, the clericals, the classicists, and the dead hand of the past; on the other, the champions of science and the generous legions of youth. It was freedom versus tyranny, Eliot implied, the democratic future against the aristocratic past - as simple as that. Yet, if it was really that simple, how did it happen that in Eliot's day so many respectable colleges like Yale and Princeton found themselves at best reluctant converts to the light? Was not the elective system actually a mixture of ideals and a product of forces only partially harmonious and beneficial?
Eliot argued that no fewer than four parties, with distinct and even contrary interests, stood to benefit from the elective system. First, the students, he said, would benefit because the greater freedom would give them wider opportunities for learning. It would also enable them to select courses in which they were vitally interested and subjects better suited to their individual capacities—hence more effective study. By specialization in college, they could prepare themselves earlier and more thoroughly for their future vocations. They would be educated toward responsibility and maturity by being given a share in their own education. Finally, they could avoid the deadly and unpleasant subjects, especially much useless debris left over from a benighted past.

Eliot also pointed out that the faculty had a stake in the new opportunities offered. The elective system, Eliot said, meant freedom to investigate, as well as to teach, new things. Thus, the elective system opened the doors to the natural sciences and the study of society and to the more advanced exploration and more varied instruction in every subject, old as well as new. A scholar interested

18 Ibid., p. 701.
in classical literature or archeology, in languages or in mathematics stood to benefit as much as the champion of chemistry or economics; for the first time he was freed to pursue his specialty and to become a discoverer. Lecturers and laboratory men alike threw off the drillmaster's yoke. In point of fact, the elective system probably made possible the creation of our scholarly professions above the old schoolteacher's trade.

Eliot further contended that the educational institution itself stood to benefit because elective practices promised to broaden its coverage, raise graduate schools on undergraduate foundations, convert the institution from a storehouse to a producer of knowledge. The old perpetuating colleges, he said, would become discovering universities.

Eliot also believed that the general public, or at least special elements in American life, would benefit from the elective system. On one hand, the elective system promised to contribute new skills and powers to society. On the other hand, the new educational philosophy, with its slogan of freedom, was a solid weapon for an

19Butts, p. 239.

20Hofstadter and Smith, p. 701.
attack on many things disliked or distrusted in the old academic system - notably the persistence of the old European studies and attitudes, the dominance of the classical languages, the leisure class overtones of the polite learning, the bookishness and impracticality of the liberal arts, and the aristocratic exclusiveness of the learned professions. Under the banner of freedom the proponents of the elective system could, and did, attack moral dictation by the clergy, the paternalism of the faculty, and the monopoly of higher education so long enjoyed by the old-style colonial foundations. If new subjects could be made acceptable for the degree, then new colleges could start almost even with the older ones. If the prestige of the older subjects and methods and attitudes could be undermined, then more students could come to college, more occupations could be held honorable and higher education and society together would become democratic.

The critical fact is that the elective system was really an element in a far broader social development. The elective principle and equal study values, laissez-faire and economic enterprise, manhood suffrage and the absence of class barriers - all these marched together. The elective system was, at bottom, quite as
much the product of powerful social movements as of conscious partisan volition. In other words, the breakdown of the old closed curriculum came about because the traditional American college suffered a series of invasions - numbers of studies, numbers of students, numbers of educational theories, and numbers of competing institutions. With the individual colleges competing with one another for students and industrial favor, with the clerical profession declining and the interests of scholars divided, it was virtually inevitable that a freer and more indiscriminate learning should begin to be practiced.

The elective system conveniently allowed institutions to vary and thus diverted energies into a free and competitive pluralism instead of confining them within a small and rigid space, thus bringing on an educational civil war. The first real achievement of the elective system was that it accommodated change. What the elective practices did to freshen college studies - to break down pedagogical rigidities, to undermine the old-style disciplinarians, to shift the emphasis from memory work to inquiry, to add variety to solid acquisitions, depth to breadth, and enthusiasm to the dusty walls of learning - should not be forgotten.
It was another achievement of the elective system to bring American scholarship to the level of the advanced European scholarship, and ahead of British scholarship in the social sciences. Still another result of the elective system was the nurturing of our graduate universities. Research and the new sciences did not have to go outside the colleges for outlet. Instead, as universities they were enabled to keep in the forefront of progress, draw the new learning into themselves, and so impregnate the forces of change with something of their own idealism and disinterestedness.

Some losses and failures of the elective system must also be noted. Variety meant loss of unity, secularism meant loss of spiritual character, and expansion involved lowering standards. The effort to take in so many students and studies meant the sacrifice of the best in favor of a better average, the postponement of still further advances at the front in favor of attention to the rear.

Even Eliot did not realize how little order there was in the elective idea, when it was applied to individual courses instead of to programs or degrees. It is ironic that he himself seems to have relied on the preparatory schools to furnish a common discipline or foundation but in the end had to campaign for common college-
entrance examinations. Eliot further claimed that the freely and scientifically educated citizen would make a better graduate and citizen. He hardly seems to have anticipated how little interested the average student would be in the breadth and truth of science, how instead he and his parents would prefer some single science, narrowly and vocationally applied. As for citizenship, time brought doubts to many. In other words, given the pragmatic temperament and the anti-intellectual nature of American social consciousness, the controversy over the elective system reflected the critical uncertainties of the age and the evolving tensions of American society.

In 1908 Charles Eliot, who surely had an opportunity to observe the consequences of the elective principle, observed: "The largest effect of the elective system is that it makes scholarship possible, not only among undergraduates but among graduate students and college teachers." His claim was largely justified. The old prescribed course of study was a course in elementary subjects, and it not only held the student and the teacher to the most superficial

kind of knowledge, but also sustained colleges that got along quite well on a level of alarming superficiality. Election permitted the professor to indulge his interests and the students to follow theirs; it encouraged the accumulation of knowledge and welcomed into the world of learning subjects that had previously been forbidden by a belief that the ancients knew everything worth knowing.

The elective principle saw the rise of science and the remarkably expanding areas of knowledge for what they were - clear indications that no longer could any one person really know everything worth knowing. The elective principle moved the individual to the center of the educational universe and boldly asserted that all educated men need not know the same things. The elective system, by giving free play to the great motive power of interest, freed the curriculum from the deadening influence of latent or open disinterest and hostility.

The elective principle was the instrument by which departments of knowledge were built, by which areas of scholarly interest were enlarged and therefore it was the instrument, secular and democratic, that permitted the American university to enter into a vital partnership with the society of which it was a part. It trans-
formed the English college in America by grafting upon it German ideals and in the process created the American university.

Of course, the elective system had unfortunate consequences. For one thing, it became the instrument but not the cause for ushering out of American experience the acquaintance with the classics which for centuries had been the mark of an educated man. It became the device which almost obliterated the humanist content of higher education and substituted for it an often excessive concern with practical power and the equality of men. The conclusion is inescapable however that the elective principle of Eliot moved the American college and university into the mainstream of American life, where it for long had sorely needed to be.

**Graduate Studies**

As the older Harvard College had been based upon English conceptions, Eliot fashioned the new Harvard University after the German universities which, with their stress on research, their ideal of academic freedom, and their concept of service to the state, had taken the leading position among the universities of Europe.

22 Butts, p. 243.
His role in developing graduate study at Harvard will now be analyzed.

Immediately after his inauguration, Eliot established graduate lectures and in 1872 a graduate division was formally authorized. While he was pushing for the establishment of a graduate school at Harvard, he was challenged by some faculty members who wondered if the attempt to teach graduates would merely weaken the College. Samuel Eliot Morison quotes him as replying this way:

It will strengthen the College. As long as our teachers regard their work as simply giving so many courses for undergraduates, we shall never have first-class teaching here. If they have to teach graduate students as well as undergraduates, they will regard their subjects as infinite, and keep up that constant investigation which is necessary for first class teaching. 23

Morison, who studied at Harvard during Eliot's later years, went on to write:

No prophecy of Eliot's has been more amply fulfilled. More than salaries, more than libraries and laboratories, the opportunity to train disciples in an atmosphere of professional study and creative scholarship has drawn great scholars to Cambridge. 24


24Ibid., p. 336.
The institution of a Ph.D. program at Yale in 1861 started a trend in the United States toward systematized graduate study. In reviewing graduate efforts at Yale up to 1869, Eliot found evidence of legitimate success "on a really high level, if also on a modest scale." The existence of this program, unpretentious but genuine, and perseveringly offered to a few real students" helped to prove to his satisfaction that there was "a small but steady demand in the older American communities for instruction higher than that of the ordinary college course, and yet different from that of the law, medical, and theological schools." He noted that Yale's success in graduate studies pointed the way to "improvements which ought soon to be made at all the important American 'universities,' which will then better deserve their ambitious titles."

As early as 1869, Eliot prophesied the emergence of an American university as "the slow and natural outgrowth of American social and political habits." His eagerness to have a university


26 Ibid., p. 208.

27 Ibid., p. 216.
formed by the American environment fitted the triumphant nationalism of the year that saw a railroad span the continent and Ulysses Grant enter the White House. Eliot then was convinced that a German-style graduate school had to be built in America upon the foundation of the traditional English-style college.

In 1872 Eliot expanded "university lectures " into a regular graduate department. This eventually became the nucleus of the Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Science. At the same time the demands of the times for a more secular system of administration and a more elective curriculum were met. Also, he strove to raise the level of instruction in the various professional schools to true graduate levels. Finally, he sought to unify in his own person the work of Harvard "University," and thus have it merit the name, by actively presiding at the meetings of its various faculties.

Although some writers insist that Eliot's views of graduate studies derived largely from the success of the research-oriented Johns Hopkins University between 1880 and 1900, Eliot himself

28 Morison, p. 334.
29 Veysey, p. 95.
stressed the value of graduate work to the Hopkins trustees shortly before the Baltimore institution opened in 1874:

We believe the post-graduate system is a good investment if one has the means to invest. We believe on the whole it is the most profitable instruction that can be given. It is more for the advantage of the nation to breed a few thoroughly trained men of great capacity than to breed a large number of moderately well trained men of limited capacity. The days of great men are not over, and one great man may do more for the nation than a million average men. The post-graduate system is a means of breeding professors. It enables the university to provide a high class of teachers not only for its own use but for the supply of other institutions.30

In his first annual report after the opening of Johns Hopkins, Eliot pledged the special attention of the faculty to "strengthening and systematizing the instruction of graduates." In keeping with his recent gestures to improve the lot of professors invited to Johns Hopkins, he commented that he hoped to relieve professors of "routine work." The atmosphere of research and scholarship at Johns Hopkins was a matter of great interest to Eliot, and a Harvard Overseer found him talking of Hopkins "all the time."


31Ephraim Gurney, a long-time friend of Eliot.

At the death of Benjamin Peirce in 1880, Eliot refused to consider hiring a gentlemanly teacher of the old school. Insisting on "some young man of brilliant promise as a mathematical investigator," he invited Thomas Craig, one of the first Hopkins Ph.D.'s, to come to Harvard. Although Craig preferred to stay in Baltimore, the following year found Eliot successful in bringing Charles Lamman, a Sanskritist, to Harvard. This importation, and others about the same time, convinced older Harvard faculty members that like Gilman, Eliot was going to demand scholarly production. Unfortunately, struggles over admissions policies and the elective system diverted Eliot and he sometimes failed to sustain this impression. In the late 1880's he felt a groundswell of discontent among the research-oriented members of his faculty who did not realize the practical difficulties Eliot faced in the financing of research.

Eliot himself usually stimulated criticism by broaching in faculty meetings the topic of the scholarly climate at Harvard. He would enter into exchanges of ideas with the professors who com-

\[33\text{Ibid., p. 245.}\]
plained, asking them for practical suggestions. If he was not a particularly original thinker, he was a brilliant promoter and administrator of the ideas of others. By the 1890's, many faculty discontents had lessened, Hopkins was in financial trouble and Harvard was thriving. Other universities had entered the field of graduate studies, making the Baltimore venture less conspicuous. In 1894 the Harvard Faculty of Arts and Sciences adopted an anniversary statement emphasizing Eliot's leadership in promoting advanced study:

It is the period of the present administration that will be remembered hereafter as the epoch in which the (Harvard) University was first fairly able to take its place among the great seats of learning of the world, and to adopt as its foremost purpose, not simply the regulation of more or less unwilling youth in the last years of their schooling, but the nurture, discipline, and inspiration of men destined to devote their whole future to scholarship, science, philosophy, criticism, or art, and of students laying serious foundations of lifelong culture - the leaders of the coming generation in the search for new knowledge, the establishment of new standards, and the creation of new intellectual forms. 35

34 Ibid., p. 143.
35 James, 1, p. 85.
The Harvard faculty went on to praise Eliot's support of the graduate program "through its long years of insignificance and apparent failure," and by linking its beginnings to "the very first weeks after his accession to office," made clear a certain priority over Hopkins.

Could the methods and purposes of two aspects of learning - one aiming at general education (the liberal arts college) and the other at the advancement of knowledge (the graduate school) - be harmonized in the same framework of higher education? The influential action taken by Eliot in 1890 was posited on the belief that this was possible. In that year he created a single Faculty of Arts and Sciences which had charge of both the college and the graduate school. Despite subsequent administrative changes in 1905 and in 1912, and the creation of a Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, the basic policy of Eliot was continued of integrating undergraduate and graduate disciplines through maintenance of a series of courses common to both. This pattern was also followed at other university centers, including Yale, Princeton, and Columbia.

36 Ibid., p. 3.
By the 1890's the Harvard Graduate School had developed an important and autonomous existence. The growth of graduate training at Harvard was of greater future importance than the isolated experiments at Johns Hopkins and Clark. Research ultimately thrived in a more luxuriant fashion at Harvard because Eliot was able to finance a broad and dependable basis for its existence. Even the crumbs from the huge endowment Eliot had amassed would have seemed bountiful at hard-pressed Clark and Johns Hopkins.

Precisely because Harvard could offer this kind of financial security, the story of Eliot's creation of the Harvard Graduate School is spiced with comparatively little sense of adventure. There was no risk. Rather, Eliot was interested in developing facilities for research largely as a means of retaining an up-to-date reputation for his institution. But means here triumphed over singleness of motive. By 1910, if a research-oriented observer had been asked to name the leading American universities, he probably would have listed Harvard, Chicago, Columbia, and Johns Hopkins - in that order.

\[37\] Veysey, p. 401.
Eliot was highly successful in developing Harvard because he had a great gift for understanding new ideas and was thus able to take advantage of new developments. Thus, he was impressed with the research orientation of the new Johns Hopkins University and used this model to spur on research motivation at Harvard. Although he did not look for research excellence on the part of his professors in the early part of his administration, his later writings repeatedly affirmed the principle that a university is concerned with extending the boundaries of knowledge. During the second part of his long tenure, he wrote of the "scholarly achievements of the teaching staff" and his actions (for instance, adequate salaries, sabbatical leaves, and freedom of inquiry) bore witness to his earnest desire to promote scholarly work.

In an 1898 address on "The Aims of Higher Education," Eliot described the threefold function of a university: "to teach, to accumulate great stores of systematized knowledge and to seek new truths." In regard to the research ideal, he said:

A university is a society of learned men, each a master in his field; each acquainted with what has been achieved in all past time in his special subject; each prepared to push forward a little the present limits of knowledge; each expecting and hoping to clear up some tangle or log on the frontier, or to pierce, with his own little searchlight, if only by a hand's breath, the mysterious gloom which surrounds on every side the area of ascertained truth. Hence universities are places of research, of diligent inquiry for new or forgotten truth. This function is quite as indispensable as either of the two former. It is indispensable for two reasons: first, because a university which is not a place of research will not long continue to be a good place of teaching; and secondly, because this incessant, quiet, single-minded search after new truth is the condition of both material and intellectual progress for the nation and for the race. 39

Eliot wrote these words at the close of the nineteenth century. Yet in his inaugural address of 1869, there was no statement of research aims or ideals. At that time, the new president apparently envisioned the future of Harvard in terms of professors whose "prime business must be regular and assiduous class teaching." His specifications for a suitable professor were that he must be 40 "a real gentleman and a natural teacher." There was no emphasis on the desirability that a permanent faculty member be a creative worker in his own right.

39 Ibid., p. 231.
40 Ibid., p. 27.
Twenty years later, Eliot was so impressed with the research ideal represented by Johns Hopkins University that he was selecting Harvard professors largely on the basis of their scholarly promise. By the 1920's it was clear that Eliot's emphasis on distinction in research was the most important, although not the only criterion of excellence among universities. The independence of departments and professors from administrative interference was also becoming well entrenched.

Eliot's emphasis on research and specialization trends in higher education unfortunately precipitated many of our current university problems. Specialization may have been, as Eliot said it was, the royal road to new truths but it left college students with a disturbing emptiness. The fantastic growth of graduate schools, spurred on by Eliot, shifted the education of young people to the training of specialists. The resultant death of liberal education on many American campuses, unwittingly aided and abetted by Charles Eliot, is at the root of many current campus problems - namely,

the conflict between the valid claims of specialized discovery, represented by the research orientation of professors, and the valid claims of vital experience, represented by undergraduate discontent.

University faculties are today organized fundamentally for the discovery of new truth and, since Eliot, an ever swelling flood of success has demonstrated that the specialization of knowledge - its compartmentalization into autonomous fields - is the most effective way to pursue new truth. This pursuit has become central to contemporary society, which measures its spiritual as well as its material vigor by the promethean endeavor. Contemporary university faculties have no intention of abandoning the pursuit of new knowledge through specialization. Even if they had, society, committed to specialization in a thousand ways, could not let them do so.

The undergraduate today, aware of the research orientation spurred on by men like Eliot, still reaches for intellectual contact with life - rounded, unsegmented, direct. His need to know makes no scholarly distinctions between new truth and old. The implications


of the death of Socrates, for instance, are new to him. The more poignant of these implications are quite beyond disciplined scientific or scholarly verification. They are experience - subjective and therefore scientifically suspect.

Experience, and not the pursuit of new truth, is what thousands of undergraduates have recently found in campus disorders. They could thus turn their backs upon the segmented rigors of the classrooms and express in action a simplified moral protest against ancient wrongs that our complex and progressing society has not set right. In demonstrations they have experienced what they do not find in university textbooks, which are organized according to the manner of seeking new truth so heartily recommended by Charles Eliot.

Professional Education

The emergence of Harvard University, under the leadership of Charles Eliot, as the outstanding model for American higher education coincided with the period of industrialism, corporate business, urbanism, growing social complexity, and the advancement and heightening prestige of science. Consequently, the new professional and graduate schools that proliferated in Eliot's university
revolution at Harvard were naturally molded by these developments. The intensified division of intellectual labor in the departmental system reflected an enlarged functional complexity of society outside the academic walls.

The most urgent demands of American society was for specialized skills, and the definition of skills fell increasingly under the influence of the natural sciences. Immense progress had been made in the sciences. Their technical service to economic life was imposing, and their intellectual achievements during the last half of the nineteenth century was one of the most exciting developments in the realm of the mind and spirit. The attempt to be "scientific" spread from the sciences themselves into every sphere of intellectual life. Law schools tried to teach "scientific" law, historians to write "scientific" history, and even classicists, trying to be scientific, turned to philology. That excessive scientism which has become one of the banes of modern American culture may have had its roots far back in the nation's past, but it was immensely quickened between 1870 and 1910 as a consequence of Eliot's
spur to professional education at Harvard.

Eliot's reactions to legal, medical, and theological education will receive primary consideration in this chapter. As late as 1870, the Boston law firm of Ropes and Gray was saying that the Harvard Law School was "almost a disgrace to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts." Eliot changed things considerably that year. He made Christopher Langdell dean, and Langdell brought with him the case method, the innovative inspiration that has been the cornerstone of legal education ever since. Langdell viewed the law as a science, with a series of progressively dependent rules. These rules were based on the precedent of cases, he observed, and they could be learned only by dissecting those cases. Under the inspiration of Eliot and the leadership of Langdell, Harvard formed the pattern for the nation's legal training by making law "a part of university education rather than an apprenticeship," and then by developing the case method which produced many of the nation's most prominent attorneys.


It is proper to credit Eliot's work in reforming the Harvard Law School as a contribution to American legal education in the larger context. Long before the Civil War, the American lawyer had reached a position of social, economic, and political significance that went far beyond the bounds of narrow professional service. Unfortunately, the content and purposes of American legal education, which had grown up after the English rather than the Continental conception, had been for the most part, intensely and narrowly professional.

College education in the law, as it existed up to 1870, was based more on a highly professional concept than a broad and humane study of the law in the general context of historical and political science. Instruction proceeded by lecture based upon an assigned text. Training could scarcely be prolonged unduly or students would have deserted academic halls for the law office readership. Being brief, legal education could scarcely be anything but highly professional.

\[46\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 238.}\]
The country was growing however. Its business was growing, there was plenty of room for more lawyers, and it was thought better to enter practice quickly than to enter it with an unnecessarily extensive educational background. The pervasive democratic philosophy that was associated with the Jacksonian movement was accompanied by a prejudice against elaborate and formal standards for such an important and popular career. While the newer states of the Union were content with the relatively informal law practiced by Lincoln's generation, there was a premium in the Northeast on a more thorough preparation for the profession. Here the leadership came from Harvard University, where in 1870 Eliot persuaded the tiny law faculty to elect Christopher Langdell as dean.

Like Eliot, Langdell was impressed with the scientific ideal and determined to remake law teaching in the image of science. Since the sources of good law were the outstanding reported cases of the leading appellate courts, the student could get closest to legal reality by studying them directly. "Law," said Langdell, "is a

47Ibid., p. 239.
science, and all the available materials of that science are contained in printed books."

To Eliot, as a scientist, this approach had great appeal. When Langdell asserted that the way to study law, as with any other science, was to go to the sources, Eliot was impressed. "I knew that was true," he said, "for I had been brought up in the science of chemistry myself; and one of the first rules of a conscientious student of science is never to take a fact or a principle out of second hand treatises, but to go to the original memoir of the discoverer of that fact or principle."

Langdell's method of case study, strongly endorsed by Eliot, did help make legal education more serious, more intense, more professional, and more knowledgeable. It had obvious advantages, among them serious intellectual ones. It meant, at best, an abandonment of the passivity of the text and lecture method in favor of some discussion between student and teacher. If it accepted and confirmed the isolation of law from other disciplines and made

\[48\text{Ibid.},\ p.\ 251.\]

\[49\text{Ibid.},\ p.\ 252.\]
of the law school simply another separate school among the
congeries of schools that made up the universities, it also turned
out more effective practicing lawyers.

In medicine, as in law, the early decades of the nineteenth
century were marked by a decline in intellectual and hence, as it
proved, in professional standards. Even at Harvard during
Eliot's early presidency, the rule was that a man who was accept-
able to only five out of nine examiners would be passed. Further,
there were no state boards to impose standards.

Early in the 1870's, Eliot took a crucial part in turning the
tide when he began a reform of Harvard's medical school. The
medical and dental schools, he asserted in his Annual Report of
1869 - 1870, were the "worst equipped departments of the University."
He further noted that "the whole system of medical education in
this country needs thorough reformation."

Essential to any reformation at Harvard was an effort to
bring the Medical School under close administrative and financial

50Eleanor Tilton, Amiable Autocrat

control of the University. Eliot's proposals met stiff opposition among the Overseers until Charles F. Adams arose to discuss the case of a recent graduate of Harvard Medical School who had brought about three sudden deaths in rapid succession among his patients in Quincy by ignorantly prescribing overdoses of morphine. The speech carried the day, and Eliot's reforms began in the 1871 - 1872 academic year. A three year course of study was organized; students were required to pass an examination each year in order to move to the next year's studies, and had to pass in all subjects before receiving their degrees. Tuition was raised, and control of the school's income was transferred to the University Treasurer. This began a reformation of wide influence among the better medical schools during the next thirty years.

Eliot's reforms of medical education at Harvard were in part helpful in enabling American medicine to leap from its backward position to a leading place in the world. Today the state of American medical science is high, and its research has been heavily supported. There is not now a figure in the community who has more status in

52 Tilton, p. 273.
the public mind than the physician, and the financial rewards of his profession are attractive.

Unfortunately, the intensely professional education Eliot encouraged in the medical schools has been generally preceded by a pre-medical education that often matches it in narrowness and specialization. Although Eliot was quite aware of the heightened intellectual and cultural awareness of American medicine, he was unhappily in part responsible for the rearing of a race of socially and culturally myopic physicians. His misunderstanding of the very nature of liberal education prevented him from realizing that premedical education must be liberal enough to supply what the professional phases of education cannot.

As for Eliot's role in the development of American professional education, particularly in law and medicine, he was partly responsible for recognizing and nurturing new professional interests that did not draw their inspiration from the ancient learning. The old professionalism was characterized by a serious regard for the liberal studies and by the degree to which the central subject of every liberal study

53Charles Eliot, A Late Harvest (Boston: Atlantic, 1924), p. 195.
was man himself. The new professionalism, heartily endorsed by Eliot, raised questions not so much about man's ultimate role and his ultimate responsibility as it did about whether this or that was a good way to go about achieving some immediate and limited object. There was a real difference between the old and the new professions, a difference that had been previously been clarified by the distinction between profession and vocation. The flowering American universities took what were vocations and turned them into professions.

Under the leadership and influence of Eliot, Harvard University became a collection of graduate professional schools, schools which replaced the apprentice system in law, put responsibility into the study of medicine, tended to relegate theology into a separate corner, created education as an advanced field of study, and responded to the felt necessities of the time and region, thus spawning appropriate schools at appropriate times, whether they were schools of business administration, forestry, journalism, social work, or Russian studies.

54 Veysey, p. 118.
Academic Freedom

It is not easy to build up an atmosphere of scholarship and academic freedom, but Eliot amply did his part at Harvard. His observations of the German universities strengthened his belief that academic freedom, like academic searching, defined the true university. He described his underlying assumptions about academic freedom in his inaugural address:

A university must be indigenous; it must be rich; and above all, it must be free. The winnowing breeze of freedom must blow through all its chambers. It takes a hurricane to blow wheat away. An atmosphere of intellectual freedom is the native air of literature and science. This university aspires to serve the nation by training men to intellectual honesty and independence of mind. The Corporation demands of all its teachers that they be grave, reverent, and high-minded; but it leaves them, like their pupils, free. 55

Under Eliot, Harvard students and faculty generally found an atmosphere of tolerance and freedom available at perhaps no other American university. There were, for instance, no serious academic freedom cases at Harvard during his presidency, while Columbia, Yale, Chicago, Stanford, and Wisconsin experienced considerable difficulty in this area. 56


56Veysey, p. 384.
Just as Eliot placed great emphasis on trusting the individual student, so did he on trusting the professor. Although he cautiously listed "reverence" as a professorial qualification in his inaugural, he increasingly fostered a climate of free expression. By 1897 he could be found stoutly defending George Santayana's modern frankness about sexually motivated behavior to the indignant mother of a Harvard undergraduate. A decade later, a militant advocate of academic freedom who was teaching at the University of Wisconsin, wrote privately: "The academic atmosphere of Harvard, though not wholly pure, is decidedly more inspiring than any other I know."

Eliot however did not condone the German idea of "convincing" one's students, of winning them over to the personal system and philosophical views of the professor. As far as classroom actions were concerned, he thought the proper stance of American professors should be one of neutrality on controversial issues, and silence on substantive issues that lay outside the scope of their competence.

57Eliot, Educational Reform, p. 28.
58Veysey, p. 97.
59Ibid., p. 97.
In the very speech that so elegantly declared that the university must be free, Eliot made neutrality an aspect of that freedom.

In that inaugural address, he had said in part:

Philosophical subjects should never be taught with authority. They are not established sciences; they are full of disputed matters, open questions, and bottomless speculations. It is not the function of the teacher to settle philosophical and political controversies for the pupil, or even to recommend to him any one set of opinions as better than any other. Exposition, not imposition of opinions, is the professor's part. The student should be made acquainted with all sides of these controversies, with the salient points of each system; he should be shown what is still in force or institutions or philosophies mainly outgrown, and what is new in those now in vogue. The very word 'education' is a standing protest against dogmatic teaching. The notion that education consists in the authoritative inculcation of what the teacher deems true may be logical and appropriate in a convent, but it is intolerable in universities and the public schools, from primary to professional.

The catholic view Eliot took of academic freedom also included students. In his 1907 Phi Beta Kappa address, the Harvard president included the student's freedom to choose his studies, to refuse to attend chapel, to compete on even terms for scholarships, and to

60 Eliot, Educational Reform, p. 31.

61 Ibid., p. 8.
choose his own friends, as well as the professor's freedom to teach in the manner most congenial to him, to be free from harassing routines, to enjoy a secure tenure, and to receive a fixed salary and a retirement allowance. This approach of Eliot was surely exceptional.

He made a point of the fact that "so long as boards of trustees of colleges and universities claim the right to dismiss at pleasure all the officers of the institutions in their charge, there will be no security for the teacher's proper freedom," that "it is easy for a department to become despotic, particularly if there be one dominant personage in it."

Eliot's first actual combat at Harvard in defense of academic freedom took place shortly after his inauguration when he asked John Fiske, who as an undergraduate had been threatened with dismissal from the College because of his religious heresies, to give a series of lectures on Positivism. In spite of opposition among the Overseers and a blast of criticism from the religious press against

63 Ibid., p. 149.
"Harvard's drive on religion," Fiske completed his lectures. Although he was not retained, he was replaced by Henry Adams, who was no less secular in his outlook.

A 1904 speaking engagement in New York City found Eliot analyzing "The University and the Ethical Problem of Our Time."

He said in part:

A change has come over our universities. They have become something more than a teacher or deliverer of truth. They have become truth seekers, which assumes that there is more truth to be found; that we have not got the whole of it - that we are looking for it day by day, and the university is leading the way always toward the undiscovered truth. The university is therefore not only the teacher of truth, but is a truth seeker. That is the characteristic difference between the ancient university and the modern.

Eliot then concluded by referring to the "ethical problem" of the time:

Now today the university is teaching constantly that through the knowledge of truth comes freedom - freedom for the individual, freedom for the State, freedom of thought and speech, freedom in industry. I suppose this development of freedom is one of the greatest of the services that universities now render in the world. It is, in the first place, an academic freedom that the public and the university honor.

64 Morison, p. 348.
By that sort of freedom we mean freedom for teachers and students of a university. There is no other way of teaching liberty except to give practice in the world; and that is just as true of every individual child and man as it is of a nation. There is no other way of bringing up a nation to the safe use of liberty except by giving that Nation a chance to practice in free institutions, to make its mistakes, to suffer some evils from which it might escape.\(^6\)

In 1921, as President Emeritus of Harvard, Eliot wrote that he did not wish to see members of the Harvard governing board expressing public concern about the controversial utterances of professors such as Laski, Frankfurter, Munsterberg, and the like. Eliot felt that the endowed universities of the United States should not ape the restricted tactics of state universities where politically inspired boards of trustees had, on certain past occasions, interfered with freedom of teaching and thereby degraded the position of university and professor. He further asserted that arbitrary silencing of controversial teachers would not reduce their influence over students. On the contrary, "to increase the influence of the Laskis, Frankfurters, Munsterbergs etc. and their like on the young


men at Harvard, the surest way would be to interfere with their academic freedom.

Eliot then responded to the charge that academic freedom of expression was tantamount to academic license, not freedom. In an impassioned defense of freedom of teaching, he wrote: "There is no surer way to strengthen and spread a mistaken doctrine than to suppress it by any kind of force or pressure. Suppression by force should be confined to treasonable, seditious, or otherwise dangerous positions." Few of the nonconformists in American colleges would fall into the latter category, he believed.

Eliot made these remarks during the time of the "Red Scare," shortly after the end of World War I. Thus, at a critical moment in modern university history, Charles Eliot did his part to help check forces which were threatening academic freedom. We today would do well to hearken back to his eloquent defense of the right of professors to dissent from majority opinion. It is also fitting to view Eliot as a creator of the American university, a free institution.

67 Ibid., p. 21.

68 Ibid., p. 21.
Few builders of institutions have managed to make new patterns so supportive of human powers with so little destruction of human freedom. Inevitably, institutionalization shut out certain possibilities for scholars, but thanks often to great presidential leadership such as Eliot's, they found chiefly new opportunities.

With the emergence of Harvard University, under the leadership of Eliot, as a superb model for American higher education, a conscious and well formulated rationale for academic freedom appeared, framed in terms to fit the new realities of academic life. Aspirations for intellectual freedom that had earlier been expressed by pioneers or rebels in the denominational colleges came to be understood and endorsed by men like Eliot, men who were powerful figures of the educational world. While academic freedom at Eliot's Harvard may have been only imperfectly realized in practice, nevertheless his vigorous efforts and noble exhortations helped in good measure to put those who would oppose and limit academic freedom upon the moral and intellectual defensive.
The Aims of the American University

As a molder of the modern American university, Eliot was keenly interested in the aims of higher education in the United States and the role of the university in modern society. In the early years of the Republic, when the economy was undifferentiated, it was enough for the colleges to prepare young men "for life" or, if something more was required, for the ministry and for teaching. During the nineteenth century however, the American economy became more mature and American society more exacting. More and more tasks were laid upon the only institutions prepared to perform them - the college and the university. By 1900, a decade before Eliot's retirement from Harvard, American universities were being called on to provide not only for the professions, but for many of the other skills needed by a rapidly expanding society. In the past generation, of course, the demands upon the American university have been even more insistent and exacting.

As early as his inaugural address, Eliot promised Harvard would not forget her responsibility to serve society. The university, he said, would promise the community "a rich return of learning, poetry, and piety. It would foster the sense of public duty."

69 Eliot, Educational Reform, p. 37
After the long decades of atomistic individualism which characterized nineteenth century America, the Harvard president’s impetus to service as a principal aim of the American university was of considerable importance to higher education.

At the dedication of the University of Chicago in 1891, Eliot summed up his views on "the aims of higher education":

First, universities are teachers, storehouses, and searchers for truth. In addition to these three direct functions, a university has less direct but still important purposes to fulfill. It should exert a unifying social influence. It should set an example of religious toleration and cultivate mutual respect between diverse churches. A university which draws its students from a large area has also a unifying influence in regard to political discussions and divisions. A true university is a school of public spirit for its governors, benefactors, officers, graduates, and students. Again, it stands for intellectual and spiritual forces against materialism and luxury. It should always be a school of good manners, and of independent thinking. Finally, universities should be always patriotic in the best sense. 71

The central, the indispensable, the necessary and sufficient function of any real university, according to Eliot, is that it be a center of creative thinking. Viewed in this light - the university as

70 Veysey, p. 57.

71 Morison, p. 322.
a center and a source of creative thought or, what is the same thing, a community of creative scholars, he believed that the arguments about courses and credits, research and teaching, liberal versus professional courses, curricula, electives, outside activities, and all the rest would fall into proper perspective. It was his view then that where one has a community of scholars, one is pretty sure to have research and good teaching going on side by side, each stimulating and complementing the other, neither complete without the other.

During Eliot's long administration at Harvard, the entry of natural science into the American university had created departments, and new departments continued to appear as new research fields were staked out. Institutes, some devoted exclusively to research, had come to the American university. Graduate schools tightened their hold on the center of the university. The "philosopher" effloresced into many researchers in many laboratories. Medicine was taken out of the hands of the profession and put into the hands of scientists and, incidentally, Eliot's scientific bias played a large part in this transfer of power. Instead of the generalist as the crown of university effort, technically skilled specialists, aware of the
latest in their fields, each capable of contributing to the new in his field, became the prize of university achievement.

The American university was ideally, for Charles Eliot, an institution consciously devoted to the pursuit of knowledge, the solution of problems, the critical appreciation of achievement and the training of men at a really high level. Since no individual could master even one subject, excellence was measurable only in specialist terms. For Eliot, Newman's liberally educated man was a figment from an outdated past.

Two principles of selectivity operated in Eliot's thought in his determination of which activities belonged in the university and which did not. The first stemmed from his strong liberal faith in research science as the best hope for the future of man in a complex and divided world. If he had a chance, he would have voted for one of C. P. Snow's "two cultures" - the scientific one. He did at times pay homage to the humanistic disciplines, but these for him had to become "research" disciplines if they were to merit a place in his "modern" university.

For a good liberal positivist like Eliot, modern life was to be based on science, and true science was conceived after the natural science model. For him, the university contributed to social progress by stimulating and supporting scientific research in various fields where knowledge is considered possible and is somehow judged desirable. How were fragmented and specialized knowledges to add up to any pattern of wisdom? Eliot did not say, and such questions were of no major concern to most of the professors he admired. If pressed, he probably would have answered that somehow provisional and tentative scientific answers to specialist questions will add up eventually and somehow into a pattern of wisdom; meanwhile we do not yet know enough to answer such questions. The answer betrays a faith in inevitable progress or cosmic bookkeeping which is no longer as convincing to most thoughtful men as it was to many when he retired from Harvard in 1909, just five years before World War I was to devastate such naive faith in progress. Eliot's ideas, whatever his broader intent, have done much to confirm the positivist, scientific temper in the modern American university, where this temper still reigns supreme in most graduate schools and in many graduate departments. The specialized
research contribution of the modern university has been stupendously impressive and valuable. As industrial and government elites have become convinced of the power implicit in abstract scientific findings, they have moved to erect a scientific establishment in which men from the graduate schools and research institutes of universities play a major role. The grant system through which the efforts of such scientists have been purchased, supported, and rewarded has put emotional strain upon the integrity of universities as contemporary social systems.

Various internal strains have increased - strains between undergraduate education, graduate training, and research, strains between the sciences and the humanities, strains between the graduate disciplines and the applied schools and extension services. As the modern American university has acquiesced more or less uncritically in the benevolences of the grant system, the quest for unifying meanings within our proliferating knowledges and within the processes of their utilization has become more and more neglected and unrewarded. Yet perhaps this quest alone can restore a greater measure of integrity to the university.

The other principle of selection in Eliot's philosophy grew
out of his conviction that the American university had a service motivation. Unfortunately many subsequent university administrators have tended to agree with Eliot on this view. As a result, the desire of university administration, and sometimes the faculty, to assume responsibility for helping solve the problem of various segments of our segmented society has come to threaten the integrity of the university in the United States. Eliot believed that the university should, and could, be at once free, relevant, and responsible in its response to social problems in its environment. Fortunately however, he did realize that the university needs autonomy and integrity as an institution devoted to intellectually valid scholarship and research, to intellectually valid, fearless, and imaginative teaching and learning.

Appraisal of Eliot's University Model

The evidence presented in this chapter has documented Eliot's role in transforming Harvard College into a university of international eminence, one that in many ways has served as a model for American higher education in general. By broadening the field of instruction in American universities and fostering the liberal spirit and scientific method, Eliot was probably more responsible than any other man for making Harvard the most successful intellectual institution in the
world during the past century.

The university model that Eliot largely succeeded in creating at Harvard, a research organism, can be better understood by comparing it with the academic cloister model of John Henry Cardinal Newman. Newman's views reflected the early nineteenth century Oxford he had attended. A university, wrote Cardinal Newman, "is the highest protecting power of all knowledge and science, of fact and principle, of inquiry and discovery, of experiment and speculation; it maps out the territory of the intellect, and sees that there is neither encroachment nor surrender on any side." Newman predictably favored "liberal knowledge" and said that useful knowledge "was a deal of trash."

John Henry Newman believed that "knowledge is capable of being its own end. Such is the constitution of the human mind that any kind of knowledge, if it really be such, is its own reward." He particularly felt that institutions other than the university should carry on research. "If its object were scientific and philosophical


74 Ibid., p. 129.

75 Ibid., p. 91.
discovery, I do not see why a university should have any students," he said. A university training, added Newman, "aims at raising the intellectual tone of society, at cultivating the public mind, at purifying the national taste, at supplying true principles to popular enthusiasm and fixed aims to popular aspirations, at giving enlargement and sobriety to the ideas of the age, at facilitating the exercise of political powers, and refining the intercourse of private life." It prepares a man "to fill any post with credit, and to master any subject with facility."

The world of John Henry Newman was, of course, shattered forever even before Eliot's inauguration in 1869. By 1852, when Newman wrote The Idea of a University, the German universities were already becoming the newer model, one which Eliot successfully "Americanized." Industrial and scientific and democratic revolutions were all well underway in the western world, and Newman's gentleman "at home in any society" was soon to be at home in none. Science was beginning to take the place of moral philosophy, research the place of teaching.

76Ibid., p. 157.
By the time Eliot had completed his remarkable transformation at Harvard, his spectacular success had helped bring departments into universities and still newer departments, institutes and even more institutes. The success of Eliot at Harvard was instrumental in creating vast research libraries, in turning the philosopher on his log into a researcher in his laboratory or the library stacks, in taking medical education out of the hands of the profession and putting it into the hands of the research scientists, and much more. Instead of the individual student, there were the needs of society. Instead of Newman's eternal "truths in the natural order," there was discovery of the new. Instead of the generalist, there was the specialist.

The university Eliot effectively helped to shape became, in the words of Abraham Flexner, "an institution consciously devoted to the pursuit of knowledge, the solution of problems, the critical appreciation of achievement and the training of men at a really high level." Under the university model Eliot had forged, no longer could a single individual "master any subject." Newman's

77Flexner, p. 3.
universal liberally educated man was gone forever.

Of course, there were serious flaws in the university model Eliot had been so successful in implementing. For example, Eliot can properly be criticized for forgetting that the true concern of the university should be study, not training. Further, this study can hardly include all subjects but rather the higher or more intellectually important disciplines. Eliot too often was more concerned with quantity at the expense of quality. It does not really matter (as he thought it did) how many subjects are presented in a university, nor how many monographs on them are published annually, nor how many professors are engaged in such writing, nor how many students are engaged in such study. It is important that no subject be presented except by a competent scholar, that no publication be encouraged unless it is of real importance, that no student should be admitted without adequate training, and that no degree should be conferred that is not deserved.

Eliot can also be properly criticized for his consistent encouragement of technical education at the expense of cultural or humanistic or liberal studies. Education and vocational training are, despite his insensitivity to the point, two very different things.
An electrical engineer, for instance, may be highly trained but he is not, by virtue of this training, an educated man. While Eliot certainly realized that education is the proper function of the university, he fell into the trap of believing that technical and vocational training could also be proper functions of the university. It must have been discouraging for humanistic scholars to hear Eliot say that the creation of the Harvard Business School was the crowning point of his educational efforts since it had had "such a prompt and instantaneous success." Men of the mentality of Charles Eliot were indeed responsible and culpable for the excessive proliferation of vocational and professional schools on American campuses.

In any organic body the whole is always greater than any of its parts. Despite serious flaws in the "model university" he proposed, on the whole the Harvard of Eliot was a vital force for the good of American college education and his contemporaries were quick to salute his effectiveness as an educational leader. In 1908 Lynam Abbott gave the following summary of Eliot's achievements at Harvard:

During those forty years Harvard has grown from a Unitarian college to an unsectarian university, from an undergraduate population numbering 423 on the average in the five years 1861-5 to a scholastic community
numbering 6000, with as many teachers in 1908 as it had undergraduate pupils in 1868. Then it was little known outside of New England, now wherever Anglo-Saxon culture has found a residence. Then, apart from its professional schools, its curriculum was mainly Latin, Greek, mathematics, and a little science; now there is no branch of liberal learning which it does not include. Then it was a higher or secondary institution whose President stood to the students in loco parentis, now as essentially a self-governing community; then with standards of graduation probably little if any higher than its standards of admission now; then dominated by a coercive institutional religion, now by a spirit of free individual religion in which all forms of faith and worship are alike welcome.78

Woodrow Wilson, while still president of Princeton, also commented favorably on Eliot's success in creating at Harvard a model for American higher education. Four years before his election as president of the United States, Wilson expressed his view of Eliot as an educational leader:

No man has ever made a deeper impression upon the educational system of a country than President Eliot upon the educational system of America. His gift for leadership, his discrimination in the choice of men, and his power to conceive and execute large plans have made him the most conspicuous and influential figure of the last forty years in American education. He has moreover shown a public spirit and a sense of duty in all matters

affecting the life of the community in which he has lived and the life of the country at large which have made him the leading private citizen of the Republic. His counsel has been felt in affairs for a generation, and always felt in the interest of right action and wholesome sentiment. 79

President Nicholas Murray Butler of Columbia University also acknowledged Eliot's contributions to American higher education:

When he assumed the presidency of Harvard the post of college president was associated in the public mind with a scholar, probably a clergyman, of a rather definite type, whose occupation and interests centered solely in and about the institutions over which he presided, and were in large part remote from the world of business and affairs. The years which have elapsed have brought a complete change and not only has the type of college or university president been changed, but the occupations and activities of these officers are now wholly different from what they were a generation ago. Dr. Eliot has represented in his own personality and in his own activities this transition and this development. He has long since become a leading citizen of the United States, voicing with singular lucidity of thought and felicity of expression the highest ideals and the wisest reflections of the American people. Of his secure place as a leader in American intellectual life and as a representative of instructed and elevated public opinion, we cannot say too much. 80

80 Ibid., p. 8.
The humanist Irving Babbitt was the only scholar the writer was able to find who was willing to publicly castigate Eliot for his sins against higher education. According to Babbitt:

President Eliot did little more than reflect the time in its main tendency. For forty years he pushed American education in the direction in which it was already leaning. His whole career indeed illustrates the advantages of going with one's age quite apart from the question whither it is going. 81

There is some truth to what Babbitt said about Eliot, although Babbitt lacked a sense of proper balance in his judgment of Eliot. It is true that Eliot knew what the American people were demanding of their collegiate institutions and, by and large, he satisfied them. If he did sin by compromising excessively with the materialism and parochialism and anti-intellectualism of the American character, then that was the price Eliot and others willingly paid for building excellent universities in remarkably short periods of time, institutions that generally have made positive contributions to the quality of American life.

Despite the excesses of the elective system, Eliot was one of the truly outstanding educational spokesmen for adapting the

American college to the forces of modern America. His career was in part instrumental in changing the status of the college from an institution of strict discipline over the religious, moral, and intellectual lives of students to an institution that boasted of its secular character and the great amount of freedom allowed to the activities of its students. Not only was he an outstanding factor in effecting these changes through his adroit implementation of the elective system, but also for the first time in American history, he was able to gather enough support to put the educational conservatives on the defensive.

Virtually every institution of higher education in the United States quivered and still quivers from the impact of Eliot's revolution at Cambridge. The real history of Harvard University begins, not with its founding in 1636 but with Eliot's inaugural address of 1869. Eliot built on that foundation for forty years and moved considerably on from that point of departure. In the forty crowded years before he retired in 1909, Eliot raised the modern languages, economics, history, and other more contemporary subjects to the traditionally high rank of Latin, Greek, and mathematics. He encouraged the rise of a noted school of business administration which took the scholar
into the market place, and he also helped to create a distinguished graduate school which was said to have grown naturally out of the elective system. Scholars enjoyed new opportunities for contemplative research through a sabbatical year system, high salaries, and a growing aggregate of famous academic scholars.

At Eliot's Harvard, William James had the facilities to pioneer in experimental psychology, and Dean Christopher Langdell of the law school, with Eliot's strong endorsement, introduced the case system of law by overturning the traditional _a priori_ methods based on uncritical axioms. The spirit of scholarly research spread through the new professional schools, and students were expected to understand some of the modern laboratory sciences as an indispensable clue to their times.

Eliot's inaugural signaled the end of the rigidly prescribed curriculum at Harvard. The new system opened the way for the kind of specialized study which has dominated American higher education for the past seventy years. The elective system created a vastly extended curriculum, a series of courses of graduated difficulty in each subject, and a demand for new teachers. Theoretically, it effected a transition from "instruction" and mere "recitation"
of prescribed material to independent study and creative scholarship. Further, such "modern" subjects as English literature, German, French, history, economics, and the natural sciences were given equal rank with Latin.

The new program enabled the Eliot administration to expand the faculty and equipment of Harvard for the study of the physical and social sciences as well as the humanities, to keep the university more nearly abreast of the increasing complexity of life. The elective program of Eliot opened the way in American universities for graduate study, stimulated scholarship by the faculty, made teaching more enjoyable for scholars, and encouraged students to cultivate the area of their own interests.

It is hardly inaccurate to say that American higher education has been reconstructed largely according to Eliot's ideas of choice of studies and specialization. Along with Daniel Gilman and others, Eliot brought to the development of graduate and professional schools that extensive scope of material and that intensive specialization of method that must always distinguish the graduate and professional schools from the college of liberal arts, in which the objective is the general enrichment and the discipline of the intellectual, aesthetic,
and moral capacities of the student. The influence he exerted upon the graduate and professional schools of the American university will stand as a permanently valuable contribution of educational statesmanship. With respect to university policy, Eliot was a statesman for the future.
CHAPTER II

POPULARIZATION OF NEWER MODELS
OF THE EDUCATED MAN

As the creator of the modern Harvard University, Charles Eliot was widely respected and honored by his contemporaries. Yet, perhaps because he was primarily an administrator, scholars of American educational history have tended to ignore him as a shallow and superficial thinker. This chapter will evaluate the adequacy of this historical interpretation of Eliot by analyzing and evaluating his writings, speeches, and educational record. The chapter will then seek to determine whether or not a newer historical interpretation is in order.

This chapter will investigate Eliot's attempts to serve as an effective popularizer and implementer of newer models for the educated man. Specifically, his role in breaking up the prescribed curriculum and deemphasizing the classics will be studied. Also, his

work in enlarging the curriculum to include more modern studies and his ardent espousal of scientific culture will be analyzed, along with his efforts to improve professional training and opportunities for popular education.

**Breaking up the Prescribed Curriculum and Deemphasis of the Classics**

One of the first tasks Eliot undertook at Harvard in 1869 was to reform the traditional image of the educated man. The old idea, which had little use for anything outside of Latin, Greek, and mathematics went back to about the sixteenth century. The classical curriculum implied a prescribed program of studies for all students and was highly elitist in its overtones. The classical program was frankly geared for the upper classes and tended to make American higher education largely ineffective in producing opportunities for social and economic mobility.

As far as Eliot was concerned, one of the major inadequacies of the classical conception of liberal education grew out of the fact that society had outgrown it. In his inaugural address, he maintained:

*Liberal education is not safe and strong in a country in which the great majority of the men who belong to the intellectual professions are not liberally educated.* Now,
this is just the case in this country. The great majority of the men who are engaged in the practice of law and medicine, in journalism, in public service and the scientific professions, and in industrial leadership are not bachelors of arts. This sorry condition of things is doubtless due in part to what may be called the pioneer condition of American society; but I think it is also due to the antiquated state of the common college curriculum and of the courses of preparatory study at school. When institutions of learning cut themselves off from the sympathy and support of large numbers of men whose lines are intellectual, by refusing to recognize as liberal arts and disciplinary studies languages, literatures, and sciences which seem to these men as important as any which the institutions cultivate, they inflict a gratuitous injury both on themselves and on the country which they should serve. 2

Of course, it was not Eliot's personal ideas alone which led to the decline of classicism in higher education. The proliferation of new knowledge gave realistic substance to most of his proposals for a major remedy - the elective system. As early as 1873, Charles Francis Adams had noted the increasing difficulty of maintaining the classical ideal of the well-rounded orator when he said: "Cicero did not have to learn in his day a thousandth part of what must be known now to complete the substance of an accomplished

The classical ideal of well-roundedness, even as an ideal, became increasingly difficult to maintain.

Eliot broke the classical hold on the American college though the introduction of an elective system, the practice of permitting students to elect their own courses of study. In a long series of articles and speeches, he defended the elective system on the grounds that if all disciplines were pursued equally well, they would be of equal value. It was evident, he asserted, that a student could not possibly pursue in depth all disciplines and would therefore have to select fields of inquiry based on his own interests. The mature American student, he argued, was equipped to make intelligent choices among options planned by the faculty.

The liberating experience which is the aim of liberal education was not confined only to those students pursuing the eternal verities of the noble dead in a classical course but was equally valid for those students plumbing the depth of knowledge in other fields, such as the physical and social sciences. Further, the disappearance

---

3 Charles F. Adams, Phi Beta Kappa Address (Boston: Wilson, 1873), p. 23.

4 Eliot, p. 125.
of required courses, he believed, would not only unleash the creative spirit of professors and students but would allow a university to be true to its name by seriously pursuing the truth in all areas of inquiry.

As the leading spokesman for the elective system, Eliot was the outstanding leader of nineteenth century collegiate reform. Daring to be different, he brought down upon himself the wrath of classicists for the next half century. Since what Eliot did at Harvard had its inevitable effect on other colleges, these institutions attempted to use their influence to curb what they considered his excesses. "His job was in jeopardy in 1885-86; the overseers were seeking his removal; eight New England college presidents were all but bending down on their knees, imploring, begging the Corporation not to allow Eliot to drop Greek as an entrance requirement," according to Frederick Rudolph.

The outstanding leader of the opposition to Eliot's deemphasis of the classics was Andrew West of Princeton University.

5 Ibid., p. 131.

For over forty years, West carried on the battle to keep Latin and Greek as prescribed studies in the course that led to a true liberal education. In 1884 he wrote an article entitled "Must the Classics Go?" in which he decided that Greek as well as Latin should be kept in the college curriculum if the true cultural spirit was to be kept alive. West cited the types of persons who objected to the classics - men of action, those who had never studied the classics, those imbued with the spirit of money-making, those who disliked a severe mental training, those who believed that the modern languages were more adequate, those who advocated the physical sciences, and those who had suffered from poor teaching in the classics. While identifying a liberal education with the study of the classics, West antagonized the type of person Eliot realized was rapidly becoming a dominant influence in all of American life.

While Eliot pointed to the demands of a growing industrial society for a practical education and the voice of democracy as

7Andrew West, "Must the Classics Go?" North American Review, CXXXVIII (February, 1884), 151.
urging that all youth should have an opportunity to receive an appropriate college education, conservatives like West were left cold. They were certain that the traditional classical and linguistic education was the best kind of education no matter what kind of society was developing outside college walls. The thinking of the advocates of the classical and prescribed curriculum is typified by the following quotation from the Reverend John Mason uttered even before the Civil War:

Experience has shown that with the study or neglect of the Greek and Latin languages, sound learning flourishes or declines. It is now too late for ignorance, indolence, eccentricity, or infidelity to dispute what has been ratified by the seal of ages. Should the time ever come when Latin and Greek should be banished from our Universities, and the study of Cicero and Demosthenes, of Homer and Virgil should be considered as unnecessary for the formation of a scholar, we should regard mankind as fast sinking into absolute barbarism, and the gloom of mental darkness as likely to increase until it should be universal. 8

As Eliot was the leading light in breaking up the prescribed curriculum, President Noah Porter of Yale led the opposition which demanded the retention of the traditional type of college with its

emphasis on discipline and moral training. In an 1878 book entitled *The American College and the American Public*, Porter vigorously defended the long emphasis of the traditional college upon a prescribed curriculum, with its prevailing classical and mathematical studies and its fundamental assumptions of mental discipline. The seriousness of Porter's opposition to Eliot's attacks on the prescribed curriculum is indicated in the following statement by the Yale president:

The writer holds that it is vitally important to the culture of this country, he would almost say to the existence of this country as a country, that the American College with its class system, its fixed curriculum, its generous and earnest common life, and its enforced discipline, should be retained and re-enforced.

The grounds on which West, Mason, Porter and others were critical of Eliot's reforms of the prescribed classical curriculum were essentially that the significance of the Bachelor of Arts degree would be lost, that Greek and Latin would be subordinated to less valuable studies, that mental discipline was more important than

---


intellectual knowledge, that students would not select wisely for themselves, and that the lazy or indifferent student would select easy courses of little value to himself.

Eliot's position on these points may be pointed out here. He granted that the Bachelor of Arts degree would no longer mean that every holder of it had progressed through the same subjects and would no longer indicate a knowledge of Greek and Latin. Eliot said rather that it was enough for the degree to mean that a student had spent a certain number of years in liberal studies. He then singled out the German degree of Doctor of Philosophy as the most significant and valuable arts degree in the world, although it did not represent any particular studies. As for Greek and Latin, he said that they should be able to stand upon their own merits and not be supported by an outworn prescription. The elective system, Eliot said, was not intended to substitute the new subjects for the old but merely to offer both and allow students to choose.

Eliot won this battle and went on to win others as well. When the twentieth century dawned, it was apparent that he had been success-

11 Eliot, p. 131.
ful in renovating American academia. Even Yale and Princeton had, by 1900, instituted a half-prescribed and half-elective curriculum, while other institutions (such as Wisconsin, California, and Indiana) were using a major-minor system.

When Eliot retired in 1909 and Lowell took charge, Harvard herself backed away from a complete elective system and went to a partially prescribed curriculum. The effect of all the controversy on Eliot's system was the evolution of a viable American college, offering many different courses and programs within a complex university setting.

Thanks in good measure to Charles Eliot, a college education was no longer synonymous with a classical curriculum. As the college became adapted to the needs of the American people, the classicist's hold on the college was effectively destroyed. Eliot had indeed earned the wrath of the classicists and the praise of the American people. He was, in fact, hated and honored by both. A noted Harvard historian, Samuel Eliot Morison, in sympathy with the older tradition, concluded that "Eliot, more than any other man, is responsible for the greatest educational crime of the century against American youth - depriving
him of his classical heritage."

Morison, of course, was too tolerant of the fact that the frozen classical curriculum was unable to adjust to the circumstances of a modern world, and therefore doomed to inevitable decline. Morison also failed to mention, although Eliot himself noted the point on numerous occasions, that much of the classical conception of a liberal education was premised on the assumption that only a few were educable. Fortunately, Eliot had great faith in popular education and in the democratic dream of social and economic mobility.

**A Larger Curriculum**

Like other perceptive men, Eliot was aware that the Civil War had played a catalytic role in American life. It was such a thorough social convulsion that it forced American academicians to recognize, once and for all, the professional respectability and social indispensability of the engineer, the natural scientist, and the industrial technician. Given this recognition, training for these careers could no longer be denied its equal place in the college curriculum alongside

---

the education of prospective lawyers, physicians, and ministers. This trend was greatly reinforced by the industrial expansion that followed the war.

In his 1869 inaugural, Eliot announced his firm commitment to the elective system and a vast broadening of the curriculum. In American higher education, he declared, the individual traits of differing minds had not been taken into account sufficiently. For the individual, the only prudent course was "the highest development of his own peculiar faculty." It was for these reasons that Eliot felt a true university college should give its students three essentials: first, freedom of choice in studies; second, opportunity to win distinction in special lines of study; and finally, a system of discipline which imposes on the individual himself the main responsibility for guiding his conduct.

Underlying all this was a conviction that all nonvocational college subjects have an equal cultural or disciplinary value, provided they are equally well taught and studied. Thus, not only election but

15 Ibid., p. 27.
16 Ibid., p. 28.
a vast broadening of the curriculum was justified. As Eliot put it in the opening sentences of his inaugural address:

The endless controversies, whether language, philosophy, mathematics, or science supplies the best mental training, whether general education should be chiefly literary or chiefly scientific, have no practical lesson for us today. This University recognizes no real antagonism between literature and science, and consents to no such narrow alternatives as mathematics or classics, science or metaphysics. We would have them all, and at their best. 17

There were several reasons Eliot wished to offer something other than a classical program. Adherence to a strictly classical curriculum, he warned, was pure fetish worship and a poor preparation for life in the modern world. He insisted that Latin and Greek, taught in a memoritor fashion, had no more value for "mental discipline" than any other study. (Eliot was one of the first college administrators to reject the mental discipline theory.) Finally, he believed the prescribed curriculum to be a failure, even in its own field of preserving and extending humanistic values, because it stressed arid and petty studies of grammar rather than true literature. He

17 Ibid., p. 30.
18 Ibid., p. 30.
19 Ibid., p. 32.
then asserted that the prescribed study of "dead" languages continued to be advocated mainly because of its talismanic value as a voucher of academic respectability.

Eliot believed that the curriculum should be expanded to include the modern studies. Hence, the significance of the bachelor of arts degree, the usual evidence of a liberal education, should be enlarged to embrace them. In considering the several subjects, he urged that the English language and literature, French and German, history, political economy, and the natural sciences be placed on a par with the ancient classics and mathematics. When properly taught, he argued, all were "liberal."

Eliot gave English parity with the classics because of its rich literature and because of England's position as perhaps historically the most important of all nations. He granted the same position of equality to German and French, not alone for reasons of practical usefulness but largely because of the greatness of their literatures and their indispensability to the advanced student. 21

20 Ibid., p. 104.

21 Ibid., p. 142.
Eliot asserted that history should rank along with Greek and Latin as one of the humanities. "If the humanity or liberality of a study depends upon its power to enlarge the intellectual and moral interests of the student, quicken his sympathies, impel him to the side of truth and virtue, and make him loathe falsehood and vice, no study can be more humane or liberal than history." Political economy was also classified with the humanities since he felt it to be concerned with grave moral problems and questions of public honor and duty.

Eliot gladly accorded equal rank to the natural sciences and cautioned that they should be studied in the "right" way - not merely from books but from the things themselves. He noted that the "patient, cautious, sincere, self-directing spirit of natural science" was already spreading to the other fields of human knowledge and enormously shaping American civilization.

In his crusade for widening the scope of the conception of a liberal education, Eliot was running up against a stronghold of traditional education. His position was so contrary to the long held

---

\(^{22}\) Ibid., p. 105.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., p. 34.
belief that a liberal education should be "cultural" and should be pursued for its own sake that headway was made slowly. In defending the traditional meaning of a liberal education, the opposition to Eliot centered their defenses around four main types of arguments.

The first type viewed the traditional classical education as the "best expression of the eternal spirit of man" and as the best way to elevate man "to the highest and best ideals of human life. In this vein, E. E. White attacked Eliot's emphasis on "useful" education through science because it did not aid man to search out the higher and richer plane of the intellectual life or to develop the "culture of man as man." White specifically stated that the scientific knowledge which was necessary for guidance in the duties of life was of distinctly lesser importance than cultural study.

A second type of argument emphasized that true liberal education was sought for its own sake and would be destroyed if utilitarian values were inserted into it. For example, Theodore Woolsey of Yale asserted that a liberal education must be valued not as a means to practical ends but solely for its own sake and that the true college

should resist altogether the effort to introduce professional or practical studies into the college course.

A third phase of the argument stated that a liberally educated man should be acquainted with all of the principal fields of thought before being allowed to specialize. Only in this way could there be a common background among educated persons. This point of view was represented by President Noah Porter of Yale, who frequently announced that the specialist needed a well-rounded general education as a background in order that he would not become narrow in his point of view and interests.

A fourth type of expression found in support of the traditional liberal education was the argument that the meaning of a liberal education and the integrity of the Bachelor of Arts degree must be maintained by keeping out of the course of study any practical or utilitarian studies. Thus, William Frost, a professor of Greek at Oberlin College, insisted that a harmonious liberal education could be had only when the classics were at the center of the course of study


and that the Bachelor of Arts degree should not be granted unless the student had studied the ancient classics.

In advocating a much larger college curriculum, Eliot was clearly urging a richer and more plastic conception of liberal education than that under which he himself had been reared. He was seeking recognition, on a parity with the older classical studies, for the languages and literatures of contemporary peoples, together with their history, contending especially for the riches of the mother tongue and the cultural and disciplinary value of modern science.

Scientific Culture

Eliot actively participated in enlightening his countrymen on the value of what has since come to be known as scientific culture. For one thing, he sought to elevate science from the inferior status it had previously held both as a school subject and as a way of looking at man and the world. Since Eliot himself had studied and taught chemistry at Harvard prior to the Civil War, he knew first-hand the

27 William Frost, "Greek among the required subjects," Bibliotheca Sacra, 42 (April, 1885), 327.
attitudes of the literary men toward the new technical subjects. As one of the first chemistry professors at the new Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he was keenly aware that Harvard offered no quality programs in engineering and applied science — hence the founding of the Massachusetts Institute in 1861.

His own experience at Harvard influenced Eliot to encourage the teaching of the sciences by means of laboratory work. When he was an undergraduate at Harvard College, no laboratory instruction was given to the students until 1851, when Josiah Cooke was appointed Professor of Chemistry. Cooke established a small laboratory which he was permitted to fit out at his own expense in the basement of University Hall. Eliot was the first undergraduate at Harvard College who had the opportunity of studying the sciences by the laboratory method. This was a matter of real importance, since the laboratory method was the basis of most of the changes in science education during the 1890 - 1930 period, and Eliot consistently recommended laboratory work in the teaching of science.

28

Thus, scientific research in many fields and greater emphasis on the physical and natural sciences were all advanced by Eliot's early undergraduate experience in the pioneering chemical laboratory of Josiah Cooke - along with his textbook on college chemistry (qualitative analysis) taught by the laboratory method, a standard college chemistry textbook for a quarter of a century.

As a consequence of his early laboratory training, Eliot put special emphasis on the training of the senses, on the acquisition of skill by eye, ear, and hand, and on the process of cautious scientific reasoning. He constantly expressed the vital necessity of giving much more time to the physical and natural sciences, and he urged that they be taught in the most concrete manner possible so as to draw out the individual observational powers of the student. To Eliot, a thorough education with intellectual and scientific discipline was the only salvation for the ills of mankind. He believed that proper understanding of the scientific method would discourage unsound generalizations, and help the individual to study facts objectively and to reason from them logically - powers vital for effective citizenship.


Eliot was anxious to elevate science from the inferior status it had previously held both as a subject and as a way of looking at man and the world. In his view, the nineteenth century had already produced a new ideal of the educated man. The development of the natural sciences held the key to this new condition for one could no longer rest satisfied with a broad sense of humanism. The growth of the natural sciences called for a sympathy with nature, an understanding of it in order to do service to mankind. As Eliot said, "the interpenetration of humanism with science and science with humanism" had become "the condition of highest culture."

Eliot noted that three changes had occurred in the idea of culture that gave scientific training new status as a way of looking at man and the world. First, man had developed a keener awareness of the world about him. Study of the contemporary world, a thing that hardly ever occurred in the classical curriculum, had become an important feature of any effort at providing educational cultivation. Secondly, a great expansion of knowledge had taken place. The

\[31\] Ibid., p. 218.

\[32\] Charles Eliot, The Tendency to the Concrete and Practical in Modern Education (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), p. 35.
person seeking cultivation could not possibly grasp everything, and so he must select from the great variety of knowledge available. Finally, constructive imagination had previously belonged to the poet and writer but now the work of the scientist also demanded and cultivated it. Constructive imagination consisted in observing and integrating many apparently unrelated elements of life so that they would gain significant meaning. The art of the poet lay in his capacity to do this in human relations; the art of the scientist lay in his capacity to do this with natural phenomena.

Eliot's insistence that the sciences be given a place of rank and dignity in American learning carried considerable authority. Though it aroused opposition, the idea prevailed at Harvard and at many other universities. Not only were the sciences, with his help, able to make themselves at home in the college curriculum but they also came to be accepted as part of the requirement for college admission.

Charles Eliot witnessed, as a participant, the increased

\[33^\text{Ibid., p. 41.}\]

\[34^\text{Ibid., p. 56.}\]
interest in science and the increased appreciation of its value. He played a key role in helping American science develop from the satisfaction of intellectual curiosity to the conscientious service of mankind. In short, he expanded the traditional view of a humanistic education by including science as one of its most important ingredients.

In its social aspects, Eliot's scientific humanism was applied over a wider segment of the American population than was classical humanism or the Lockian educational ideal of the aristocratic gentleman. He envisioned a more universal scheme of education than did John Locke and consequently sought to instruct the common man who, he believed, was as capable of reaping the fruits of education as was the more privileged Brahmin aristocrat. In this vein, Eliot actively participated in the movement toward the expansion of educational opportunities.

Eliot's overly confident faith in the power of scientific culture is reflected in the following passage that appeared in a 1908 book entitled University Administration:

Science has engendered a peculiar kind of human mind - the searching, open, humble mind, which knowing that it cannot attain unto all truth or even to much new truth is
yet patiently and enthusiastically devoted to the pursuit of such little new truth as is within its grasp, having no other end than to learn, prizing above all things accuracy, thoroughness, and candor in research, proud and happy not in its own single strength but in the might of that host of students whose past conquests make up the wonderous sum of present knowledge, whose sure future triumphs are shared in imagination by each humble worker. Within the past four hundred years this typical scientific mind has gradually come to be the kind of philosophic mind most admired by the educated class. Indeed, it has come to be the only kind of mind which commands the respect of scholars, whatever their department of learning. 35

There is surely fire in these words of Eliot in praise of scientific culture. Unfortunately, it is the kind of fire which inflames the palm that has held a block of ice. The writer fears that Eliot was so overly concerned in giving science its due that he forgot the university has a duty to students themselves as well as a duty to knowledge. That Eliot brilliantly responded to the modern scientific impulse was admirable. Unhappily however, he tended to ignore humanistic culture and the cultivation of the human heart, the human will, and character. The cold passion for science cannot quite congeal the human spirit. The man of broad culture rightly deserves, the writer,

believes, his place beside the narrow researcher of Eliot. Character and style, in living and thinking, are no less important than the conquest of new truth.

Of course, part of the explanation for Eliot's emphasis on scientific culture at the expense of humanistic culture lies in the fact that the agnostic Eliot wrote outside any theory of man or culture. This philosophical deficiency gave his thoughts on education, and particularly on scientific culture, a kind of biscuit-like dryness that placed it at the opposite end of the scale from discussions of the same matter by, say, John Henry Cardinal Newman. In the absence of a general conception of man and culture, Eliot's optimistic scientific culture was depressing and soul-destroying.

Professional Education

With the accession of Andrew Jackson to the American presidency, egalitarianism spread, not only to the civil service, but to qualifications for professional training as well. As the common man came to power, his confidence in pioneer versatility caused him

to distrust the expert. He claimed the right for all economic classes to enjoy professional privileges as a new principle of equal significance in a democracy as the older one that those who exercise professional privileges should be trained to discharge them. While one might reluctantly concede this principle in the case of training for law, which is closely akin to training for politics, the fierce egalitarianism of the frontier seemed to know no bounds and extended to medical education as well, even though the difference between expert and charlatan might be the difference between life and death.

Neither the pre-Civil War professional schools nor the surviving apprenticeship system for professional training had worked out satisfactorily. Both tended to be too specific in their curriculums, and both needed a broader scholarship. What seemed required was a type of professional education that combined the practical merits of the apprenticeship system with the academic merits of the college faculties of law, theology, and medicine.

After long preoccupation with opening the doors of opportunity as wide as possible to those bent on professional careers, interest came to center more and more on selective factors. At Harvard, Eliot persuaded the professional schools one by one not only to require
a bachelor's degree for entrance but also to raise the tuition. Enrollment initially fell but when the quality of this new product began to make itself felt in professional life, enrollments rose again and Eliot was more than vindicated for the risk taken.

In raising the tuition and entrance requirements, Eliot insisted that the Harvard professional schools should offer an enriched program of studies. The new intellectual nourishment came principally from studying the traditional professions of law, medicine, and theology in the light of related academic disciplines. Medicine particularly benefited from being studied in conjunction with the sciences of chemistry, physics, biology, physiology, psychology, and the like. Law too took on new proportions when studied in the light of history, philosophy, and the social sciences.

To promote research into the wider and deeper ramifications of the law, Eliot established a graduate department of law that awarded Doctor of the Science of Law degree. He also encouraged the Divinity School to strengthen the traditional courses of study by drawing on the resources of psychology, sociology, and politics in order to give the ministry an informed as well as a sensitive social conscience, to say nothing of keeping it abreast of the impact of scientific discov-
eries on theology.

Up to 1886 the Harvard Divinity School had been little more than a seminary for prospective preachers and required only a secondary school certificate for admission. Eliot's plans for the Divinity School closely resembled the high standards of scholarship and research set by the rest of the university. Emphasis on the historical approach and the selection of German-trained scholars were his principal techniques for making the school scientific. In this way he helped to shape it for survival "in the modern world, which respects only the scientific method, which admits of no settled convictions except those which rest upon thorough previous investigation."

The experiment in scientific theology produced noteworthy scholarship and in 1908 a new theological journal, The Harvard Theological Review. By keeping theology in the university as a respected intellectual discipline, the Harvard Divinity School in Eliot's day made its greatest contribution. This Cornell and Johns Hopkins and the state universities could not do.

To make professional preparation for the ministry more effective, Eliot cautioned that "theological study, if it is to be

---

respected by laymen, must be absolutely carried on with the same freedom for teacher and pupil which is enjoyed in other great departments of learning." He further pointed out that support by the funds of sectarian societies implies an obligation and attracts too many unfit elements.

As for curriculum, Eliot suggested that the preparation of the minister should comprise language courses, English literature, psychology, political economy, history, and natural science as preliminary to more strictly professional studies as philosophy of religion and systematic theology. The Divinity School, he asserted, should also acquaint the prospective minister with modern charitable and reformatory methods and should hold allegiance to no particular denomination.

Before his administration, the Harvard Law School was little more than a big law office. Eliot succeeded in making it over into an advanced school of jurisprudence and, after continually adding to its entrance requirements, in 1896 gave it the strict character of a

\[38\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 346.\]

\[39\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 346.\]
graduate school. As such, it served as a model for the whole country and also became one of the strongest and largest departments of the university. The decisive step was that complete reform in legal instruction marked by the introduction of the case system at the expense of the traditional \textit{a priori} methods based on uncritical axioms. In bringing a new type of teacher (typified by Christopher Langdell) to the Harvard Law School and in standing behind him until his methods had proved themselves, Eliot assumed the responsibility and the credit for the decisive changes in legal education that have given character to American law schools and have exerted a continually growing influence upon all forms of professional education. Many ideas which had their inception and implementation partly with him are still a force in the teaching of law - for instance, the case method.

Eliot lived long enough to see his conception of the scientific teaching of law prevail. He saw his vision of an academic professional school made real in more than fifty institutions that now adhere to the Association of American law schools. He saw the teaching methods and the organization of teaching for which he stood begin to bring forth great results in the improvement of the administration
of justice in America. He saw his ideas bear fruit in the development of graduate professional instruction, with the consequent rise of scientifically trained teachers equipped to meet new problems continually facing our legal system.

Before Eliot took office in 1869, the Harvard Medical School required hardly any entrance qualifications. By 1900 Eliot was able to require a bachelor's degree for admission. The medical student, after four college years of general education and training in the natural sciences, had now to pass a rigid examination after each year of medical school. Before Eliot, the medical curriculum was considered to be a fairly easy three year course and almost entirely theoretical. Eliot moved the duration up to four years and required the prospective physician, through extensive work in the anatomical institute, in the laboratories and clinics, to display a practical mastery of medical science.

His views about the training of physicians emphasized the public duties medicine has to perform. Eliot suggested that phy-

sicians have the duty of enlightening the people by public advice and precept, and that the growing importance of medicine should find recognition in the increasing supervision and actual assumption by the state of medical labors. Accordingly he said: "The times are past when the church alone asked men to devote themselves passionately, disinterestedly and bravely to the service of their fellow men. The medical profession now exhibits these virtues to a high degree."

Eliot asserted that modern heroism could be found in altruistic medical service:

Our nation sometimes seems tempted to seek in war - that stupid and horrible savagery - for other greatness that can come from vast resources, prosperous industries and extending commerce. Would it might turn its energies and its longing for patriotic and heroic emotion into the immense fields of beneficent activity which sanitation, preventive medicine and comparative medicine offer it. There are spiritual and physical triumphs to be won in these fields infinitely higher than any which war can offer, for they will be triumphs of construction and preservation, not of destruction and ruin. They will be triumphs of good over evil and of happiness over misery. 42

41 Ibid., p. 4.

42 Ibid., p. 6.
A truly outstanding critic of Eliot's overall views on professional education was Thorstein Veblen, who took the radical stand that scholarly training in the university should be thoroughly purged of any professional influences. So far would Veblen go that he advocated having no professional study at all, not even law or medicine, on the university campus. Mindful that professional study has been characteristic of the university since the Middle Ages, Veblen nonetheless called the medieval university "barbaric" because it had been interested in the narrowly practical.

American universities have not usually followed Veblen's extreme advice to forego professional education altogether. Still, the writer hopes that higher education will be able to follow Eliot's advice to commit itself to higher and higher standards of professional training in both senior and junior professions, higher standards being defined in terms of constantly increasing the intellectual or theoretical content of professional training.

It may safely be assumed that the emphasis on advanced professional education, so effectively encouraged by men like Charles

---

Eliot, has touched nearly every area of American life. Part of the shift from slowly acquired practical experience to swiftly completed formal training was obviously related to the rising economy of the United States. It is natural enough for a man to want speedy, efficient training when he knows people are paid more when they have more specialized training. Another part of the swing toward professionalization was due to the rapid growth of complexity in the American society and a booming technology accompanying the booming economy. To satisfy this demand for higher degrees, the graduate and professional schools of the United States have had to expand at a very rapid pace.

The emphasis Eliot placed on professionalization was in itself sometimes desirable. Professionalization did tend to create knowledgeable specialists who were able to work in groups which, in turn, reinforced their assurance of high-level competence in their own field. Unfortunately, Eliot's strong attitude on professionalization was accompanied by a lack of appreciation of the general education idea that had so long informed the more established disciplines. Professionalization became dangerous when the humane and cultural disappeared from the foundation of the professional area.
The newer professional fields, and sometimes the older ones, have not adequately realized that somewhere within their boundaries there must be men liberated from overspecialization long enough to spend at least as much time formulating a value system as they do in compiling specialized bibliographies. Such men cannot be artificially appointed; they must be the product of a value tradition that stemmed from older disciplines. The ideas implicit in a good liberal education are essential to the understanding of the value of all human effort. The men liberated by a cultural and humane education must take the lead in their emergent newer disciplines to show their more specialized colleagues that a simplified list of "do's and don't's" is insufficient for the complexities that characterize most professional education of the twentieth century. Only then can a sense of equality and respectability begin to infuse strength and vigor into disciplines still in their doubting, self-conscious adolescence.

Popular Education

A permanent contribution of Eliot to American civilization was his efforts to make education available on as large a scale as practicable, something critics like Irving Babbitt strongly opposed. Like

Thomas Jefferson and Horace Mann, Eliot actively supported programs for universal education, and often at public expense. Like Mann, Eliot repeatedly warned his fellow patricians of the danger to men of wealth if Jacksonian democracy were coupled with ignorance on the part of the voting masses. Eliot did indeed sound very much like Mann when he wrote that "the mental and moral force which makes for the permanence of our institutions is universal education."

Taken as a whole, the writings of Eliot elegantly discussed the problems of education in their intimate relation to American popular ideals - economic and social mobility, for instance - and championed educational reform as a public interest. The theme of educating men to the service of democracy shaped Eliot's views about popular education. He argued that the university should offer the widest possible scope of development to every promising talent, and the public school in particular should be a common teaching place for all the growing members of a democracy. "Schools follow universities," he observed knowingly, "and will be what universities make them."


46 Ibid., p. 115.
With a view toward a uniform and democratic system of education, he was particularly zealous in urging the reform of the public school system and he devoted a major part of his writings to public education. In particular, he pointed out that "accessibility of appropriate opportunity is the essence of democratic society."

In Eliot's words, "the most important function of education in a democracy should be the firm planting in every child's mind of certain great truths which lie at the foundation of the democratic social theory." These are "the intimate dependence of each human individual on a multitude of other individuals, which increases with civilization and with the development of urban life, the obligation of the present generation to many former generations, the essential unity of a democratic community. He then extolled "the familiar Christian doctrine that service rendered to others is the surest source of one's own satisfaction and happiness."

Eliot urged that "the children should learn that the desire to be of great public service is the highest of all ambitions." Further, "the democratic school must teach its children what the democratic

47 Ibid., p. 113.
48 Ibid., p. 114.
nobility is." He believed it was based on "fidelity to all forms of duty which demand courage, self-denial, and zeal, and loyal devotion to the democratic ideals of freedom, serviceableness, unity, tolerance, public justice, and public joyfulness."

Eliot felt that all people should have enough education to understand the theory of the democratic state and to respect expert leadership. In his democratic model, the most fit should have access to higher education to properly develop their talents. Further, the great problem of democracy, the harnessing of the popular will with expert control, was in his thought to be solved by education:

Confidence in experts and willingness to employ them and abide by their decisions are among the best signs of intelligence in an educated individual or an educated community; and in any democracy which is to thrive this respect and confidence must be felt strongly by the mass of the population. 50

Eliot's long administrative experience at Harvard convinced him of the inferiority of most public secondary school programs at preparing for college work and economic mobility. He was therefore quite liberal on the question of appropriate quality educational oppor-

49 Ibid., p. 115.

50 Ibid., p. 111.
tunities. Consistently pointing out that "accessibility of appropriate opportunity is the essence of democratic opportunity," he emphasized that the public schools, to be truly effective, had to aim at matching the offerings of private schools. His belief in "a natural aristocracy of talent" and his experience with rich but unintelligent and poor but talented Harvard students convinced him that talent existed at all social and economic levels — and deserved opportunity for development.

It seems likely that Eliot has to date received insufficient credit for enabling talented young men to avail themselves of Harvard's unrivaled opportunities when, at that time, their economic or social status would have made them ineligible at other top universities. If a young man had brains but no money, Eliot was more than willing to provide assistance — usually by means of work scholarships. Race or religion were, under Eliot, no obstacles to a gifted student's chances of getting into Harvard. It is to his credit that many brilliant young men, plagued by poverty or social minority stigma, were able to enjoy and profit from a Harvard education.

51 Ibid., p. 107.
Eliot is also due high marks for his efforts to build up public secondary education, especially in his role as chairman of the Committee of Ten. In that role, he used his prestige to emphasize that money for public educational facilities would not be fully effective if the educational programs of the public schools were inferior and of a different type than those of good private preparatory schools. It was for this reason that, in writing the report of the Committee of Ten, Eliot concluded that in general the best secondary school program was a college preparatory education - and not a terminal or vocational one.

Eliot's career paralleled the period of our educational history which witnessed the rise of the public secondary school. His breadth of vision soon discerned the significance of this new institution, and through his efforts it was brought into affiliation with the colleges. Also through his instrumentality, the elementary school was harmonized with the higher institutions of our country to form a broad system of public education in articulate relationship, from the kindergarten to the university.

52 Ibid., p. 83.
Not only was Eliot a leader in the organization of American educational institutions, but their liberator as well. Finding our schools and colleges hobbled by a narrow traditionalism in their scope, curricula, and methods of instruction, he labored to enrich the curriculum by increasing the number of subjects taught, and to destroy the blighting uniformity which subjected every mind to the same academic mold. In place of formalism, he demanded methods which emphasized creative scholarship in every stage of the educational process.

Charles Eliot was rightly honored for the spirit and manner in which he accomplished great things. Without authority of government, without the power of a dictator, or even the political channels of a public servant, Eliot had to rely wholly on the force of reason, on the power of persistent persuasion. His broad knowledge of education, his catholicity of interest, and his abiding and contagious faith in the dignity and soundness of human intelligence accomplished among a democratic people what is usually brought about only by absolute power. His superb leadership, at once congenial and firm, will remain as a true example of how high-minded men should act in public concerns.
Eliot's Model of the Educated Man: The "Expert"

The most effective argument against Eliot's many educational reforms, particularly the elective system, was that American college students were too immature to choose wisely. The students, it was alleged, chose courses flippantly or in accord with the laxity or popularity of the professors. Eliot's opponents assumed an ideal of the educated man which, they said, was not being attained by students freely electing their courses of study. Eliot, of course, had his own ideal of the educated man - the expert. All of his reforms - the professional schools, the graduate school, and the elective system for undergraduates - were of a piece; all contributed to the creation of experts.

In establishing an institution of higher education that functioned to train experts, Eliot differed from most of the college heads of his day. They, for the most part, looked to the college to turn out an elite steeped in the genteel tradition - men of culture, men of virtue. These educated men, they felt, had claim to authority not because of any technical competence but because they possessed a liberal education, which gave them general competence and the right to lead. Eliot, more aware than most of the changing times, maintained that
the college graduate's claim to leadership must be based on technical competency.

Eliot constantly argued that the American failures of government at all levels could be traced to the refusal to employ experts. "The democracy must learn," he warned, "in governmental affairs, whether municipal, state, or national, to employ experts and to abide by their decisions." Eliot not only distrusted the masses to run the government, he also distrusted the "educated man" who had no expertise. "Such complicated subjects as taxation, finance, and public works, cannot be wisely managed by popular assemblies or their committees," he cautioned, "nor by executive officers who have no special acquaintance with these most difficult subjects."

As Eliot saw it, unless the university trained experts, there would be no check on the masses. However, if the elementary and secondary schools could make the masses aware of their limitations, then, he concluded, they would be willing to trust most of the tasks of government to the experts. The masses could be made aware of their limitations if the schools would concentrate on training them

53 Ibid., p. 111.
how to think. Once people learned the importance of accurate observation, exact description, and correct inference, then they would "naturally acquire a respect for these powers when exhibited by others in fields unknown to them." The man who has been trained to think, he said, would recognize that his competence is limited to a few subjects and would "come to respect and confide in the experts in every field of human activity."

Perhaps because he never held political office, Eliot saw clearly that one need not hold political office in order to exert political influence. He realized that legislators and administrators had increasingly come to depend upon "the researches of scholars, men of science and historians and follow in the footsteps of inventors, economists and political philosophers." These experts, he felt, were the ones who exerted the real power in the United States. Still, he did not discount the importance of institutions as well as men and he particularly was aware of the political power of a great institution like Harvard University. By fulfilling his commitment to make Harvard

\[54\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 112.\]

\[55\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 79.\]
University into a great national institution, Eliot provided the surest guarantee that people would listen when one of its experts spoke - be he an alumnus, a professor, or the president.

**Evaluation of Eliot's Educational Models**

This chapter will now evaluate Eliot's record in publicizing and implementing alternatives to the traditional educational model of classical humanism. Whether we like it or not, Eliot's concepts of the educated man have proved to be very much in accord with modern conditions. While it is true that he achieved enormous administrative success at Harvard and many of his basic ideas on educational theory have been accepted and implemented over the years, it is still quite proper to evaluate the merits of his basic ideas. After all, no proper analysis of Eliot's ideas on newer models for the educated man can be made without understanding his basic educational philosophy.

First of all, it must be understood that, for Charles Eliot, the prescribed curriculum usually meant routine learning and routine teaching, and tended to produce only an average product. By way of contrast with this, the elective system allegedly awakened individual interest and, in so doing, resulted in harder, better work. Thus the
whole burden of motivation was shifted from external to internal compulsion. The student's own moral autonomy was developed. This, in his view, was the only way the effective leaders of the future could be trained.

It is important to understand that Eliot always saw the elective plan as a true "system," not a wide-open, miscellaneous bazaar. According to him, it presupposed a "well-ordered series of consecutive courses in each large subject of instruction, such as Latin, German, history, or physics." However, he shied away from purposefully arranging electives in "groups." This, he felt, would fetter spontaneous diversity of choice. Groups of studies, he wrote, were "like ready-made clothing, cut in regular sizes; they never fit any concrete individual."

Whence came Eliot's ideas? The stress on the crucial role of the individual and on the importance of self-reliance reflected the influence on his mind of Jefferson, of William Channing's brand of Unitarianism, and of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Certainly Eliot's devotion to democracy was always of the selective Jeffersonian kind

56 Eliot, University Administration, p. 131.
rather than the broad, all-inclusive Jacksonian variety. In addition, there was a vein of utilitarianism running through his thought which was similar to that of Herbert Spencer and his system of Social Darwinism.

In at least one respect, Eliot's elective system did amount to Social Darwinism transported to an academic setting. Before the days of college departments of guidance and student counseling, his system amounted to survival of the intellectually fittest. By a process of natural selection, the collegian who was not a member of the "natural aristocracy" was pretty much permitted to go his own way. His collection of "gentleman's C's" and extracurricular activities might or might not help to make him a useful citizen, but the system was not primarily concerned with him. Eliot, of course, was largely concerned with outstanding individuals rather than with the average, and far more common, student.

Not only did free electives, consciously or otherwise, foster a Darwinistic struggle between students but they also produced the

57 James, I, p. 346.

58 James, II, p. 349.
same kind of competition between broad fields of knowledge, subjects, and even professors. Now that the students were free to choose, how would the professors of Greek and Latin make out in competition with the professors of chemistry and physics? Would the "fittest" fields and professors necessarily survive? If so, in what sense were they "fit"?

In the last analysis, the elective system flourished between 1870 and 1900 because it met the needs of the American culture of that period. A rural society was being transformed into a great industrialized nation. Keynoting the era were optimism, competitiveness, and materialistic expansion. Applied research was more important than ever before. In the realm of thought, it was the age of the pragmatism of William James, the instrumentalism of John Dewey, and the new psychology of Edward Lee Thorndike. In such a social and economic structure, the old liberal arts college, with its predominantly clerical administration and its prescribed course founded on an absolute ethics and a theistic faith, was on the way out. Eliot's elective system, with all its revolutionary implications, was a logical expression of the spirit of the time.
**Major Criticisms**

The writer has six major criticisms of Eliot's educational philosophy and these criticisms are related to a proper interpretation of his efforts to popularize and implement newer models of the educated man. The basic criticisms of his educational philosophy are the following: its extreme individualism which tends to ignore the dependence of freedom on a degree of social unity; the rationale behind the elective system; the emphasis on specialized training at the expense of cultural or humanistic studies; an unrealistic view of education as a social panacea; his assumption that all subjects are of equal cultural value; his failure to recognize the limitations of science and the scientific method; aesthetic insensitivity and pervasive materialism in the forming of educational goals. All of these weaknesses are evident in Eliot's suggestions for alterations to the classical model of the educated man - dethroning the classics, enlarging the curriculum, the espousal of scientific culture, professional training, and popular education.

(1) The extreme individualism of Eliot's thought has been proved deficient by the twentieth century research of psychology and sociology on the behavior of man under the conditions of modern industrialism.

Characterized by respect for a loosely defined freedom, Eliot encouraged training for the personal development of the individual with the implication that almost any development of the individual would repay society. A major educational weakness was that he did not fully realize that the fulfillment of the individual has now come to depend in a large measure upon his successful integration in a society that is rapidly becoming more collective.

Equality of opportunity must often be thought of in terms of group opportunity. Surely the free competition among individuals in a modern social and economic setting does not always serve to develop, as it may once have done; desirable qualities or traits. Eliot failed to realize that, even by 1900, the technology of modern America had rendered the modern successful man not an individualist but a man who works through others for others.

Partly as a result of the extreme and somewhat obsolete individualism framing Eliot's educational philosophy, we are faced today with the problem of bringing our institutions to the point where they recognize the need of giving the individual the social understanding which is necessary for the conservation of his individual freedom.
The writer finds a second point of criticism in the rationale Eliot gave for his elective system. His reasoning regarding the elective principle may be reduced to this: Since individual interest is the keystone for determining a subject's value, no subject should be required. Required subjects stifle interest and thwart the student's right to explore for himself. No subject is more valuable than another. Any subject is worthwhile if pursued with earnest interest. A large and enlarging curriculum is at all times necessary to match the interests and needs of all students.

In a general way, the theory of choice and interest underlying his elective principle is wholesome and suggestive. It is true that vital interest is often lacking when a student must take required courses. It also seems true that the discipline from working with an interested will along lines that fit one's abilities far outweighs the discipline from merely enduring the disagreeable. Also, seemingly it is true that schooling is wasted unless a student's interest is engaged in the task.

The inadequacy of Eliot's treatment lies in his over-simplification. Like many other past exponents of interest (for instance, Rousseau and Pestalozzi), Eliot treated of the subject without really
knowing much about it. He proceeded on the premise that interests have a high degree of permanence, so great in fact that future interests may be predicted from present ones. He related interest to ability or efficiency, and anticipated achievement by analyzing the individual's interests. He assumed that interests as such were safe guides for vocational choice and he tended to oversimplify the matter of individual choice when he assumed that the average student had the ability, if not the background, to make a wise choice of subjects.

Eliot was not sufficiently conscious to the fact that interests are not always justifiable criteria. Some interests have to be redirected, others have to be harmonized with conflicting interests. A distinction has also to be made between interests which have social value and those which are purely egocentric.

(3) The writer finds a third criticism in Eliot's emphasis on specialized training over cultural or humanistic or liberal studies. Eliot seems to have had no sympathy with the view that a liberal education is valuable for all. Quite the contrary, Eliot preferred specific preparation for the business and professional world and would surely have disagreed with Harry Broudy that the more

education is immediately useful, the less likely that particular type of education will be for having a high explanatory and transfer potential.

Given a choice of educational aims - the pursuit of truth for its own sake and specific preparation of students for their life work, he preferred the latter approach. His consistent emphasis on specialization was partly responsible for a major weakness in our contemporary educational system - virtually unlimited opportunities for training in the vocational skills required by our complex society, but inadequate opportunities for contemplation of the meaning of these skills. The reason for this weakness can be traced back to the foundation of American higher education, by men like Eliot, on service rather than culture or scholarship as the principal aim of the American university. This has been part of the practical price American society has had to pay for its impractical lowly evaluation of the liberal arts.

Eliot accused the nineteenth century liberal arts program of being associated with special privilege and preciosity. He did not pause to consider that a contemporary liberal arts education can be rooted in freedom, not privilege, and can be broad, not narrow, in
Eliot's excessive emphasis on practical education was antagonistic to the basic purpose of the liberal arts college - to help men become capable and cultivated human beings. As John Stuart Mill put it, "Men are men before they are lawyers or physicians or manufacturers; and if you make them capable and sensible men they will make themselves capable and sensible lawyers or physicians."

Eliot was insensitive to the idea that the educational preparation of men and women is not just for intellectual pursuits but for life. With all his emphasis on practical education, he lost sight of the possibility that "liberal" types of education may be regarded as preparatory, either in developing general intellectual capacities or through providing practice in rational or aesthetic activity which may become the basis for enduring skills and abiding sources of enjoyment.

In our rapidly changing civilization, Eliot's preparatory emphasis on education is also inadequate because the competences required shift too quickly. This is particularly true in the case of vocational education of a highly technical nature, where modification of ideas and procedures is generally continuous and swift. Even in the less obviously vocational disciplines, the overturning of established
patterns of thought and practice may negate the fruits of the most careful schemes of preparation. Charles Eliot, this writer believes, erred by emphasizing education largely for a vocation at the expense of education for life. Contrary to his thought, the writer believes that the purposes of liberal learning and liberal education are central to the purposes of all education.

(4) The writer finds a fourth basic criticism in Eliot's highly optimistic, and perhaps unrealistic, view of the power of education - particularly as a social panacea. Eliot seems to have gone overboard in his commitment to the power of educational excellence. For one thing, there is a cart-before-the-horse aspect to his view of how education fits into the larger process of social change. In looking to education as the principal engine of social change, he failed to reckon with the kind of interdependence that exists between every educational system and the society of which it is an integral part. Thus, some of the conditions in American education that Eliot wanted to change - for instance, the inferior quality of public education - were linked intimately to other conditions in American society and were difficult to change except as those other conditions change. His faith that education could and should be used as an instrument for social change
is questionable.

A second point is that Eliot may have been asking too much of education. In pinning his faith and hopes on education as the basic instrument of change, Eliot did not give due weight either to the inescapable element of time or to the complexity of the process of social change.

A third question the writer raises on Eliot's view of the role of education is his insistence that American education must have a value orientation (democratic citizenship), that there are value criteria for choosing what and how to teach. Eliot contended that since the United States is a democracy and aspires to become a good society, an educational program that is geared to a set of value goals defined for it by the leaders of that society will be the "right type of education." Eliot, of course, assigned to education the responsibility for building these desirable qualities into American society.

The writer questions whether in a free society an educational system should be charged with the normative role of teaching any set of social, economic, political, moral or spiritual values. Historical

---

61 Krug, p. 105.
evidence in this matter shows that when education is saddled with a value mission its basic task of developing minds and extending knowledge is likely to suffer. There is an inherent incompatibility between the two functions, and conflict over value goals is probable. Men differ over values and the values of a society change with time. Who is to make the value judgments that the American educational system is to serve?

To summarize, Eliot asked that sweeping changes take place in American education first, as the primary means of producing great social change in the United States, whereas there is such an interdependence between education and society that they must change together. He also asked of American education that it produce those qualities in men that in turn would enable the United States to develop economically, achieve national unity, and operate a stable democracy in the context of a good society. There is no evidence that education alone is capable of developing these qualities in men. Finally, Eliot would have education serve certain moral, political, social and spiritual values, whereas the evidence of history is that education cannot

62Broudy, p. 125.
do this and at the same time perform well its primary role of teaching men to learn, think, and produce knowledge.

(5) The writer finds a fifth criticism in Eliot's failure to recognize the limitations of science and the scientific method. Eliot believed that the scientific method broadly conceived was an effective tool for solving virtually all the major problems facing mankind. It is quite questionable that more sophisticated technology and more advanced scientific applications will necessarily improve the well-being of men, as he naively thought it could.

Even forty years after his death, the scientific method cannot be used to study social problems in the same way it can be used to study physical or chemical mysteries. The social problems facing mankind involve not only material obstacles but, often more important, elusive intangibles and irrational factors that do not admit of any clear solution. It is, for instance, harder to stamp out the fires of racism and selfishness than to eradicate malaria or even illiteracy.

Eliot seems to have thought that heavy doses of the scientific method would enable men to have more rational attitudes and therefore influence "good" behavior. He did not realize, as Sigmund Freud was even then pointing out, that human behavior is frequently obsessed
by irrational motivation that often frustrates the efforts of planned, rational, "scientific" thinking.

As a capable chemist, Eliot should have known that science and the scientific method are only useful tools for controlling the physical environment. To expect science to bring man an earthly Eden is to ask the impossible - at least for the foreseeable future. Eliot failed to realize that the values men live by are not determined by the laws of chemistry and physics.

(6) The writer finds a sixth major criticism of Eliot's educational philosophy in his aesthetic insensitivity and pervasive materialism in the forming of educational goals. Although he was a competent chemist, outside his laboratory Eliot was often illiberal and blind. One reason was that he had a very insufficient appreciation of those studies which make for sweetness and light, for the sensitive and disciplined imagination. It was in these qualities that he himself was defective, and he revealed the fact both in what he said and what he did not say.

One is disappointed in reading such words as these, uttered by the president of the oldest college of liberal arts in America: "I can hardly think that I have had during my life as an educational
administrator any greater satisfaction than I have taken in the creation and growth of this School of Business Administration. It has had so very prompt and striking a success."

Again, Eliot protested that he did not wish to oust Greek and Latin, only to keep them in their place, but his imperfect sympathy and understanding are evident in such a remark as: "Greek literature compares with English as Homer compares with Shakespeare; that is, as infantile with adult civilization." Surely Eliot was not satisfied with material progress alone, but his clear, strong Puritan intellect was not receptive to the spirit of beauty, of poetry, which is essential even in morals.

These six major weaknesses underlying his educational philosophy tempered the models Eliot proposed as alternatives to the classical conception of the educated man. While he was probably correct in asserting that a modern liberal education is possible without a knowledge of the ancient classics, he was too quick and harsh in his dismissal of the liberal and humane heritage derived from Plato,

63 James, II, p. 224.

64 Ibid., p. 193.
Isocrates, and Cicero. Eliot never did perceive the unbridgeable gulf between the actuality of "general education," that is, a smattering or casual acquaintance with the various academic disciplines, and real "liberal education," which explores the great ideas of the past as the source of living possibilities for students and teachers alike.

While the writer criticizes Eliot for misunderstanding the nature of true liberal education in the tradition of Plato and Isocrates and Cicero, he does congratulate Eliot for helping to bring the "modern studies" to academic respectability. Somebody had to break the shelf of the frozen and inadequate prescribed curriculum because most of the intellectual creativity of the time was going on outside the college walls among the natural scientists. To his credit, Eliot made a breach in the walls through his elective system, and asked the scientists in.

As has already been indicated, the writer is critical of the radical elective system Eliot employed to enlarge the curriculum. The writer has no intention to denigrate specialization but rather to argue that a sounder underlying base was needed. The free elective system, pioneered by Eliot, did liberalize the prescribed curriculum
but in time it led to a fragmentation in which the electives moved further and further away from a unifying center. In most cases the courses the student took outside of his major were not designed for him but for men who would go on to specialize in the particular subject, and even were he not bored by it, the student would usually fail to grasp the relevance of this subject to other subjects, and thus the relevance to him.

The writer praises Eliot’s efforts to implement scientific culture as a legitimate model of the educated man. He correctly concluded that modern thought is steeped in science and even pointed out that the literary men, who allegedly despised science, were indebted to scientific methods for many of their comforts and successes. He wisely noted that one desirable outcome of good science training is an open-minded and tolerant attitude, one that is not tied to fixed absolutes. Unfortunately, Eliot in practice tended to substitute a one-sided scientific training for a one-sided classical training.

Although Eliot’s argument for teaching science rested on a somewhat shaky psychological assumption (transfer of mental training theory), a utilitarian-minded populace agreed with him
that in our everyday living a knowledge of science is of more worth than Latin and Greek. The years bore him out in the recognition of science as a meet and necessary subject for general instruction.

His brilliant success in revitalizing professional education at Harvard helped American professional education to awake to a truer vision of its duties and its privileges. His practice of requiring a college education as a prerequisite for admission to the professional schools of law, medicine, dentistry, and divinity proved a useful guide for the more effective training of specialists. His achievement of expanding Harvard College into a genuine university by adding the graduate school of arts and sciences and coordinating it with the various professional schools, lifting Harvard from a colonial college to the plane of a national university and then bringing it to international eminence was an achievement of the highest order.

To his lasting credit, Eliot did much to help the public secondary schools of the United States. His work as chairman of the Committee of Ten helped shape the development of American secondary schools and their relation as preparatory schools for the colleges. As an energetic campaigner for the granting of more
money for the public school system, his desire to further the cause of public education found a suitable expression in his service as president of the National Education Association.

A notable reformer of American education, Eliot was preeminent for his valiant and successful warfare against rigidity in education and formality in teaching, for the humanizing of learning and research, and for a determined effort to make the results of the laboratory and the library a vital part of the upbuilding of the individual and of the nation.

Eliot found our schools and colleges hobbled by a narrow traditionalism in their scope, curriculum, and methods of instruction. He responded by laboring to enrich the curriculum by increasing the number of subjects taught, and to destroy the blighting uniformity which subjected every mind to the same academic mold. In place of formalism, he demanded methods which emphasized creative scholarship in every stage of the educational process.

His broad knowledge of education, his catholicity of interest, his scorn for mere empirical and utilitarian ends, his abiding and contagious faith in the dignity and soundness of human intelligence, and his superb leadership will remain as a true example of how
high-minded men should act in public concerns.

The public duty and service of educated men, the high value to a democracy not only of good manners but of an aristocracy of the intellect, the unfailing value of sound traditions and sane progressiveness, the urgent necessity of tolerance and open-mindedness, the human right to freedom of the spirit, thought, and action - these were his constant teachings to his fellow citizens.

That Eliot was so often right in educational policy is evidenced by the fact that nearly all the reforms he advocated are now commonplaces of educational theory and practice - for instance, less emphasis on the classics, a larger curriculum with more choice for the student, greater emphasis on science education, and better facilities for public education and professional training. He did much more than promote the elective system. Eliot was one of the outstanding educational spokesmen for adapting the American college to the forces of modern America. He represented in his career the changing status of the college from an institution of strict discipline over the religious, moral, and intellectual lives of students to an institution that boasted of its secular character and the great amount of freedom allowed to the activities of its students. Not only
was he an outstanding factor in effecting these changes through his advocacy of the elective system but also, for the first time in American history, Eliot was able to gather enough support to put the educational conservatives upon the defensive.

His long administration was a most effective frontal attack upon the traditional aristocratic, linguistic, and classical conception of a liberal education. Eliot saw clearly the direction in which the winds of public opinion and of industrial activity were blowing, and so he opened the doors of Harvard to meet the demands of democracy and of industry for more specialized and professional training. Taking advantage of the tremendous financial resources that became available to him as a result of the vast fortunes created under the new industrial capitalism, Eliot had a rare opportunity. For many years head of the oldest, richest, and most respected of American universities, he was able to direct the testing of many new policies and at the same time to have the weight of Harvard added to their potency. His long series of years were of great service to his country and to his age.
CHAPTER III

ADVISOR TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Ralph Barton Perry characterized Eliot as "an advisor to the American people on things in general." This chapter will investigate Eliot's efforts to alert his fellow citizens to two of the major problems that have plagued industrialized societies throughout this century - the difficulty of preserving individualism in an increasingly organized society and the secularization of American life and thought. Eliot's views on the conflict between individualism and the organized structure are of interest because the conflict has become even more intense since his day. This chapter will document and critically evaluate his efforts and views on defending the liberty and integrity of the individual in an increasingly structured society.

before considering Eliot's efforts to help Americans to rethink the traditional Christian Gospel in the face of modernity, science, and urbanization.

Historical Background

According to Stow Persons, the ethic of individual responsibility was perhaps the major legacy of Puritanism to American civilization. It provided the psychological attitudes, the personal discipline, and the rationale out of which sprang a host of merchants, speculators, and industrialists who were unaware of the Puritan antecedents of their outlook. The Calvinistic admonition to pursue worldly success while at the same time foreswearing the pleasures and indulgences that success makes possible was precisely the teaching calculated to develop a thriving business civilization in an environment richly endowed to reward the self-disciplined individual who turned to its vigorous exploitation.

By 1910 the character of business enterprise in the United States had changed to such a degree that for many individuals the Puritan ethic of individualism no longer seemed relevant to the facts of economic life. The dawning of the discrepancy, at the end

of the nineteenth century, with the consequent disintegration of practical values that followed, was one of the chief causes of the moral and intellectual confusion of the twentieth century.

By 1910 industrialization and many of its related influences had significantly changed the social and economic structure of the United States and was fast altering the thinking of the American people. Farmers and workers, businessmen, political leaders, and intellectuals were reshaping their behavior to conform to the demands of a new way of life in which each individual affected his fellows in numberless, if often obscure, ways. American civilization was becoming so complex that it was submerging the individual and forcing him to seek expression and self-realization through combining with others.

Most Americans clung to the old ideal of the self-reliant, independent individual, and saw cooperation as a means of preserving this ideal. Their attitudes changed very slowly because, more than at any earlier time, their world confronted them with many baffling paradoxes. The United States was becoming a more unified country but also a more diverse one. Improvements in transportation and communications were shrinking distances but the popu-
lation was growing ethnically more dissimilar and the people were living under a far wider variety of conditions than ever before. New technologies eased the burdens and improved the material welfare of the average citizen but undermined his independence, and some said were beginning to enslave him. The burgeoning cities of the land expanded the opportunities and fired the imagination of their inhabitants, yet seemed at the same time to narrow their horizons and reduce them to ciphers.

**Eliot and Individualism**

With this historical background in mind, Eliot spoke out in 1910 on the formidable challenge to individualism posed by the new industrial order. Eliot explicitly expressed his views on the increasing bureaucratization of American life in a 1910 book entitled *The Conflict between Individualism and Collectivism in a Democracy.* It is true that Eliot did not speak in terms of individuals and individualism; the words he did use were man and freedom. But Eliot knew about "Organization Man." In a sense he was one himself.

3 Ibid., p. 287.


and a good one. Perceptively, he pointed out that the central problem of modern democracy is to reconcile the claims of the individual with the claims of society.

In *The Conflict between Individualism and Collectivism in a Democracy*, Eliot analyzed the rapid development of collectivism at the expense of individualism in three great departments of personal and social activity - industry, education, and government. This development, he said, "has been constructive, not destructive, inevitable in consequence of other profound social and industrial changes, beneficial in the present, and hopeful for the future."

Eliot carefully stated collectivism to mean not state socialism, with which he had little sympathy, but cooperative action, however it manifested itself. The collectivism he admired:

maintains private property, the inheritance of property, the family as the unit of society, and the liberty of the individual as a fundamental right; and it relies for the progress of society on the personal virtues rightly called 'homely' because they have to do with the maintenance of the home - namely, industry, frugality, prudence, domestic affection, independence, emulation, and energy.  

Eliot was in full accord with this type of collectivism although he lamented the propensity of "reformers," in their zeal for the

---

6 Eliot, *Conflict*, p. 3.
7 Ibid., p. 129.
8 Ibid., p. 5.
collective good, to overlook the indispensable role of individualism.

While Eliot equated collectivism with social cooperation, he diffusely defined individualism as "the immediate self-interest of the child or its parents" and "the initiative of the individual left free by society." Elsewhere, he associated it with free competition. A farmer, he said, "is an individualist in industry." According to Eliot, "employers in the larger industries used to be highly individualistic, particularly in England during the laissez-faire period, when large works were owned and managed by a family or a small group of partners." Here, his ideas seemed to imply that individualism was equivalent to small production as contrasted with large production in corporate form. Yet, to Eliot, division of labor was to be a form of collectivism.

Although most Americans in 1910 equated collectivism with socialism, Eliot remarked pertinently: "Collectivism should not be confounded with socialism." He went on to say:

Socialism dwells on the sharp and unnatural division of society into a few owners of land and machinery on the one hand and the many wage earners on the other, on the

---

9 Ibid., p. 6.

10 Ibid., p. 41.

11 Ibid., p. 7.
small share of the wage earner in the product of his industry, on the wrongfulness of private property, on the waste and cruelty of competition. Collectivism is concerned with none of these matters. The collectivism which has developed so effectively since the middle of the nineteenth century maintains private property, the inheritance of property, the family as the unit of society, and the liberty of individuals as a fundamental right. 12

The pendulum in the United States, Eliot observed, had since 1870 swung markedly in the direction of collectivism. Industrialization had progressed rapidly and, he noted, the parallel concentration of people living in cities and divisions of labor had necessitated a great extension of the function of government. Appropriately, he said that increased appreciation of the importance of education had brought about larger educational expenditures and higher educational standards. To conclude however that increasing concentration would continue in American life until government ownership and cooperation of the means of production would supercede individual ownership seemed, to him, illogical and unhistorical.

A disciple of Herbert Spencer’s laissez-faire social phil-

12 Ibid., p. 2.

13 Ibid., p. 5.
Eliot asserted that individualism was the foundation of the Puritan character and the political key of American democracy. "Jefferson's fundamental doctrine," he said, "was the political and economic value of individual liberty." Yet Eliot agreed that, even by 1910, collectivism had become a permanent feature of American life. For this reason, he stated that his purpose in *The Conflict between Individualism and Collectivism in a Democracy* was to demonstrate "the rapid development of collectivism at the expense of individualism in the three great departments of personal and social activity - industries, education, and government."

Eliot was of the opinion that the complexity of modern American life and the interdependence of social groups had made individualism somewhat inadequate and the predominance of collectivism almost inevitable. He also noted that collective action was

---


15 Eliot, p. 6.

16 Ibid., p. 129.

17 Ibid., p. 89.
carried out by voluntary associations and by the local, state, and national governments. With regard to governmental action, Eliot sided in 1910 with the "New Nationalists" of Herbert Croly. Matters calling for collective action through governmental regulation (such as big business and the conservation of natural resources) should, he thought, be regulated by whatever branch of government had "range and power enough" to effectively supervise them.

Though admitting the necessity of government regulation, Eliot would not take the further step toward the socialization of government ownership and operation of industries and public utilities. The reasons he assigned for not doing so were hardly satisfactory. He maintained, for instance, that "it is well to have many different employers competing with each other for good service rather than a single employer, the government." Now, Eliot was writing during the heyday of the trusts and monopolies, and competition for good service between industries was negligible. Thus,

18  
Ibid., p. 109.

19  
Ibid., p. 112.

20  
Ibid., p. 111.
this reason seems to have little strength. A stronger reason, the difference in the ends sought to be attained by government and by industrial enterprises and the incompatibility of attempting to attain both ends by the same machinery, he only alluded to by implication.

Still, Eliot was penetrating enough to stress that individualism as such needed to be modified. The collectivism which was taking its place, he said, was not destructive but constructive and tended to make safer and more certain the exercise of individual rights within those limits. Collective action was, for him, not necessarily antiindividualistic but conservative to the true spirit of individualism.

In appraising the labor unions and capitalism, Eliot pointed out where each curtailed individual freedom and forecast how each must adjust itself to the needs of a democracy. Like most of his Progressive contemporaries, he had a morbid fear of monopoly. Yet, while criticizing the monopoly of labor that the unions sought to establish, he said little against the capitalist monopolies that controlled so much of American business. He even pronounced it the democratic duty of employers to fight against the closed ship, the...
limitation of apprentices, and the union label although he was relatively silent about the evils of the giant trusts that closed the shops of competitors, limited output to maintain prices and utilized patents and copyrights far more exclusive than any union label.

It is true that Eliot realized that the unions would persist and he mildly encouraged them by speaking occasionally at their meetings. Forgetting however that over sixty per cent of the adult wage-earners of the United States in 1910 received less than six hundred dollars a year, he naively insisted that "high wages and short hours have been secured." Therefore strikes, to Eliot, were unnecessary and publicity would "accomplish all reasonable ends which trade unions have proposed for themselves."

At the same time, Eliot believed that democracy would require the capitalist to "invent the means of getting varied and progressive work to the individual workman" and to "take thought for the means of providing their workmen with permanent homes which are not only

---


24 Eliot, p. 33.
wholesome, but cheerful and suitable for the bringing up of a family." Where a single factory controlled a village, this might have been possible. In a city however much thought an employer might give to the housing question, he would find the task of supplying dwellings for his work-people and keeping them in his houses to be impossible. Only community action, which could affect all the dwellings the workers occupied, could grapple effectively with the problem. To such "socialistic" efforts, Eliot was opposed. Thus, his aim and method, on this and other points, were too often at variance. Again, his pronounced bias against socialism led him to assert that it was against the best interests of the very persons for whom it was designed to aid. Further, he approved many of the aims of labor unions while strongly condemning any militant tendencies.

In education, Eliot was predictably more inclined to extend the scope of collectivism than in industry and government, although he did emphasize the right of the individual to choose his studies and his profession. In the opening section on education in The Conflict

Ibid., p. 41.
between Individualism and Collectivism in a Democracy, he pointed out the highly individualistic character of education in its primary essence:

Education addresses the single, individual child and attempts to call forth its powers of observation, to train its memory, to give it the means of recording for future reference what it sees and hears, and to discriminate and to reason. The whole process takes effect on an individual child and the fruitage is in the degree personal and individual.26

The great champion of the elective system added: "The best thing done by the American colleges during the past fifty years has been the widening of their instruction so as to meet the various individual needs of a continually increasing number of students, who distribute themselves among an increasing number of subjects."27

As things had evolved by 1910, Eliot felt it was necessary to conduct education largely along the lines of collectivism. He even suggested that further collective action along many new lines

26 Ibid., p. 43.

27 Ibid., p. 44.
was needed:

The demands of democratic collectivism being in many respects novel and being also very various, and American schools and colleges having been built, like the English, on sixteenth century models, it is obvious that profound modifications of the American educational system are necessary in order to meet these needs. Wise and competent individuals can lead the way, as when a single rich man endows and sets at work a trade school or a technical institute or a college or university with a wide range of instruction; but in order to give such good work permanence, the individual benefactor must immediately call to his aid the collective forces of society, to incorporate his institution, and enlist in its support a body of teachers, and in many cases a large community. Then the methods devised and illustrated in one private institution must be adopted and imitated, so far as may be, by the public school system, and be maintained by the collective intelligence and resources.28

Eliot also cited the need for providing playgrounds and of exercising the "right of eminent domain" for community purposes. He agreed that sometimes it was necessary for society as a whole to give way to a particular class of needs of society - for instance, to invoke the "eminent domain" clause to build a public school or playground. He also pointed out distinct educational efforts of the time that illustrated the domination of modern collectivism over the

---

28 Ibid., p. 65.
old-fashioned individualism - the state universities and public secondary schools, for example. He added an exhortation for reform:

The American belief in freedom and the rights of the individual has found very scanty expression in the conduct of American schools. At last however the leaders of American education have begun to realize that the end of education is the development of internal motive powers, such as the desire to excel, the imitation of gentleness and nobility, and the love of freedom. In order to have efficient collective action, the schools must apprehend and utilize the effective motives of individualism. The reform of American education in these respects cannot be brought about by individual action, although a few leaders may show the way to reform. It is only the public schools that can effectively embody on an adequate scale the new, or rather the revived, ideals. The reform must therefore be an immense collective operation.29

As much as he perceived the inevitability of bureaucratization in American life, Eliot was very much concerned for the independence of the individual who, he said, needed protection against the claims and the power of big unions and big corporations. He carried this concern for the individual into theory and practice. As president of Harvard, his influence was often exerted on the side of enlarging the freedom and independence of students and faculty members.

29 Ibid., p. 63.
Eliot demanded freedom for the pupil in order that the pupil's development might proceed, under guidance, in accord with his awakened native tastes and capacities. Thus, he conceived of the elective system as a deliberate means for fostering individuality. In his inaugural address, he said: "In education, the individual traits of different minds have not been sufficiently attended to. For the individual, concentration and the highest development of his own peculiar faculty is the only prudence."

An advocate of responsible freedom, Eliot found that at the beginning of his presidency, the elective system was struggling for existence. He made himself its champion and by unflagging efforts, established it firmly at Harvard, from which it spread to practically every college throughout the land. In part by reason of his wide vision and in part because the elective system could not reach its full possibilities without such expansion, Eliot enriched the college by the introduction of new and vital subjects, beyond anything known before the Civil War. Other institutions followed his example in this matter, by and large to the great profit of American education.

---

Seldom did an educational institution less deserve the name of tyrant than the Harvard of Charles Eliot. Students could, and did, live off campus, and without any university supervision of their conduct. Their range of academic choice was huge and untrammeled by curriculum requirements of concentration and distribution among courses. In his brilliant inaugural address, the young Eliot was insistent on freedom as a necessary factor in the moral development of the young. He said:

The petty discipline of college attracts altogether too much attention from both friends and foes. The best way to put boyishness to shame is to foster scholarship and manliness. In spite of the familiar picture of the moral dangers which environ the student, there is no place so safe as a good college during the critical passage from boyhood to manhood. The security of the college commonwealth is largely due to its exhuberant activity. Its scholarly tastes and habits, its eager friendships and frank discussions of character and deep political and religious questions, all are safeguards against sloth, vulgarity, and depravity. Shams, conceit, and fictitious distinctions get no mercy. Repression of genuine sentiment is indeed, in this college, carried too far. 31

The freedom which Eliot insisted upon for the students he accorded to the professors. Throughout his administration and under his leadership, the Harvard faculty became a clearinghouse for educa-

31
Ibid., p. 15.
tional opinions. Under Eliot, the individual professor could generally voice his real opinions and know that opposition to the president's views usually played no part in his tenure or promotion. Thus, Hugo Munsterberg, George Santayana, and Barrett Wendell got along fairly well at Harvard at a time when they would have been unacceptable on any other American campus. It is appropriate to note that in 1906 Joseph Jastrow, a militant advocate of academic freedom who taught at the University of Wisconsin, wrote privately to Munsterberg: "The academic atmosphere of Harvard, though not wholly pure, is decidedly more free and inspiring than any other I know." Under the Eliot administration, the conscientious and effective performance of his duty to the university were, for the most part, the determining factors in a professor's career.

Responding to the charge that academic freedom of expression was tantamount to academic license, Eliot delivered a strong defense of freedom of teaching. "There is," he said, "no surer way to strengthen and spread a mistaken doctrine than to suppress it by any kind of force or pressure. Suppression by force should be confined

to treasonable, seditious, or otherwise dangerous positions. Few of the nonconforming professors in American colleges would fall into the latter category, he believed.

As for the conflict between the individual and society, Eliot felt that the crushing of individual creativity by large organizations was not inevitable. Rather, he believed that a creative and original mind could accomplish much when it was backed by, but not bonded to, the resources of a large organization and the research techniques of modern science. According to Eliot:

Individualism values highly not only the rights of the single person but also the initiative of the individual left free by society. Collectivism values highly social rights, objects to an individual initiative which does mischief when left free, holds that the interests of the many should override the interest of the individual whenever the two interests conflict and should control social action, and yet does not propose to extinguish the individual but only to restrict him for the common good, including his own. 34


34 Eliot, Conflict, p. 1.
Eliot believed that a reaction in the direction of individualism might soon be expected:

Collectivism is sure to thrive in this country. Will an adequate individualism survive? In a democracy, in spite of the fact that the general tendency of a democracy is toward the liberty of the individual as well as the liberty of the mass, a majority may at any time act tyrannically toward a minority or an individual. For this reason much interest attaches to certain industrial tendencies, plainly visible within the past twenty years, which resist the onward march of collectivism, and are likely to afford much protection to a sound individualism in industries.

The forces which have been resisting collectivism during the past thirty years have not yet gathered strength enough to arrest its progress, but they have checked it, and have shown the way toward a new development of individualism. 35

Although Eliot's theme in the Conflict between Individualism and Collectivism in a Democracy - the bureaucratization of American life - was an old one, his belief in the value of the human mind lent an edge to his work and made his ethos of the technician in 1910 America among the best then available. Unfortunately, he was unable to see clearly that the work-and-thrift ethic of success had already declined in the United States by 1910, or that the entrepreneurial scramble to success was starting to be replaced by the organizational crawl.

His book is disappointing in that Eliot lacked the courage to carry out the logic of his ambitious title. He proclaimed himself an optimist in the power of the individual, and then vaguely suggested that individualism is readily possible within modern organizational life. The challenging issue - and Eliot never really faced up to it - is whether any kind of organization is conceivable which can reconcile individual independence with the goals of mass production. The evidence to date seems to indicate that the pursuit of productive efficiency becomes, at a point already reached, somewhat incompatible with individual freedom.

Eliot too glibly asserted that individualism was reconcilable with modern organizational structure. His sturdy mood of optimism was based on the illusion that, by a mere act of personal will, "white collar" men could change their world. The truth seems to be that although the corporate way may not be inevitable, still its power is now such that the area of willful and effective action open to the "white collar" man is small indeed. In fact, a very real moral problem of social control in the United States today is less the explicit domination of men than their manipulation into self-coordinated and even cheerful subordinates.
The healthy conflict between individualism and collectivism in a democracy to which Eliot referred has been partly replaced by the ideal of adjustment. Large organizations in the United States have become, in fact, self-contained welfare states - for instance, corporations, universities, and religious orders. The problem today is that big organizations are too often stifling individual initiative. This is sometimes a result not of the evils of organization life but of its very beneficence. According to William Whyte, "Organization Man is imprisoned in brotherhood." Partly because of their enormous size, partly because of the myth that strong leadership is somehow undemocratic, American organizations are increasingly run by multiple management - that is, committees, boards, and so on. There is a growing reliance on the creativity of the group as against the creativity of the individual. The group spirit unfortunately often breeds a deadening atmosphere.

The writer has no special objection to reasonable conformity in so far as it is a requirement of all civilized life. Nor does he object to the organization itself - giant corporations, group laboratories,

36 Whyte, p. 225.
philanthropic foundations or even organized committee scholarship—
all of which may be part of the irreversible trend toward complexity
in human affairs. What he does find unnecessary and dangerous is
that in the contest of conflicting interests between the individual and
society, many people have begun to feel that society is necessarily
right. Social consciousness has too often become the recognition of
a supposed moral imperative to adjust to the organization.

In the effort to suppress eccentrics, nonconformists and revolutionaries into a mass of "other-directed" mediocrity, American society may be indulging in a kind of death wish, damning up the genius which alone can renew its own vitality. More importantly, the insistence that individuals adjust to serve the group threatens to downgrade persons from spiritual entities to dependent members to be respected only as they function on the team. This trend clearly leads away from the proposition of democracy that the individual is the final value and so facilitates acceptance of statism in any of its various forms.

Perhaps Eliot was right in believing that individualism could

37David, Riesman, The Lonely Crowd
really survive under industrial and bureaucratic conditions. It is surely true that people are essentially individuals and, without individual effort, no collective organization can be built. Individual initiative has always been the key to success and probably always will be. The "Social Ethic" of William Whyte's *Organization Man* notwithstanding, group thinking may continue to be dominated by the strongest individuals. If they are not permitted to dominate, they will break away and apply their energies elsewhere. If this happens often enough, the group will see the light, particularly if it is one which depends on profits for its existence. Human nature does not change readily. As long as we preserve our ideals of freedom, strong personalities will continue to assert their leadership and to nurture creative thinking and individual initiative.

To his credit, Eliot was probably correct in asserting that the dignity and worth of the individual is central to American society. Yet man is a social animal, and to talk about individuality without talking about the social system that makes it possible is to talk nonsense. It is therefore necessary to examine the capacity of the individual to accept the responsibility of freedom and the conditions under which he will sacrifice his freedom to gain other objectives.
Although we cannot accept the totalitarian notion that man's highest fulfillment is to become a faceless member of the group, neither can we accept romantic notions of complete individual autonomy. Thus, when the individual seeks autonomy he may achieve freedom and moral responsibility or he may achieve only aggrandizement of himself, with all the accompanying disorders of self-regard: cancerous pride, uncontrolled inflation of his self-evaluations, unfulfillable self-expectations.

It makes a great deal of difference whether the individual is really running away from freedom - that is, from the moral responsibility of free choice - or from the meaningless isolation that modern life so often thrusts on us. The mature person must achieve a considerable measure of independence if he is to meet the standards implicit in ideals of individual freedom and dignity. At the same time he must acknowledge the limitations of his own individualism, come to terms with his membership in the society at large and give his allegiance to values more comprehensive than his own needs.

A meaningful relationship between individualism and values that lie beyond it is not incompatible with individual freedom. On the contrary, it is an essential ingredient of the inner strength that must
characterize the free man. The man who has established emotional, moral, and spiritual ties beyond individualism gains the strength needed to endure the rigors of freedom.

As David Riesman has observed in *The Lonely Crowd*, ours is a day of inner estrangement and outer conformity. As for the task Eliot tried to define in *The Conflict between Individualism and Collectivism in a Democracy*, we must combat those aspects of modern society that threaten the individual's integrity as a free and responsible being. At the same time, we must help the individual to re-establish a meaningful relationship with a larger context of purposes.

The solution to the dilemma of the modern "Organization Man" is, the writer thinks, partly intellectual and partly moral. In the process of maturing, the individual must free himself from self-preoccupation. To do so he need not surrender his individuality, but he must place it in the voluntary service of larger objectives. To relate himself to his fellow men and to the best in his own social, moral, and intellectual tradition, the individual today must become really aware of his own free society, its social and intellectual tradition, and the requirements and realities of a complex modern society.

38Ibid., p. 1.
The experience of the writer has been that many young people sour into alienation or egocentrism because they do not really understand their own free society. In other words, they fail to commit themselves to the larger social enterprise because they are genuinely baffled as to the nature of that enterprise and structure. If they are to commit themselves to the best in their own society, it is not exhortation they need but instruction.

To properly resolve the problem Eliot posed in 1910, the conflict between individualism and an organized but free society, we must help the individual to discover how commitments to a larger context may be made without surrendering individualism. The mature individual then must make commitments to something larger than the service of his own little "ego" - religious commitments, commitments to loved ones, to the social enterprise and the moral order. We must however help him to understand and resist any impulse he may have to flee the responsibility of individual choice by mindless submission to a cause or movement. In short, he must recognize the hazard of having no commitments beyond individualism and the hazard of commitments that imperil it.
Assessment

The previous remarks have surely characterized Eliot as one very much concerned with the individual in modern society. Further light on the problem he tried to come to grips with in The Conflict between Individualism and Collectivism in a Democracy can be had by comparing Eliot's views on individualism in an organized society with those of some of his contemporaries - namely, John Dewey, Abbott Lawrence Lowell, Theodore Roosevelt, and Woodrow Wilson.

John Dewey, like Eliot, was also interested in individualism. Dewey in fact defined democracy as "faith in individuality, in uniquely distinctive qualities in each normal human being; faith in corresponding unique modes of activity that create new ends, with willing acceptance of the modifications of the established order entailed by the release of individualized capacities." In spite of this emphasis on the individual, Dewey's sense of the importance of the social was much greater than that of Eliot. Thus Dewey made constant references to "communal life," "shared culture," communication and the common, and insisted that under industrial conditions the realization

39

of democracy must be a cooperative enterprise. Indeed, for Dewey, a prime function of government was the regulation of activities ultimately private in their origin or intention. Eliot, with greater emphasis on individualism, was far more in the American historical tradition than Dewey.

Eliot's successor at Harvard, Abbott Lawrence Lowell, did not share Eliot's strong confidence in the reliability of the individual. While Lowell displayed lifelong concern for academic freedom, he also made it a point to modify Eliot's individualistic elective system through the use of general examinations and tutorials.

Theodore Roosevelt, who had studied at Harvard during the early years of Eliot's administration agreed with Eliot that industrial conditions had made nineteenth century laissez-faire individualism inadequate. Eliot and Roosevelt were further agreed on the merits of the "New Nationalism" of Herbert Croly, which called for a larger increase in governmental power to control the economic life of the country in the interests of the many instead of the few. Both men saw a certain inevitability in the growth of a complex and organized

40
A. Lawrence Lowell, At War with Academic Traditions in America (Cambridge: Harvard, 1938).
Eliot's awareness of the effects of industrial conditions on traditional notions of individualism was not fully shared by Woodrow Wilson. Wilson, of course, initially rejected the "New Nationalism's" (and Eliot's) call for active governmental intervention on behalf of social justice and the economic welfare of the underprivileged. In fact, Wilson was so fearful of the burgeoning "collectivism" in American life which Eliot had praised that Wilson called for expanded exercise of federal authority by means of regulation. In time Wilson was to agree with the "New Nationalism's" view (shared by Eliot and Roosevelt) that the enlarging of federal power to intervene actively in the social and economic life of the country was not an abridgment of traditional American liberty and freedom but an extension.

In company with many others, Charles Eliot struggled with the ancient dilemma of the individual and the group and concluded that democracy must in some way account for and provide for both. He repeatedly called attention to the importance of concern for community and provided in his own life an example of working for social reform.

41

Yet, and in spite of his staggering list of memberships in groups, he was no mere "Organization Man." Individuality was always his supreme concern and Eliot defended individual rights against the encroachments of government, schools, business, industry, and labor. On the latter point, while he defended the right of unions to exist, he frequently chided them for what he called monopolistic practices, especially the closed shop.

Because of his commitment to individualism, Eliot sought to promote social and economic mobility in American life and to provide talented young people with opportunities to develop and exercise their talents. An example of his concern for the individual was his efforts to adapt schooling to an infinite variety of individual capacities and interests – largely through the elective system. Eliot was hardly unaware of the difficulty of developing talents in a mass of pupils, but he would not surrender his conviction that the individual came first. To him, common culture was to be attained not through bodies of knowledge but through a few personal qualities, such as skill in the use of the mother tongue, love of truth, and a sense of social obligation. Perhaps these are not enough for the demands of today's and tomorrow's worlds. If there is something more to be
achieved, Eliot would warn us against seeking to achieve it at the expense of individuality and freedom.

As for Eliot's role as a defender of individualism in a highly organized society, Eliot was hardly ignorant of the fact that the "New Nationalism" of 1910 was starting to lay the foundations for an uneasy partnership between business and American government that would eventually build a capitalist welfare state and a large middle class society. He consistently pointed out that the material advantages enjoyed by many Americans even in his day were made possible only through an industrial and organized civilization, and that what was denounced by some as regimentation of the individual was the price paid for giving most individuals a chance to live a wider, longer, and richer life. It was Eliot's contention then that modern organization's threat to the individual has been vastly exaggerated.

The whole theme of Eliot's 1910 publication, The Conflict between Individualism and Collectivism in a Democracy, is that organization as such does not crush the individual. Even the tightest of organizations depends on individual creativity, Eliot said, and creativity exists as long as man has any moral initiative of his own.
The message of Charles Eliot for today's "Organization Men" is that individualism grows and spreads with responsibility, and that men can be made free only when they are inwardly bound by their own sense of responsibility.

By way of criticism, some of the statements of Eliot in The Conflict between Individualism and Collectivism in a Democracy give strong evidence of the anti-labor sentiment of the Progressive Era. His affection for the "Protestant Ethic" of hard work and success was quite clear. Unfortunately, Eliot's ideas on labor peace were hopelessly-out of date. The mass production methods of modern technology had begun to transform American social attitudes - including work - long before 1910.

For most Americans of 1910, the "Protestant Ethic" was dead. The very industrial revolution which this highly serviceable ethic begot began in time to confound it. A key assumption of the "Protestant Ethic" had been that success was due neither to luck nor to the environment but only to one's natural qualities; if men grew rich it was because they deserved to. The big organization of modern technology had now become a standing taunt to this dream of individual success. Quite obvious to anyone who worked in a big organization,
those who survived best were not necessarily fittest but, in more cases than not, those who by birth and personal connections had the breaks. Unfortunately, Eliot failed to sufficiently realize that the technology of modern America had rendered the modern successful man less an individualist than a man who works through others for others.

The gifted Eliot failed to adequately understand the intellectual assault on the "Protestant Ethic" and its aftermath, a new social ethic. In the great revolt against traditionalism that began around the turn of the century, William James, John Dewey, Charles Beard, Thorstein Veblen, the muckrakers and a host of reformers brought the anachronisms of the "Protestant Ethic" under relentless fire. However, it was a long time before men like Eliot grasped the relevance of these new ideas and the emergence of mass culture and "Organization Men."

Eliot liked to believe that Americans were a people who held to the "Protestant Ethic," and he eloquently eulogized the American dream. It was his sincere belief that the pursuit of individual salvation through hard work, thrift and competitive struggle was the heart of American achievement. The harsh facts of organization life of
in the United States in 1910 simply did not jibe with Eliot's Puritanical precepts regarding individualism. In the America of 1910, the contrast between the old ethic and contemporary reality were apparent and poignant. Yet, Americans like Charles Eliot led in the public worship of individualism as if nothing had really changed at all.

Eliot and the Secularization of American Thought

This chapter will now investigate Eliot's efforts to alert his fellow citizens to a second major social problem that has plagued American society throughout the twentieth century - the secularization of American life and thought. The rise of urban civilization and the decline of traditional religion are two of the main hallmarks of American history during the past century. During that time, some very perceptive men have tried to rethink the Christian Gospel in the face of modernity, science, urbanization, and secularity. As the gap between the Bible and industrial America widened, it altered traditional American religious views. The decline of traditional religion in the United States has been accompanied by scientific and technological advances which sprang from the wreckage of nineteenth century religious

world-views, for instance, the literal interpretation of the Biblical miracles. The change in religious attitudes, called secularization, marked a change in the way men grasped and understood their life together, and occurred when the cosmopolitan confrontations of city living exposed the relativity of many myths and traditions men once thought were unquestionable.

Few, if any, historians have adequately studied the efforts of responsible educators to help the American people to understand the changing role of religion in modern life. Charles Eliot was one of these responsible educational leaders, and one of his notable contributions to contemporary American thought was his efforts to secularize it.

The term secularization, as used in this chapter, refers to the emancipation of the modern man from religious and metaphysical control over his reason and life style. Secularization refers to man's turning his attention away from the worlds beyond and toward this world and this time. It represents a modern society's unwillingness to enforce any particular world-view on its citizens. Secularization refers to the loosing of American civilization from religious and quasi-religious understandings of itself and the discovery by men that the
world has become their task and their responsibility.

As an early supporter of the secularization phenomena studied first by Max Weber, Eliot favored and worked for the emancipation of American institutions, particularly the universities, from ecclesiastical control. He lived at a time when the dominance of Protestant culture was being seriously challenged by the flood of Catholic and Jewish immigrants. The oncoming of a more secularized American society was, in his view, a healthy development since it was already helping to bring about a much needed emancipation of Catholics, Jews, and others from an enforced Protestant cultural religion. He astutely contended that Christians should support the secularization of American society, recognizing that secularists, atheists, and agnostics do not have to be second-class citizens.

The theme of the second part of this chapter is that Eliot's efforts to secularize American thought were most visible in his creation of Harvard as a model for the secular (non-denominational) university.


45 Charles Eliot, A Late Harvest (Boston: Atlantic, 1924), p. 213.
of the twentieth century United States and in his description and popularization of the "new religion."

Eliot and the Secular University

Eliot's strong impulse to the secularization of American universities contributed significantly to the decline of traditional religion in the United States - one of the hallmarks of modern American history. In nineteenth century America, educational and theological orthodoxy almost always went together. Orthodox Christianity, as the nineteenth century college president usually understood the term, meant a diluted Calvinism. Man, besides possessing the faculties which education was supposed to develop, ought to undergo a definite experience of conversion. Religious orthodoxy demanded acceptance of Biblical authority, including the accounts of miracles. Sometimes Christianity of this sort was passionately evangelical; sometimes it was tacitly complacent. But everywhere it gave college leaders their fundamental notion of the nature of the universe, a self-assured notion hardly conducive to religious tolerance.

The religious-oriented colleges, often clinging to existence with


47 Ibid., p. 73.
few students and little income, had much to lose if Eliot's ideal of a nonsectarian college, sharing by means of the elective system, the curriculum of a complex university, gained general acceptance. The forces of religious orthodoxy also feared that Eliot, as a scientist, was inclined to be skeptical of spiritual truths. More orthodox educators of the nineteenth century preferred to resist science as a philosophy which claimed to account for the entire universe, and they often identified the very nature of science with such a claim. Science, they felt, was to be mistrusted on a variety of levels. It conveyed a tone these men did not like, one which the older phrase "natural philosophy" had comfortably muffled. In particular, science appeared to denigrate the position of man in the universe.

Quite inconsistent with orthodox educational views, Eliot expressed his preference for nonsectarianism as a university policy at the opening of Johns Hopkins University in 1874:

48
Ibid., p. 274.
There is a too common opinion that a college or university which is not denominational must therefore be irreligious; but the absence of sectarian control should not be confounded with the lack of piety. A university whose officers and students are divided among many sects need no more be irreverent and irreligious than the community which in respect to diversity of creeds it resembles. A university cannot be built upon a sect, unless it be a sect which includes the whole of the educated portion of the nation. 49

In shaping the religious life of the university, Eliot steadfastly maintained that Harvard should be nonsectarian and that her loyalties to standards of scientific truth should not be harmful to religion. The increasing religious heterogeneity of New England and his desire to draw students from the whole nation provided new grounds for the policy of nonsectarianism. As Harvard was more and more justifying herself on grounds of scientific method and scientifically grounded truth, he sought to mediate between the university and the religious community be establishing compatibility between science and religion.

Eliot assured the Johns Hopkins audience at Gilman's inauguration in 1874 that scholarship filled men with humility and awe by bringing them on every hand face to face with inscrutable mystery and power. "The whole work of a university," he said, "is uplifting.

49 Eliot, Educational Reform, p. 42.
refining, and spiritualizing." He then stoutly forecast that Johns Hopkins, nonsectarian by will of the founder and oriented toward science by will of Gilman and the trustees, would be a seat of piety as well as learning.

Of the scholarly fields, the most feared as antagonistic to religion were the natural sciences, then being elevated by Eliot far above their cramped role in the required curriculum. His reply to this fear was in effect that the busy scientists in the universities were chiefly glorifying God. The danger to organized religion became clear when he turned to discussions of method. "In every field of study," he observed knowingly, "in history, philosophy, and theology, as well as in natural history and physics, it is now the scientific spirit, the scientific method, which prevails."

Eliot was understandably of the opinion that the clergy, with their fixation on creed and rigidity of belief, had, never learned to practice or respect the scientific method. "Protestant theologians and

50
Ibid., p. 42.

51
Ibid., p. 43.

52
ministers," he said, "must rise to that standard if they would continue to command the respect of mankind." He did not, as did some of his contemporaries, despair of winning ministers over to the scientific method. His optimistic attitude could be seen in his reorganization of the Divinity School on a nondenominational and, as he saw it, "scientific" basis.

Still, two encounters with President James McCosh of Princeton, demonstrated the antagonism toward Eliot's ideal of a nonsectarian university. Although McCosh had introduced a limited elective system at Princeton, he did not sympathize with the extent of Eliot's ideals of liberty, either in the curriculum or in student religious life. The two university presidents debated the elective system before the Nineteenth Century Club of New York in February, 1885. One of McCosh's criticisms of Eliot's free elective system was that it made the colleges less fit to prepare ministers. The denominations could protect their own colleges, but McCosh feared the future might bring an unfortunate division of colleges into Christian and infidel. Aside

53


54

from its failure to guarantee future ministers with sound classical backgrounds, McCosh felt that Eliot's "new departure" threatened general moral development. A Harvard student might elect nothing but science, and "everybody knows that science alone is not fit to form or guard morality."

The Harvard president opened the 1886 debate by classifying colleges not as Christian and infidel but as denominational, partially denominational, and nondenominational. Most colleges gradually passed from the first type to the last by a process of evolution, in keeping with the growing heterogeneity and tolerance in their constituencies. Harvard, he said, had reached the most advanced stage. Though a nondenominational university might "appear to be indifferent to religion, instead of impartial," Eliot invoked "the history of the civilized world" as proof that religious liberty did not extinguish interest in religion. Finally, he suggested standards to be followed by colleges of whatever type: respect toward all religious opinions, support of the student's attachment to the communion in which he was born, and encouragement of the voluntary attachment of all students to some religious body."

55 Ibid., p. 12.
56 Ibid., p. 32.
Although he shared with McCosh the thought that organized religion was in some danger from the emerging secular and nonsectarian universities, Eliot felt that narrow sectarianism and a narrow curriculum contributed to that danger. "The widespread suspicion," he said, "that there is opposition between the fundamentals of religion and modern science - an opinion which religionists on one side and socialists on another have industriously spread - is one which in the present temper of the popular mind does infinite harm to religion." He pronounced it the duty of all colleges to "demonstrate that modern science is creating a very spiritual idea of God," and that no true opposition existed between religion and science "although the religious imagination and the scientific imagination do not set forth precisely the same images of the omnipresent Deity they both adore."

Five years later Eliot went beyond his nonsectarian college ideal of 1886 and pictured the "true university" as one which by its very nature could not be conducted "as a strict denominational organization.

57 James, I, p. 317.
58 Ibid., p. 318.
59 Eliot, Educational Reform, p. 223.
As a spokesman for the "true university," he did not speak of the impossibility of teaching morality without religion. He said rather that "conduct has very little to do with creed, or at least is not dependent upon theological opinion." By demonstrating this truth, the university softened denominational asperities.

Eliot, often interpreted as antagonistic to all religion, was sincere in claiming that Harvard continued to give religion a place in education. He had no doubts of the power of religion and even acknowledged religion and patriotism to be the major forces in human society. Much of his hope that Harvard would elevate American religious life and make it more hospitable to university ideals centered in the Divinity School.

Although he preferred a policy of nonsectarianism for Harvard, Eliot spoke out in his first year in office in favor of a solid intellectual training for ministers:

Ministers should be scholars by temperament, education, and inveterate habit, else their congregations will drain them dry in a year or two. Moreover, ministers, having

---

60 Ibid., p. 237.

none of the material or adventitious means of gaining influence and commanding respect in the community, need all the support and moral strength which the possession of ample learning can give. To breed such men of solid learning is the main function of a theological school connected with a University. 62

The intellectual approach Eliot was recommending for ministerial education alarmed some religionists. His proposals, they felt, were not likely to swell the ranks of devout exhorters of the Gospel. Still, he continued to press his point in favor of learned ministers:

Ministers, as a class and as a necessary consequence of the ordinary manner of their education and induction into office, are peculiarly liable to be deficient in intellectual candor; this belief on the part of multitudes of educated men is a potent cause of the decline of the ministry during the past forty years. 64

Eliot expressed his conception of the role that a nonsectarian theological school should play in the course of an 1878 plea for endowment:


63 James, I, p. 371.

64 Eliot, Educational Reform, p. 71.
Theology, ethics, biblical criticism, history, and homiletics should be taught without sectarian bias. The modern world respects only the scientific method and admits of no settled convictions except those which rest upon thorough previous investigation. By the side of the numerous theological schools which are avowedly devoted to the interests of the several denominations, let at least one University school of theology be suitably supported, where young men may study theology and the kindred subjects with the same freedom of spirit which they study law in a Law School or medicine in a Medical School, and with as little intention or opportunity of committing themselves prematurely to any particular sect of opinions or practices.65

Eliot wrote these words in 1878, a time when money was vigorously being sought for the Harvard Divinity School. Yet he courageously declared that the function of the Divinity School should no longer be that of feeder to the pulpit of the wealthier denominations. He also noted, at this time, that the training of research scholars in theology was a laudable university function.

Solid academic standards for the Divinity School, Eliot hoped, would lessen both sectarian hostility and secular indifference. Emphasis on the historical approach and the selection of German-trained scholars were his principal techniques for making the school "scientific."

65 James, I, p. 368.

66 Ibid., p. 369.
In this way he helped to shape it for survival "in the modern world, which admits of no settled convictions except those which rest upon thorough previous investigation." His experiment in scientific theology produced good scholarship and in 1908 a new theological journal of academic respectability. By keeping theology in the university as a respected intellectual discipline, the Harvard Divinity School in Eliot's day made a solid contribution to American academic life. This Cornell and Johns Hopkins and the state universities were unable to do.

Eliot's nonsectarian ideal helped win for Harvard a national stature and constituency suitable to its position as the country's oldest and richest university. Catholics, Jews, Mormons, agnostics, and atheists were free to study at Harvard, certain that no official creed would hinder their religious or intellectual pursuits. Even Harvard's near creed of science, feared by so many religionists, Eliot often managed to equate with a freedom not inimical to faith. Indeed, the shift from religious to scientific standards, ardently


68Harvard Theological Review
supported by the Harvard president, did benefit freedom of thought and made the condemnation of unorthodox views less likely.

There was a suitability to the ideals of Charles Eliot that makes modification in religion properly associated with his name. His pride in these developments and his public presentation of them eased the American university's course in a society where formal religion retained considerable power. As early as his first year in office, Eliot had asked alumni to help the university gain public understanding for its new relationship to religion. The nonsectarian ideal he asked Harvard men to support was worthy of the promise of American academic life. His transformation of Harvard into a truly nonsectarian institution helped accelerate the change in role of the American university from one of proselytizing to one of real searching for truth. Eliot thus represented in his career the changing status of the American college from an institution of strict discipline over the religious, moral, and intellectual lives of students to an institution that boasted of its secular character and the great amount of freedom allowed to the

---

69 James, I, p. 367.
activities of its students.

Most of the top American universities followed Eliot's lead and implemented a policy of nonsectarianism. It has already been noted that in the process of its secularization and emancipation from clerical control, the American university has gained much. As a result of its secularization however, American higher education has also lost much because of a resultant glaring deficiency which can be stated as a belief in an ultimate value in human life, which is essentially a question of religion. The issues are obviously both delicate and explosive; and where possible, they have been evaded. Because many educators (like Eliot) have felt that they could not speak with authority upon them, they have elected not to speak at all. The question however has not been disposed of by neglect. It has persisted, and is now more insistently posed than at any other time since Eliot's nonsectarian ideal took hold.

Much can be said of Eliot's deemphasis of religious belief and it is not a coincidence that American colleges and universities grew to greatness after the ideal of free inquiry was recognized and generally, if sometimes equivocally, followed. During the period of Eliot's public life, the scientific outlook alone seemed to promise
a true perspective and higher education did indeed make great contributions to man's knowledge.

Still, much has also been left undone by Eliot and his successors. In the first place, no matter how long we wait, science alone will probably not provide the answers to our most pressing and fundamental questions. The method of science is not comprehensive enough; it does not even recognize the validity of ultimate values in human life. Hopefully, it is doubtful whether the dogma of science will ever again appear to have infallibility, or the universal validity that Eliot's generation optimistically conferred upon it. Certainly it is now permissible to seek a larger area of truth than science limited itself to, to seek a harmony of the understanding which can fuse the split personality (material and spiritual) of Western man.

The quest to educate for wisdom beyond mere knowledge is a quest of ultimate values, a religious quest. Should education, or even can it, stop short of religious certainties and still fulfill its educational function? Can education attain to wisdom without the religious spirit? The answers given to these questions will depend largely upon how one defines religion, which defies definition as
stubbornly as does education.

It is not surprising then that educators should prefer not to choose the impossible. Consequently, however, they have had constant difficulty in relating their activity to a purpose and giving it direction. The resulting loss can be estimated by observing how effective higher education has been when its purpose is clear and forthright, as in scientific research and technical training, and how the muddled purposes of liberal education have blunted its impact, slackened its discipline, and scattered its energies.

If a major effort of higher education in the next generation is to be bent toward liberalizing all learning and toward achieving the balanced harmony of wisdom, nothing could be more helpful than a common vision of the harmony man should strive for—in short, an accepted version of the best life for man. Since true religion must satisfy the mind as well as the heart, as Eliot correctly observed, higher education can occupy a position of profound importance in the life of our times. It can provide the forum where the really searching questions can be discussed in an atmosphere where truth, not power, is the goal in view.
There is certainly no guarantee that mutual understanding and harmony will result, but the university has many things in its favor: its tradition of objective inquiry, its intellectual honesty, its dedication to persuasion rather than force, its comprehension of all knowledge, and its belief in its civilizing mission. The ideal is that of the Middle Ages, a harmony of understanding and belief; but it is nonetheless at the heart of modern civilization's quest.

Perhaps in this way, through the academic community and its universe of discourse, higher education can encourage the scientist, the poet, the philosopher, the learned specialist, the professional man, and the theologian to bring their talents to bear on the relation of their expanded knowledge to the ultimate values in human life.

The searching of mature men for permanent meanings can properly orient them to the world of their experiences. To participate in this endeavor is to plunge into the most vital drama of our times, with a concern that makes learning relevant and intense. It is to be hoped that this concern might permeate the American college and university so that, although they may teach no religious
doctrine, they will help students become the kind of people who realize in their transient existence an eternal meaning.

**Eliot and the "New Religion"**

A basic contribution of Eliot to the secularization of contemporary American thought was his efforts to de-mythologize traditional religious beliefs. The evolutionary theories of Darwin and scholarly Biblical criticism necessitated, he felt, modifications in religious beliefs — for instance, literal interpretation of the Bible. The style of American life had already in his day become increasingly pragmatic and profane. The emergence of a more secularized society in the United States, he said, was inevitable and even desirable. It was his unflinching hope that secularization would help liberate men from religious and metaphysical tutelage by turning their attention away from other worlds and toward this one.

Eliot described his rather liberal religious views in a 1909 book entitled *The Religion of the Future*. In the "new religion" he felt the twentieth century would adopt, God was not the ruler of

---

70

the universe but its immanent spirit. "The Creator," in his words, "is for modern man a sleepless, active energy and will, which yesterday, today and forever actuates all things, as the human spirit actuates its own body, so small and yet so inconceivably complex."

We are told: "God did not make man out of the dust of the ground. God did not turn stonemason and give into the hands of Moses the Ten Commandments." Again, Eliot says: "Twentieth century people recognize God chiefly in the wonderful energies of sound, light and electricity, in the vital processes of plants and animals, in human love and aspirations, and in the evolution of human society." To those who feared God was being robbed of personality, Eliot replied:

The sense of personality, the belief in personality is an inherent part of our nature. Taking into consideration all the new demonstrations of science with regard to the attributes of God, no name so well describes him as Our Father among all those peoples who conceive of a father as the loving head of a family.\(^{72}\)

---


\(^{72}\) Ibid., p. 9.
Eliot regarded Jesus not as the Son of God in any unique sense, but as "the supreme teacher of religion, whose teachings have proved to be the undying root of all the best in human history since he lived." The form of religion Eliot recommended was "not propitiatory, sacrificial or expiatory." It refused to stake its faith in miracles. It regarded the story of the Garden of Eden as "primitive myth or fanciful poetry." It did not believe that the sun stood still for Joshua, or that Jonas went through a thrilling experience in the closed quarters of a whale.

Nor was Eliot interested in transubstantiation, predestination, or apostolic succession. He preferred liberty to authority, and saw "neither deities nor demons in the forces and processes of nature." His religion had room for ministers and pastors but no mediatorial priests. Finally, "the church of the future will reverence more and more the personality of Jesus, and will dwell on the extraordinary quality of his teachings as proved by their historical effects during nineteen centuries."

---


74 Ibid., p. 15.
In a 1909 speech before the Harvard Divinity School, Eliot described what the "religion of the future" would not be. There would be no authority "either spiritual or temporal, no deification of remarkable human beings," no tribal faith, no sudden conversions, no sacrifice, no belief in malignant powers, no thought of man "as an alien or fallen being, no place for obscure dogmas or mystery, no supernatural element, no sacraments, except natural hallowed customs," no imagination of the justice of God, no condemnation for much of mankind.

As for the positive elements of Eliot's "new religion," there was to be a new thought of God as one immanent in the world. He said:

For every man God will be a multiplication of infinities. The new religion will take account of all righteous persons, and it will reverence the teachers of liberty and righteousness. Its priests will strive to improve social and industrial conditions. Prevention will be the watchword of the new religion, and a skillful surgeon will be one of its ministers. Based on the two great commandments of loving God and one's neighbor, the new religion will teach that he is best who loves best and serves best, and the greatest service will be to increase the stock of good will. 75

75 Ibid., p. 33.
The new religion, said Eliot, would strengthen love and hope, and would particularly foster "a new virtue - the love of truth." It would teach men to serve their fellows. "Finally," said Eliot, "the new religion will make Christ's revelation seem more wonderful than ever to us."

One result of Eliot's expression of his liberal views on religion was a flood of commentaries, favorable and unfavorable. Noting that no other American's views on religion had received so much publicity during the first two decades of this century, the New York Times found particular praise for Eliot's "religion of the future" and its admiration for the "Protestant Ethic" of work, thrift, and individualism. According to the Times, a heaven of idleness and relief from work would not only offer no attractions but would be unbearable and unthinkable. In fact, a Times editorial interpreted Eliot as believing that a place of eternal torment would be a place of eternal unemployment. The Times agreed with Eliot's assertion that time would change men's ways of thinking without disturbing the stability of their religion.

76Ibid., p. 23.

Approvingly, the *Times* said that Eliot's "religion of the future" would be based on love of truth and a spirit of cooperation among men. Eliot's prophesy, it said, was that worship of the deities of the past would give way to reverence for beauty and goodness.

In January of 1914 several prominent New York clergymen publicly replied to Eliot's version of "twentieth century Christianity." They agreed that Eliot's ideas were little more than a restatement of Unitarianism, the liberal view that it is possible to create a genuine and enduring religious community without requiring doctrinal conformity. According to the Reverend Charles Eaton of the Madison Avenue Baptist Church:

Eliot tells us that science has profoundly changed the thought of man about God, especially in his relation to the universe. He finds further that democracy has deposed God as a 'ruler' and elected Him as 'leader.' But the fact is that God, whether He be a 'ceaseless activity and will' or just simply the God of the Bible, is the ruler of the world. Democracy or oligarchy have nothing whatever to do with the rulership of God Almighty.

To reduce religion to the bones of cold intellectualism is to have no religion at all. To make the religion which he presents the foundation of our whole life is to fall into

---


the blackest failure and despair. Such religion is nothing more or less than New England Unitarianism in its best clothes, very learned, very cold, and very futile. It will never send forth missionaries, nor found institutions, nor inspire reformations. It is a pity, when the world is asking for bread, that we should persist in handing it a stone.

Rabbi Joseph Silverman agreed that the religion of the future would be the outcome of scientific thought on the part of advanced thinkers such as Eliot. In fact, Rabbi Silverman sounded very much like Eliot when he predicted that the religion of the future “will have only the ideals embodied in the Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, and the ethics of Moses and the prophets because the belief in the virgin birth and the heavenward ascension will finally fade in the light of scientific thinking.”

D. A. Puleo, in a penetrating critique of Eliot’s religious views, attacked Eliot’s statement that “men of science have no faith in magic and miracles” and that his religion would stop useless speculation in theology. Puleo cited the following quotation voiced by Sir Oliver Lodge, an outstanding scientist of the time:

\[ \text{Ibid., p. 8.} \]

\[ \text{Ibid., p. 8.} \]
Mysticism must have its place, though its relation to science has so far not been found. They have appeared disparate and disconnected, but there need be no hostility between them. The methods of science are not the only way, though they are our way, of arriving at truth. The pre-scientific insight of genius - of poets and prophets and saints - was of supreme value, and the access of those inspired seers to the heart of the universe was profound.82

The thesis of Eliot's religious views can be stated briefly. Because science, technology and urbanization have radically altered our way of life, it follows, he felt, that our religious beliefs must also be altered. Scientific achievements were, in his view, highly impressive and could in time make "religion, metaphysics, and the transcendent disappear forever."

Eliot's Christianity, as might be expected of an inveterate Unitarian, had virtually no substance. He interpreted the Gospels merely as urging hospitality to change, and the changes then being called for by technological development as providing a legitimate "theology." The theological emptiness of Eliot's position points to a fundamental truth; there is no "new Christianity." The bare bones of the problem remain what they were for those who heard

82 Ibid., p. 8.

Saint Paul in the Areopagus. Does God exist? Did the events of the life of Jesus really occur as claimed? The honest man faces these questions with as much philosophical and historical discipline as he can muster. If he answers them affirmatively, it would be irrational for him to talk about the "disappearance of religion, metaphysics, and the transcendent." If his answer to either question is negative, it is questionable for the person to call himself a Christian. On the basis of the evidence presented in Eliot's writings, the author is doubtful that Eliot would make much of a showing on the philosophical arguments or the issues of historical scholarship necessary for really solid study in the field of religion.

In Eliot's "new religion," men were to cling to no objective truths, to no religious doctrines that contribute to a world-view, and to no ethical or moral standards that are not subject to change. What would hold men together in this "new religion," according to Eliot, or what would keep them united in seeking the good goals he outlined - freedom from prejudice, poverty, and tension? Eliot would probably have answered with one word - consensus. Citizens

84 Ibid., p. 60
of differing viewpoints and moral standards and spiritual beliefs, all realizing that their position was at best an opinion and that the opposite of what they hold sacred may be an equally valid opinion, would come together and work out agreements on practical matters. Each would compromise something of his own view, and defer to the opinions of others to whatever degree was necessary so that a working formula might be evolved. Eliot called this "rule by democratic principle."

It is strange that brilliant men like Eliot could blind themselves to two things that vitally affect their humanistic theories. The first is that there is a proneness to evil and selfishness and sin in the heart of man; and when this proneness to evil is unchecked and united with influence and power, it can succeed in reducing thousands into agreement with its proposals. If there are no absolute moral principles and no inalienable rights of the individual man, then bad men today have the technological means for controlling the city, the state, and the world.

The second thing overlooked by Eliot's optimistic view is

85Ibid., p. 54.
the testimony of history. For instance, if political mass murders are wrong only by reason of the agreement of some groups of people, then political mass murders by "agreement" will occur again and again in the future history of man.

Eliot was a sincere and fervent believer in a religion that placed its greatest reliance on increased knowledge and good works. However, events of the twentieth century - Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Vietnam, and Biafra - have made his easy optimism unpalatable. Eliot wrote confidently: "The truth will progressively make men free so that coming generations will be freer, and therefore more productive and stronger than the preceding." Most contemporary Americans are not quite so sure about this kind of optimism as they once were, and it is this uncertainty which constitutes a great present problem.

It is not, the writer suspects, that we do not want to have faith but that certainty of faith escapes us. All things have been brought into doubt, and fearing to be victimized we are inclined not to believe at all. We simply are not the "true believers" of whom

\[\text{\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., p. 51.}\]
Eliot spoke, and this suggests that his really did not turn out to be a religion for the future. Something was left out of his account, the absence of which has gone a long way toward vitiating his position.

For Eliot, the enemies to his true faith were churches, creeds, priests, anything supernatural, any concern for a life after death, anything that professed to be sacramental. The writer suspects that Eliot considered the doctrine central to generations of believers - that Jesus came into the world to save sinners - as so much twaddle. His was to be a "simple and rational faith" and there was to be no place in it for "metaphysical complexities or magical rites."

Despite Eliot, churches and creeds and metaphysical complexities have persisted and we have need of them still. This is where Eliot was wrong. It has become frighteningly clear that if we try to ignore metaphysical considerations, they will rise up in perverted and distorted forms to mock our circumscribed efforts. Nor was it right to have assumed, as Eliot did, that if only one could get

87 Ibid., p. 52.
rid of churches and creeds, one would by that act also get rid of the human failings which had in the first place produced the blemishes irritating to him. Churchmen are not the only men who can be guilty of failures of imagination, understanding, and charity.

Eliot had a creed, whether he admitted to it or not. It is implicit, for instance, in every line of The Religion of the Future. Most people in our time would probably find his creed an inadequate one. What this proves, the writer believes, is that our need was not then and is not now to get rid of creeds but rather to examine into them to find an adequate one for our time. We need to know, as Eliot stressed, but we need also to believe. What we want especially to do is to believe knowingly and to know with conviction.

Eliot apparently would not, or could not, recognize that the old forms of Christianity which he was so ready to depreciate, and which, as they had been latterly abused, rightfully irritated him, had at one time been vehicles for holding and transmitting truth—that is, for communicating profound and relevant insights about the human situation—from one generation to another. What he did not suspect was that in getting rid of the forms we ordinary citizens would also run the risk of getting rid of the insights, and that we
would in fact, in surrendering to a new kind of blindness or idolatry, run the risk of cutting ourselves off from a whole, possibly the most central, area of human experience.

Eliot was wrong, the writer thinks, in urging his generation to get rid of what he called "paganized Christianity" by eschewing metaphysics and by escaping into a formless empyrean of good will. He might have done better to exhort his generation to simultaneously keep a firm grasp on the spiritual treasure that has been transmitted to them while wrestling vigorously toward a fresh understanding of "first things."

The need of contemporary America is not for a religion of the future but for religion now, since the vigorous and creative faith which Eliot and his generation had has largely spent its force. The sad truth is that in many areas and in many minds, a paralyzing disbelief has taken its place. There is, the writer believes, a very widespread religious illiteracy among contemporary Americans and correspondingly little religious practice. Still, it is to be hoped that we can avoid Eliot's error in asserting that all that is lacking is a matter of knowledge. It is rather, the writer thinks, a matter of faith.
It is necessary to recognize that truth can be lost in a formless and uninformed faith, and that we can no longer get along in the face of our present great needs with such. The university must always serve truth, but we must make a fresh effort and learn again to do this more fully. Eliot’s insights into the "new religion" did not encompass the whole of it. Another man’s will not either but we must go on trying, freshly and creatively, in humility and in love, and with all the allies we can find. It is to be hoped that now we can have a revitalized study of religious learning, and that its influence will be increasingly felt throughout the whole of American higher education.

Assessment

This chapter has documented the role of Charles Eliot in the secularization of American thought. Eliot believed that the "true" American university should be nonsectarian so as to provide a free atmosphere for seeking after truth. The years since his long presidency at Harvard testify to his conviction that freedom from denominational censorship fostered an atmosphere of open inquiry. Most of subsequent presidents of major universities in the United States have agreed with his view that nonsectarianism was pretty
much a positive good.

The sad truth is that the nonsectarian policy Eliot recom-
mended so glibly has contributed to the shallowness of much of
American scholarship today. Nonsectarianism indeed has itself
become a creed which asserts that there is neither a need nor a
place for religion in American education today. To say this is not
to plead for a return of the Inquisition. It is rather to observe that
the study of man's relation to the objective world is not the whole
of education. The nonsectarian university, in so far as it proceeds
on the assumption that it is, must always fall short of adequate
ministry to human needs. The questions which are finally of most
importance to all of us in our private lives and for the health of
our "selves" are not the questions which secular inquiry asks of
nature, important as these are. They are rather the questions
which religion answers for her believers by supplying meaning to
life, by kindling hope, and by giving through faith in God a basis
for ethical behavior. It is because religion does these things for
her believers that it is so important.

However, Eliot did perform a memorable service for
theological education through his establishment of the Harvard
Divinity School on a nonsectarian and, as he saw it, "scientific" basis. In this regard, he had the foresight to divine and the courage to demonstrate a genuinely catholic form of education. It should be further noted that he consistently stressed tolerance in religion as a most potent influence for world peace. A Unitarian himself, one of his great achievements was to place Harvard, which had previously been a Unitarian university, on the broad base of religious tolerance and nonsectarianism. To the faculty of the Divinity School, which from its inception had been composed of Unitarians exclusively, Eliot added eminent scholars from other denominations, thereby tending to make Harvard more broad and catholic in its religious teaching and influence. To his lasting credit, he sought an atmosphere in which the free interchange of well-matured opinion should be conducive both to the firmer grasp of truth and to the deepening of religious experience.

The writer surely has no quarrel with Eliot's desire to free the American university from the domination of narrow and anti-intellectual religionists. The writer applauds Eliot's success in providing at Harvard an academic freedom and scholarly atmosphere far different from the closed mindedness too often found in denomina-
tional institutions. Still, the unhappy consequence of nonsectarianism as a university policy has been antagonism to religion.

The second section of this chapter studied the efforts of Eliot to orient his fellow citizens to the impact modern science was having upon religious views. Although he was quite correct in pointing out that science and the new Biblical criticism were shattering many superstitious beliefs, Eliot went too far in arguing for a flippant disposal of the organized churches. Unfortunately, American society has somewhat accepted his advice to reject the religious, and perhaps mythical, memory of our cultural past. The writer fears however that a technological society which rejects its religious and metaphysical past may be doomed to superficiality and directionlessness.

Eliot's liberal religious views received a warm welcome from many Protestant Americans, although Catholic and Jewish Americans tended to regard his ideas with considerable suspicion. Thus, when the middle-class American of 1910 wanted cosmic reassurance, he eagerly turned to men like Eliot who were spokesmen of liberal religion and popular science. Even some time before Spencer or Fiske or Eliot, American religion itself had been
evolving. It is not surprising then that many Americans were highly pleased to read in Eliot's "new religion" that God had matured from a constitutional monarch to a vast indwelling force in the universe. Indeed, in the view of Charles Eliot, God's methods included not only biological evolution but also economic and political progress. Thus, the Divine methods, for Eliot, included law, commerce, and education and were readily palatable to the articulate and up-to-date American middle class of 1910.

Eliot's "new religion," 1910 Social Christianity, had two major practical limitations. First, it was largely the view of the middle class and had failed in its campaign to convert the immigrant urban masses. Further, millions of native Protestants probably would have rejected it as a distortion of Biblical truth. Religious liberals like Eliot failed to see the signs of the religious counter-revolution that was to sweep the United States after World War I. The second limitation was Eliot's unfailing faith in progress, a faith that World War I would devastate.
A Summing Up

This chapter has examined Eliot's attempts to help his fellow citizens cope with two major social problems posed by modern industrial conditions - namely the difficulty of preserving individualism in an increasingly organized society and the secularization of American life and thought. As for his role as a defender of individualism in an organized society, Eliot somewhat naively contended that modern organization's threat to the individual has been vastly exaggerated. With his cold deterministic and materialistic approach to human problems, Eliot contentedly pointed out that what was denounced by some as regimentation of the individual was the price paid for giving virtually every individual a wider, longer, and richer life.

While the writer explicitly criticized Eliot for underestimating modern organization's threat to the individual, he congratulates Eliot for pointing out that organization as such does not crush the individual. Even the tightest of organizations depends on individual creativity, Eliot said, and creativity exists as long as man has any moral initiative of his own. A very constructive message of his 1910 book, The Conflict between Individualism
and Collectivism in a Democracy, is that men can be made free only when they are inwardly bound by their own sense of responsibility.

In the analysis of Eliot's role and views in the secularization of American life and thought, it was pointed out that he, perhaps superficially, saw secularization largely as a positive good. This motivated his enthusiastic support for the nonsectarian university ideal and the "new religion." While the writer applauded Eliot's success in providing at Harvard an academic freedom and scholarly atmosphere far different from the closed mindedness often found in denominational institutions, an unhappy consequence of nonsectarianism as a university policy has been antagonism to religion. Although Eliot may have been correct in observing that science and Biblical criticism were shattering many superstitious beliefs, the writer feels he went too far in arguing for a flippant disposal of the organized churches. Eliot himself had a creed, whether he admitted it or not, although most people in our time would probably find his creed an inadequate one.

For all the criticism the writer levied on Eliot's views on individualism and secularization, he must in balance and fairness note that the writings and activities of Eliot exhibited unusual breadth
and catholicity of interests. Whatever else might be said, one cannot fail to take Eliot seriously or to recognize his commitment to the cause of peace, intelligent action, and human betterment.
CHAPTER IV

AN ACTION - INTELLECTUAL

The involvement of intellectuals in public service is not new in the history of the United States; the Founding Fathers themselves were men of genuine learning. One of the intellectuals who tried to act in the public interest during the first quarter of this century was Charles Eliot, and this chapter will critically examine his efforts to use his talents in the best interests of the nation. Although Eliot was, for a generation, an associate and friend of some key men in American public life (Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and Woodrow Wilson, among others), his views and role in the shaping of American social and political policy have never been adequately explored. The implication of this lack of attention by historians seems to be that Eliot was just another captain of industry, "a ghost of the 1870's," who made little permanent contribution to

1

American social and political history. This chapter will examine the adequacy of this hypothesis by analyzing in detail Eliot's stand on the major issues in United States history between 1900 and 1925, the period when he was referred to as the "First Citizen of the Republic." The specific problems to be considered are the following: trusts and finance capital, labor conditions and labor unions; America's role as a world power; bosses and control of politics; the rights of Negroes and other minorities; nativism and immigration; taxation and tariffs; and prohibition.

**Trusts and Finance Capital**

As early as 1888, Eliot pointed out that the great corporations, as units of organization, had already far outstripped the governments of the states. He remarked that a certain railroad with offices in Boston employed 18,000 persons, had gross receipts of about $40,000,000 a year, and paid its highest salaried officer $35,000. At

---

2Chicago Record Herald, November 5, 1908, p. 7.

the same time, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts employed only 6,000 persons, had gross receipts of about $7,000,000 and paid no salary higher than $6,000. Eliot then pointed out that a really great railroad like the Pennsylvania would overshadow the Commonwealth far more imposingly than the Boston organization.

Eliot was not as fearful of corporate power as some Progressives came to be. However, he did observe that "the activity of corporations, great and small, penetrates every part of the industrial and social body, and their maintenance of all the governments on the American Continent combined."

In February of 1909, Eliot lashed out at unethical employers and capitalists. He faulted them for the following reasons: exercising the stern right of instant dismissal; closing one establishment that the profits of another may be increased; refusing to establish a rising wage scale for the employee and to reward long

---


5 Chicago Record Herald, February 11, 1909, p. 4.
and faithful service. Eliot described his opposition to the trusts in
moral terms:

The objection of all civilized people to a monopoly is a
moral obligation. Monopoly is always an advantage to
the monopolist selfishly enforced against the rest of the
community. Every monopoly is an interference with the
liberty of everybody except the monopolist.\textsuperscript{6}

An earlier (1904) speech in Boston found Eliot enumerating
the dangers of great combinations of capital and suggested modifica-
tions to remove them. "The present tendencies of trusts suggest
strongly that it is expedient to establish over them governmental
inspection and control." Eliot then pointed out that the action of
legislative or judicial remedies must necessarily be slow and super-
ficial. The real remedies, he concluded, must be found through the
deep workings of the same democratic spirit which created conditions
making such strife possible.

A 1906 speech in Chicago found Eliot condemning the trusts
for their practices of using dummy directors and paying huge salaries

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., p. 4.

\textsuperscript{7} New York Times, February 8, 1904, p. 9.
to corporation officers and other evils:

Legislatures and courts have not been able to keep up with the onward rush of eager and adventurous business, particularly in this country where industrial and commercial enterprise is stimulated by a political and social freedom heretofore unknown. Directors and managers of corporations need to be convinced that corporations have souls, which may be lost by just such conduct as would cause the loss of one man's soul, and that the question 'What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?' applies to corporations. The exaggeration of salaries is indeed a great abuse. 8

Eliot's warfare against the trusts suffered from uncertainty as to specific solutions, an uncertainty derived from the fact that he had a more complex vision of the problem than the old-fashioned trust busters. For Eliot who discerned an evolutionary necessity in economic concentration, the Sherman Act was an exercise in nostalgia. Since Eliot came from a comfortable part of society and a general attack upon property was usually farthest from his mind, his assault upon great wealth put him in an ambiguous position. His way out of the paradox was to draw a line between good and bad wealth. Just where the exact lines should be drawn, Eliot would not say.

---


10 Ibid., p. 5.
Labor Conditions and Labor Unions

One of the things on which Progressives often disagreed was the proper place of labor unions in the national scheme of things. Most of them were altogether sympathetic to the situation of the working man but many feared the power of union organization in much the same way as the power of the great corporations. Charles Eliot, who was one of these progressives, expressed his concern in a 1914 address:

The blame for industrial warfare should be placed evenly. Trade unions are primarily to blame. Always they are demanding an increase in pay, always they are raising the cry for higher wages or to improve the conditions of labor. Yet in many cases capital is to blame for deplorable conditions under which men labor, and in many cases with unjust pay. 11

Eliot unequivocally asserted that the labor unionist was injuring himself in the eyes of society as a whole - by limiting the opportunities of young men seeking to prepare for a trade, by refusing to allow the government to regulate the huge labor combinations, by undertaking to prescribe a minimum wage, by apportioning work in one locality to a limited number of favored men that the

11 Ibid., p. 5.
job may last longer.

Critical of monopolies in general, Eliot was particularly scornful of labor unions and rightly enraged the organized labor movement by calling the "scab" an "American hero." Arguing that freedom was the source of joy and efficiency in work, he maintained a strong suspicion of trade unionism. The closed shop he regarded as an evil because it destroyed "the individual freedom of workman or proprietor, and this freedom is the main source of American efficiency."

Eliot repudiated the limitation of output by unions as "the most degrading of all the trades-union doctrines and practices; for it destroys the enjoyment of achieving, and that enthusiastic pursuit of an ideal which makes work done in an artistic spirit and with good will a durable satisfaction throughout life. It defeats the true democratic standard for a workingman's life - increasing intelligence, efficiency, personal liberty, and cooperative good will."

12 Chicago Record Herald, February 11, 1909, p. 4.


14 Ibid., p. 260.
Eliot advocated universal adoption of cooperative management and discipline, increased welfare provisions for employees, abandonment of "the conception that capital is the natural enemy of labor and that unorganized laborers are traiters to their class," and of the "ideal that it is desirable for workers of any sort to work as few hours in a day as possible," and "absolute rejection of the notion that leisure rather than steady work should be the main object of life."

What was really immoral to Eliot was any instance of violence or irrational advantage. Thus, labor strikes were dangerous follies he wished to prevent. "Strikes, the chief warlike weapon of the unionist, interfere with the stability of industries and are unethical as well as wasteful and liable to import into industrial strife extremes of violence and ill will."

Eliot may properly be criticized for not clearly understanding the difference between creative and artistic work, and the forced and dehumanizing labor to which the mass of mankind was condemned by industrialism. His affection for the "Protestant Ethic" of hard work

15 Ibid., p. 258.

16 Chicago Record Herald, February 11, 1909, p. 4.
and success is clear. For most Americans however, the Protestant Ethic was dead by 1917. A key assumption of the Protestant Ethic and Eliot had been that success was due neither to luck nor to the environment but only to one's natural qualities; if men grew rich it was because they deserved to. The big organization of modern technology became a standing taunt to the dream of individual success. Quite obviously to anyone who worked in a big organization, those who survived best were not necessarily the fittest but, in more cases than not, those who by birth and personal connections had the breaks. Eliot failed to recognize that technology had rendered the modern successful man not an individualist but a man who works through others for others.

Admitting in theory that the labor union was a necessary organization in the modern world, his bias against organized labor was always greater than against the large corporations. Eliot seems to have considered the unions only a temporary expedient representing the necessity of one class standing against another until the United States could get beyond the questions of class and caste. Even where unions had demonstrably raised wages for their members, he seemed sure the benefits applied to the few and
really hurt the many. He particularly could not see why the skilled laborer needed the union for economic purposes.

It may be concluded that Eliot's stress on individualism in a maturing industrial economy was basically archaic. His refusal or inability to see the connection between economic institutions and class consciousness indicated a severe case of social myopia. His hopes to avert class strife by political and moral reform alone were scarcely realistic. Extremely paradoxical was the coexistence of his own intense group loyalties with his strong antipathy to the class consciousness of organized capital and labor.

Bossses and Popular Control of Politics

By the time of the Progressive era, the weaknesses of America's political system had become glaringly patent in the misgovernment of its cities. Eliot appealed to the general interest of the people by demonstrating that no one suffers worse from municipal misrule than the citizen of small income. He advocated administration by small commissions of experts with long tenure of office, and he inspired the first trial of this plan in two New England cities. His earnest theme was always that better education would

17 Chicago Record Herald, February 11, 1909, p. 4.
18 Chicago Record Herald, March 2, 1907, p. 2.
make reform truly effective.

Eliot had a firm, although provincial, faith in the rationality of democratic tendencies. In counting up America's contributions to world civilization, he included "the safe development of a manhood suffrage nearly universal" in the actual governing of the state through the votes of its citizens. According to Eliot, the American democracy effects "the combination of individual freedom with social mobility, it permits the capable to rise through all grades of society."

He further commented that American democracy created the periodical interest of the voters in the discussion of grave public problems, enabled the capable citizen to wield far-reaching influence, inspired genuine grass-roots support as did no other form of government, and thereby engendered the strongest spirit of sacrifice.

Impressed by the past success of American democracy, Eliot pointed out that in three major crises of American history prior to 1914, (independence from Britain, forming a federal union, and maintaining that union), "the only wise decision was arrived at by

19 Eliot, American Contributions, p. 37.

20 Ibid., p. 60.
the multitude." He therefore stated that "democracy is a training school in which multitudes learn in many ways to take thought for others, to exercise public functions, and to bear public responsibilities."

Eliot's immediate response to bossism and the need for popular control of politics were strong denunciations of improper political activity by office holders and effective work in behalf of municipal reform. In particular, he recommended the employment of experts with long tenure of office instead of the constant rotation in office of mere politicians.

From a larger view, Eliot saw public education as a vehicle for desirable social reform and viewed it as a unifying element for a democratic society. The theme of educating men to the service of democracy shaped his views about public education. With a view toward a uniform and democratic system of education, he was particularly zealous in urging the reform of the public school, and devoted a major part of his energy to public education.

---

21 Ibid., p. 41.

22 Ibid., p. 43.

23 Chicago Record Herald, December 12, 1909, Part I, p. 11.
"Accessibility of appropriate opportunity is the essence of democratic society," he pointed out.

America's Role as a World Power

In 1898 Charles Eliot was opposed to imperialistic foreign adventures; by 1917 he had become a strong advocate of America's mission to make the world safe for democracy. Eliot gradually proved to be agreeably acquiescent to the imperialist surge and favored increased naval expenditures and Carribean adventures in imperialism. By 1916 Eliot was demanding a regular army of 250,000 men, compulsory universal military training, and a top navy. By 1917 he was insisting that the United States recognize her international obligations and keep mobilized resources in readiness to honor them.

During the 1914-1920 period, Eliot strongly advocated that the United States should take a responsible lead in the international community. Thus, he strongly supported the American entry into World War I. Subsequently, he campaigned for American entry

24 Eliot, "The function of education in a democratic society," Outlook, 57 (November 6, 1897), 572.

into the League of Nations and was active in promoting suggestions for peace plans.

In view of his own Anglo-Saxon background as a New England patrician, Eliot was ardently pro-British by kinship and eagerly found reasons for advising the American people to go to war against Germany. Aware that the simplest of moral judgments play an important part in the diplomacy of a democratic people, he skillfully did his part to make moral judgments a significant factor in determining the attitude of most Americans between 1914 and 1918. Mindful that trade and finance tied the American economy closely to Britain, he capitalized on the unfavorable stereotype of Germany that Anglophiles had created in the minds of many Americans. The pen of Charles Eliot openly added fuel to the anti-German fire burning in the hearts of "one hundred per cent Americans."

After the conclusion of World War I, Eliot vigorously campaigned for James Cox and the League in the 1920 election. While his efforts in behalf of Cox and the League were unsuccessful, Harding's triumph was really not a popular repudiation of the League,


as "irreconcilables" gloatingly proclaimed. Despite the earnest efforts of men like Cox and Roosevelt, the League probably had less to do with the outcome than prohibition, Irish independence, protest against the rising cost of living, and the twin waves of nativism and anti-Bolshevism which made reform and Red radicalism seem of one piece.

Eliot was probably correct in believing the United States could not avoid involvement in World War I, although he neatly sugared his propaganda with rhetoric about the conflict between democracy and totalitarianism. His position regarding the League entitled Eliot to respect as a responsible critic of America's role in world affairs. Although he correctly asserted that the United States could not escape from global responsibility, he badly miscalculated the American mood in the election of 1920.

Had a large majority of Americans been persuaded by men like Eliot of the League's value in 1920, the Republican technique of avoiding the issue would probably have been unsuccessful. He seems to have been blind to the fact that there appears to have been an immense reaction against Wilson and everything he represented against the idealism and the self-criticism of the Progressive era,
against reform, the war, political intensity, self-sacrifice, and personal discipline. The world that Eliot and the Progressives had so confidently tried to reform had largely been shattered by World War I.

Prohibition

Although Eliot tirelessly campaigned for "freedom of choice in studies" (the elective system), he characteristically took his stand with the "Establishment" on the prohibition issue. His stand here is in fact paradoxical. For years Charles Eliot was a strong advocate of individual responsibility as manifest in the elective system, academic freedom for professors, and relaxation of regulations for student behavior. Previous to World War I, he opposed governmental prohibition on the grounds that it unnecessarily infringed on the freedom of the individual.

Although Eliot listed the results of World War I medical examinations as the reason for changing his mind, the writer believes this point is not at all the essential factor in his ultimate opposition to prohibition. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that Eliot associated heavy drinking with the flood of new immigrants.

He himself was a New England patrician and the son of a former mayor of Boston. He was naturally alarmed that the uneducated and swarthy Irish and Italian immigrants had literally taken over his hometown of Boston via the Democratic political machine.

His views on prohibition illustrate where Eliot stood in the struggle between two visions of morality and two ways of life. He seems to have considered drinking a preeminent vice of immigrants and of corrupt city life. The subsequent crime and corruption concerning illegal liquor probably surprised him — perhaps because he characteristically thought everybody should have "progressive" ideas similar to his own.

Prohibition was, after all, partly the intelligent patrician's reaction to pressure from the masses below. The astute Eliot realized that the New England upper classes were hopelessly outvoted, and their reign of direct political control of Boston was forever ended. However, prohibition might curb some of the gross excesses of the swarthy newcomers, and civil service reform had a chance of curbing the blatant corruption that he felt accompanied the dominance of government by the "wrong kind of people."
Rights of Negroes and Other Minorities

Charles Eliot is currently enjoying a reputation as a liberal on race relations. While Eliot's views on this point should not be demeaned (he did admit Jews and Negroes and Catholics to Harvard at a time when this represented a brave policy), he seemed to have in mind "assimilable" peoples — that is, people of the white race, and even there with some qualifications.

Eliot displayed the style of his thought on the race question in a 1924 speech at Cambridge before the Harvard Zionist Society. Citing Irish individuality as an example, he advised the Jews not to intermarry with Christians. In substantiating his theories, he declared that the Irish:

have never been assimilated in America, anywhere, and it is not desirable that they should be. So it should be with the Jews. Americans do not expect to assimilate any foreign people, even the Jews. It seems that non-assimilation is better for the future of the nation.

Eliot viewed Jews stereotypically but had no thought of excluding them or limiting their freedom of movement. He once remarked: "It is doubtless true that Jews are better off at Harvard than at any other

29

30
Ibid., p. 2.
American college; and they are therefore likely to resort to it."

Negroes were admitted to Eliot's Harvard long before they were eligible at most major universities. However, in his letters to hostile Southern parents Eliot was not always sure that he approved of much social intercourse between the two races. Further, he reached no clear conclusion on the issue of segregation of schools and public facilities generally. As a founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, he was very much interested in the whole problem of race relations in the United States. He felt however that the political situation was too delicate for any effective political action.

Eliot gave as his program for Negro elevation productive labor, family life, universal education, and respect for law. He did specify that the federal government should aid the South in educating the Negro. While pointing out that the Constitution called for the political equality of its citizens, he felt this did not carry with it social equality. Eliot favored a suffrage limited by both educational


33 Chicago Record Herald, April 5, 1906, p. 5.
and property requirements and made it plain that persons of all races who met these standards should have the right to vote, as well as other basic civil rights.

Considering the historical context of his remarks, Eliot may accurately be regarded as a glib spokesman of American public opinion on race questions. The Progressive era was, after all, a period of vigorous anti-Negro, anti-Catholic, and anti-Jewish sentiment. Eliot surely did not regard himself as a bigot; yet he was really an articulate spokesman for white racism.

Although Eliot advocated that citizenship should be extended to all peoples--regardless of race or creed, the immigrant masses were a threat to the old America he loved. He reacted to his fear of the immigrant's impending takeover by advocating that the elite Americans should not marry outside their class and by favoring drastic cutbacks in the immigration quotas.

Eliot's idea of American democracy constituted little more than suffrage and military service. He saw little reason why non-WASPS should feel that they have a right to share fully in the promise of American life. While he strongly condemned the flagrant racism of the Klu Klux Klan, he did little to help assimilate minority groups
into the mainstream of American life. A man of his stature could have greatly helped the nation with truly responsible racial ideals.

**Nativism and Immigration**

Eliot felt little enmity toward the immigrants but little identification with them either. Neither could he realize that the newcomers were significantly influencing American culture. Eliot viewed the immigrant as a passive entity, malleable and still to be molded under the influences of American society.

The logic of Eliot's democracy should have pointed beyond this negative tolerance. It should have pointed to a respect for the integrity and importance of all people, toward a cooperative concern with the problems of every group. While convinced of the solvent power of democracy, Eliot applied it largely to political equality. That it might reform relationships among men of varying creeds or cultures did not impress him.

**Income Tax and Tariff**

Eliot noted approvingly that the Wilson Administration had enacted a national income tax, "the justest and most expedient of all taxes in a democracy." He admitted "that a much needed improvement is a reduction in the limit of exemption so that a much
larger part of the population may pay the tax." He went on to warn:

All parties in a democracy are likely to seek the votes of the poorer classes by proposing to make the rich and the well-to-do alone provide the public revenues. Democracies surely have the power to demoralize themselves in this mean way; but patriots hope that democracies will not use this power. 34

Since Eliot felt that low tariffs tended to promote international peace, he praised Wilson's achievement of lower tariff rates. He also pointed out that low tariffs encouraged foreign trade.

The home market cannot support the vast machinery industries in which American workmen excel and the livelihood of a considerable fraction of the people is earned. In regard to many industries employers and employees alike have learned that foreign trade is essential to their support and development. This indispensable tariff reform was made promptly by the Democratic Congress and administration, and in a wise and successful way. The reform took effect at a fortunate moment because it promoted that great development of several American industries which the war brought about. It is hoped that the war will bring about a reduction of protectionist activities throughout the civilized world because they tend to develop hostile feelings and acts among nations, and therefore to delay the coming of lasting international peace. 35


Eliot seems to have been committed to the prevailing theoretical economics of laissez-faire. His economic program did not go much beyond tariff reform and sound money, and his political program rested upon the foundations of honest and efficient government and civil service reform. He was an economic "liberal" in the classic sense. Tariff reform, he thought, would be the sovereign remedy for the huge business combinations that were arising. He imagined that most of the economic ills that were remediable at all could be remedied by free trade, just as he believed that the essence of good government lay in honest dealing by honest and competent men.

Some Comments

This chapter has outlined the views of Eliot on the key public questions of the first quarter of the twentieth century. Specifically, it has examined his writings and speeches connected with the following topics: trusts and finance capitalism; labor conditions and labor unions; America's role as a world power; prohibition; bosses and popular control of politics; the rights of Negroes and other Minorities; nativism and immigration; and taxation and tariffs.

For the most part, it is apparent that Eliot's ideas on these
matters either directly reflected public opinion or helped to mold it in the directions it was already headed. Men like Charles Eliot seldom sold Americans ideas they really did not want; rather they made them seem noble and proper for good Americans. Thus, the American people realistically realized that they could not afford to sit out World War I. Men like Eliot and Wilson gave them facile rhetoric that complied with the American fetish to do something grand. Unfortunately, too many Americans were oversold by propaganda of the Wilson-Eliot type. Their disillusionment with this moral idealism ruled out American entry into the League.

Eliot was an intelligent man and, along with most Americans, gladly accepted the prosperity and materialism of the Progressive era. He was perceptive enough to realize the public wanted no government tampering with the economic status quo which greatly favored big business over the labor unions. It was however the workers who suffered most from the debacle of 1929, something Eliot never envisioned.

A wise old man like Charles Eliot should have realized that prohibition in this country and at that time was doomed to failure. Still, he allowed his fears of "wet" immigrants to change his
original and sounder views. Again on the race question, he missed the boat. The country needed men of prestige who could elegantly explain to the people the necessity of admitting people of all races and creeds into full American citizenship.

Although he was greatly respected by his contemporaries, Eliot shrugged off numerous opportunities to tell the American people what was good for them to hear - preferring instead to tell them what they wanted to hear. His contribution to American history during the first quarter of this century was essentially that he greatly helped accelerate America's progress in directions it was already headed. It is to be pitted that he did little to try to alter these goals and directions.

**Characteristics of His Social and Political Views**

Charles Eliot was a strong believer in progress and, more importantly, had a sound understanding of how progress works and of the pace at which it goes on. A distinguishing characteristic was his activism. He argued that social evils would not remedy themselves, and that it was wrong to sit by passively and wait for time to take care of them. Eliot denied that the future should be left to take care of itself. Instead, he believed that the American
people should be stimulated to work energetically to bring about social progress, that the positive powers of government must be used to achieve this end. Conservatives generally believed in time and nature to bring progress; Eliot believed in energy and governmental action.

The basic mood of Charles Eliot was intensely optimistic. The dominant note of his speeches and writings was one of confidence, of faith that no problem was too difficult to be overcome by the proper mobilization of energy and intelligence in the citizenry. A 1906 speech displayed his certain faith in the possibilities of the future. Waxing eloquently on the progress of American democracy, he predicted enormous growth in might and population and called American democracy a proven success:

The progress of democracy will be the great feature of the advance of civilization in the twentieth century. Though critics of democracy say that democracy has destroyed some of the finer characteristics of the older countries, such as reverence of children towards parents, pupils toward teachers, the people toward their rulers, there is in all relations a more genuine relation than formerly. No nation in the world has such reverence for women as have the men of this great Republic. Our reverence for symbols has diminished, but not for the ideals which these material signs of religion and love of country stand for. 36

Eliot felt that the promise of social progress was not to be realized by sitting and praying, but by using the active powers - by the exposure of evils through the spreading of information and the exhortation of the citizenry; by using the possibilities inherent in the ballot to find new and vigorous popular leaders; in short, by a revivification of democracy. He hoped that an aroused American people would wrest power away from city and state bosses, millionaire senators, and other minions of invisible government and take it back into their own hands. Having done so, they would use their regained power - through the city, state, or federal governments, as the case might demand - to solve social and economic problems: tenements should be eliminated; the sweated labor of women and children should be forbidden; the Negro should be supported in the struggle for his rights;

37 Chicago Record Herald, December 12, 1906, p. 11.


39 Ibid., p. 770.

40 Ibid., p. 769.

41 New York Times, June 2, 1920, p. 3.
extortionate tariffs and monopoly prices should be regulated out of existence; social legislation should protect the working classes from the terrible hazzards of industry; unfair competition by the great corporations should be subject to constant policing by the government; the concentration of business control in the hands of a few powerful banking interests should be broken up; and the commercial exploitation of vice and drink should be reduced or eliminated.

Clearly what troubled Eliot about organized capital and labor was not only economics but questions of high politics, class prestige, class morality, and class power. Involved also was the rising threat to an old American way of life which he represented and which he considered good. Eliot was a member of an old group in America.

---


46 Chicago Record Herald, October 30, 1908, p. 3.
As businessmen and politicians, his Harvard-educated relatives and friends and similar types had engaged in extremely individualistic pursuits and had supplied most of New England's intellectual, moral, and political leadership. Still confident that he possessed most of society's virtues, Eliot was very aware that many of society's rewards and badges of merit were going to men quite unlike himself. His religious convictions, his personal morality, and his concept of law, he felt, were demeaned by the crude power struggle between capital and labor.

On the defensive for the first time since the disappearance of the old New England aristocracy, Eliot's class of individualists developed a group or class consciousness themselves. Men like Charles Eliot unquestionably claimed ethical and political superiority. Eliot then was militantly opposed to class control and class consciousness when it emanated either from below or above him.

What was his positive creed? In the first place, he was an extremely ethical-minded man. His writings, in fact, were freighted with problems of morality. While his religion was old American in its form, much of its content was a product of the
recent past. Conspicuously absent from his writings was the stern God of the Puritan, the abiding sense of tragedy and the inherent evilness of man. Indeed, Eliot seems to have believed in the essential nobility of man. With an Emersonian optimism, Eliot believed that evil perished and good would triumph. Sin may have been original but he seems to have doubted its transmission. Under the influence of Darwinism, the rising social sciences, and a seemingly benign America up to 1914, he gladly traded in some of the old mystical religion for a new social faith. He was aware that evil still existed, but he believed it a man-made thing and upon earth. What man created he could also destroy, and his present sinful state was the result of his conditioning. His writings suggest that when men were given justice, they would return justice to society. Further, he not only wanted to abolish a supernatural hell; he was intent also upon secularizing heaven.

Eliot too easily accepted belief in the fundamental goodness of the individual. To a surprising degree, this fervent belief in the "rightness" of the democratic process separated the Progressive Eliot from the conservative politician who usually insisted upon a "representative government" and held that "pure democracy" was
a dangerous thing. For Eliot, democracy was a thing to venerate.

According to his thought, behind every political question was a moral question whose answer could safely be sought in the moral law. Since most men were ethical agents, public opinion was the final distillate of moral law. It was a jury that could not be fixed. Eliot hardly regarded democracy as just a means to an end; to him, it was a positive moral force in operation, a good in itself. Ethical and benevolent, he did not quarrel with the doctrine of wardship, provided it was not pushed too far. He stood ready to protect obviously handicapped individuals and was ready and even eager to eradicate special privilege, which to his mind fundamentally limited opportunity for the man on the bottom to make his way economically upward.

For the most part, the Progressive Eliot was content with the basic concepts of the economic system under which American capitalism awarded its profits and its pains. He firmly believed in private property, profits, and especially the competitive system and acknowledged that the corporation and the labor union were necessary instruments of modern business. What Eliot did object to was not capitalism as such but rather the ideological, economic,
moral, and political manifestations which had arisen from that system. He was confident that no inevitable causal relation existed between American capitalism and its social results.

The denial of economic interest and the emphasis upon the general American welfare typified what Eliot saw in himself. Subjectively, he pictured himself as a complete individual wholly divorced from particular economic as well as class interests. Ready to do justice in the name of morality and the common good, he was, in his own estimation, something akin to Plato's guardians, above and beyond the reach of corrupting material forces.

Considering the middle-class type the solid moral element in America, Eliot was exceedingly class conscious even though his class was a collection of supreme individualists. His was a psychological group as well as an economic one, and his rising sensitivity was due as much to social, moral, and political causes as it was to the economic factor. His opposition to the corporation trust was more political and psychological in nature than it was economic, while the reverse was true of his attitude toward organized labor.

Whereas the communist, after a violent political and economic revolution, would have frozen his state on the proletariat level, Eliot
thought it possible to achieve and perpetuate a middle-class, capitalist level through the peaceful political instrument of democracy. Unlike the Marxists, Eliot believed it possible to stop the rise of class loyalties without removing existing economic inequalities or destroying existing economic groups. Since he thought primarily in political terms, his major concern was to remove class consciousness from politics.

Charles Eliot wanted to preserve the fundamental patterns of twentieth century industrial society at the same time that he sought to blot out, not only the rising clash of economic groups but the groups themselves, as conscious economic and political entities. He sought to do all this without profound economic reform. From today's vantage point, his aim of a capitalist commonwealth seems very naive.

Eliot died (in 1926) shortly before the Depression was to sorely test his faith in American capitalism and middle class domination. What would happen to the fundamental beliefs of men of his kind if they found out that their ends could not be achieved without substantial economic reform; if in spite of their efforts, labor threatened their economic and political estate; if many of them became economically and psychologically absorbed in the advancing corporate system; if in a less prosperous age, the clash between economic groups for a livelihood
created intense social friction? Would their moral calculus, their spirit of benevolence, their faith in men, their reverence for democracy still persist?

The fate of the progressivism of Charles Eliot and perhaps the fate of democracy in the twentieth century were wrapped up in the answers to those questions. For between militantly organized and class-conscious capital and equally militant class-conscious labor, Progressives like Eliot represented a makeweight for compromise, a pivot on which the democratic process could swing. The United States urgently needed that makeweight before 1914, until the nation could reconcile the contending ambitions of capital and labor on a better basis than dynamite and the general strike, and the company police and the lockout. Time was needed to relax the taut emotions of men, time and just enough action to lull the social pangs of the economic groups below, and not frighten the wealthy groups above.

Whether or not Progressives like Eliot could fulfill this role of skillful broker depended not only on their intelligence but also on their heart and ethical sense. Whether he realized it or not, Eliot was himself a capitalist and belonged to one of society's more fortunate groups. In trying to modify the struggle between organized
capital and labor, he would be faced in the long run with the necessity of giving up some of the social power of his class. In the large sense, the rock of the progressivism of Charles Eliot was to rest upon faith in the superiority of altruism over selfishness. Whether it was true and to what degree, only the years following Eliot's death could tell.

**Historical Evaluation of Eliot**

This chapter will now attempt to evaluate Eliot's proper role in the larger context of American social and political history. Specifically, it will examine whether or not the traditional interpretation of Eliot is valid - namely, that he was just another captain of industry who made no really solid and permanent contribution.

While a detailed study of his contributions to American education is surely beyond the scope of the present chapter, it is only fair to recognize that he was the commanding figure in American higher education between 1870 and 1920. It is not unlikely that he was more responsible than any other man for making Harvard University the most successful intellectual institution in the world during the past century. It may be assumed that he was a genuine success in
his particular field - educational administration.

Surely a man of good character like Eliot was anxious to serve his country in a larger context. Although he understandably declined ambassadorships to England and Japan due to his age, he made consistent efforts to influence American governmental policies for what he considered were noble ends. It should be remembered clearly however that when Eliot expressed his views on topics outside the realm of educational theory and practice, he was on unfamiliar ground and prone to error.

First of all, the usual interpretation of Eliot as a Cleveland-type conservative is incorrect. The evidence presented in this chapter strongly suggests that Eliot fitted very much in the Progressive mold.

A major weakness in his political and social views was that his interpretation of American history rested on an unrealistic evaluation of human nature. The result was that men like Eliot were unprepared for the dilemmas and challenges that Americans were to face in the great Depression of the thirties and the global conflict of the forties because of their tendency to view history in terms of a simple morality play where good always triumphed over evil.

Indeed, much of his social program (profit-sharing and
arbitration as a quick panacea for labor-management conflict) was doomed to failure because it was based upon the idea of a return to an ideology that emphasized acquisitive and individualistic values. A glaring deficiency in his thought was that, like most Progressives, he was unable to face up to the fundamental problems of an industrialized and corporate America.

Eliot's moral crusade to restore older Protestant and individualistic values was based on the simple idea that only men of character, the "right sort of people," should rule. Like his friends Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, Eliot was often unrealistic in his appraisal of and solutions to America's problems. His attempts to hold on to some of the values of agrarian life, to save personal entrepreneurship and individual opportunity and the character type they engendered, and to maintain a homogeneous Yankee civilization were futile. Blinded by his moral absolutism and righteous convictions, Eliot was unable to foresee that much of his ideology was narrow and undemocratic and would prepare the groundwork for a later reaction that would threaten the very fabric of American liberty.

Motivated by an intense faith in individualistic values, Eliot opposed the rapid concentration of power in the hands of large cor-
porate entities and the consequent emergence of an impersonal society. Progressives like him sought to recapture and reaffirm the older individualistic values, but they attempted to do so without undertaking any fundamental economic reforms or altering to any great extent the structure of American society.

In stressing the role of the expert and the ideals of scientific management, Eliot favored reforms directed not at making the government more democratic and responsive to the wishes of the American people, but to making it and the American people more efficient. His advocacy of federal regulation of business was not motivated by fear or hatred of large corporate enterprise. His goal was the elimination of senseless and destructive competition in the economic system by making business and government partners in the effort to eliminate the ups and downs of the business cycle. The progressivism of Charles Eliot reflected the desire of various professional groups to substitute planning for competition, to raise the "expert" to a position of paramount importance, and to end the inherent defects of democratic government by making government

conform to the ideals of efficiency and planning. It is interesting to note that in 1907 Eliot himself called in Frederick Winslow Taylor, the "efficiency" expert, to suggest ways of making Harvard more efficient.

Eliot may properly be criticized for accepting an optimistic moralism based on his unswerving faith in progress. Like most Progressive reformers, he tragically misunderstood man's propensity for evil and thereby failed to do his part to prepare Americans for the inevitable reaction that followed their failure to establish a democratic utopia at home and a peaceful international community of nations abroad in the first two decades of this century.

What can we say about Eliot's role in United States history? We must judge him, of course, on his role as a private citizen. Although he held no official position in American public life, he did use his personal prestige responsibly and well to alert his fellow citizens to the transformations being wrought by industrialism, democracy, and science.

It has been pointed out that when Eliot voiced his views on the great questions of the day, he was outside his own field of expert knowledge - educational administration. Many of his views,
particularly in historical retrospect, seem naive. He was sincere however in trying to come to grips with the baffling problems facing a rapidly growing nation that was painfully crossing the bridge from rural agrarianism to almost total industrialism.

The evidence presented here surely characterizes Eliot as a responsible private American citizen, one very much in the Progressive mold. As a college president who was enormously successful in his long work at Harvard University, he surely was not in the conservative class of Elihu Root or William Howard Taft or Henry Cabot Lodge - as Henry May implies in the End of American Innocence.

His attitude toward American involvement in international affairs explains much of the character of Eliot's "progressive" beliefs. He surely favored no attempt to remold the world anew, to discard the old system for a new society. Eliot was completely a part of American life, accepting the traditional values and ideals and aspirations of middle class America, including the new sense of delight in the rise of the United States as a world power. Con-

48
May, p. 36.
cerned more with the promise of American life than with the rights of all men, he saw nothing incongruous in supporting American investments abroad in the interest of expanded markets while condemning the same businesses at home for excessive profits and substandard wages.

While the contradiction between humanistic values and national aspirations was only one of the weaknesses pointed out in the criticism of his thought, his responsible position regarding the League entitled him to respect as a responsible critic of America's role in world affairs. He was surely correct in asserting that the United States could not escape global responsibility.

As a well known American educator, Eliot was for half a century an outstanding exponent of good citizenship, showing a rare combination of high idealism and sterling practical sense. In the person of Eliot, the "scholar in politics" meant that thorough knowledge, clear thinking, fearless courage, and tenacious purpose were put at the service of the nation by one devoid of selfish interest and above the lure of political preferment. His example brought Harvard into close contact with the cogent issues of contemporary life, and gave the public a new and illuminating insight into the rich manpower
resources contained in American universities, along with a fresh appreciation of the contributions to human progress which they make. Eliot thus helped bring together the spirit of learning and the spirit of democracy, in whose union lies part of America's hope for the future.

When Eliot of Harvard spoke out on key public issues between 1900 and 1925, the American people listened carefully. An accurate analysis of his major themes during this period provides keen insight into the prevailing climate of opinion. His responses to the major issues amply illustrate the quality of his own character, as well as the atmosphere in which he was writing.

This paper has pointed out that Eliot was not a really original thinker. He was very adept at sifting out the public mood and thereby made his own themes highly palatable. Though he spoke much and sincerely of the need for understanding and tolerating the opinions of others, he was really a nineteenth century liberal - the old-fashioned, cautious sort. His mind moved within a set of pre-technology ideas which he did not question (the Protestant Ethic, for instance), and most of his ideas were
the equipment of the average educated man of the time. It was for this reason that the great American public so heartily welcomed him as an official embodiment of and spokesman of its cherished virtues.

Charles Eliot was truly an administrative genius. The ethic of individualism had served him well but was no longer really helpful in the 1900-1925 period. He was shackled however by a nineteenth century view of man and society that technology was presently destroying. Although the American people liked to think that the aged seer Eliot possessed the answers to the great public questions of the Progressive era, this was not the case. With his heart longing for the America of the past that could never be again, Eliot was pretty much unable to cope with the problems of industrialized America.
CONCLUSION

The purpose of this dissertation, stated explicitly at the outset, was to provide an extensive and in depth study and evaluation of the contributions of Charles Eliot to American civilization. It was hoped that this dissertation would fill a real gap in educational history by analyzing and appraising his role as an educational leader so as to provide a critical interpretation of Eliot from an historical perspective. In other words, the basic aim of this study was to obtain solid evidence that would indicate some conclusions about the quality of Eliot's contributions to American education and to American life.

The first part of this historical analysis, Chapters One and Two, critically examined Eliot's role in the shaping of American education. Chapter One investigated his attempts to create at Harvard University a specific type or model that would benefit American higher education. Considerable evidence was found to document Eliot's role
in transforming Harvard College into a university of international eminence. While Eliot's record in this regard contained many notable accomplishments, serious reservation was expressed about many of his educational policies. It was concluded that while Eliot's leadership brought decided improvements in American higher education, it also spurred many colleges to opposite extremes in an effort to eliminate old failings.

Thus, the strait-jacket curriculum was abandoned but too often in favor of a disorganized elective system. The classics were divested of their monopoly but the value of classical culture was largely forgotten. Excellent new methods of teaching came into use, but in larger institutions they were swamped by the exigencies of mass education. Theology and dogma were largely displaced but education lost too much of its emotional and spiritual content. Science won a larger place but science teaching was too often given a sharp preprofessional slant to the neglect of its broader intellectual possibilities. For all his solid achievements at Harvard, in many ways the educational legacy of Charles Eliot unhappily consisted of the idealistic old college giving way to a new one with an excessive vocational bias.
Still, John Corbin, author of An American at Oxford, was probably correct in asserting that Eliot, by and large, rendered great service by broadening the field of instruction in American universities and by helping to establish the liberal spirit and the scientific method. Corbin was probably also correct in commenting that the means Eliot employed to achieve his success (the elective system and deemphasis of humanistic culture in favor of scientific studies) were, temporarily at least, destructive of those disciplinary and cultural values which have been for many centuries the thing prized in Western education.

It was mentioned at the outset of Chapter Two that educational historians have not given much attention to Eliot as an educational theorist other than to dismiss him as a shallow and superficial thinker. The evidence presented in Chapter Two acknowledges that while Eliot may not have been a really seminal thinker in proposing newer models of the educated man, he did execute and publicize


a brilliant program for educational reform. While the writer listed several major criticisms of Eliot's underlying educational philosophy, Eliot correctly judged that the classical ideal of the well-rounded man was obsolete and he did help provide a number of better alternatives. Probably no other man in American education was so instrumental in breaking the monopoly of the classics on academic prestige.

It was concluded in Chapter Two that the elective system, despite unfortunate excesses, did serve a useful purpose by providing alternatives to the classical or prescribed program of studies. The "modern studies" Eliot thereby introduced proved to be academically worthwhile alternatives to the classics and useful to a rapidly developing American civilization. It was also noted that Eliot preferred scientific training as an alternative to classical education. In an age that glorified naturalism and pragmatism, he emphasized the importance of the scientific method generally conceived as the basis for modern scholarship and research - and long before John Dewey began to publish. It is possible that no other

man did as much as Charles Eliot to elevate the status of science in American education.

No claim was made that Eliot had a monopoly on proposing newer models of the educated man to break the classical headlock on American education. Eliot did however hold a key position as president of Harvard University for forty years and was thus able to use his office and considerable skill to publicize and implement alternative models through his ideas and practices regarding the breaking up of the prescribed classical curriculum and enlarging the curriculum through the elective system, scientific culture, professional training, and popular education rather than education largely for an elite.

A major concern of this study was to obtain evidence that would indicate some inferences about the quality of Eliot's contributions to American education. The writer feels that the evidence and verdict of history, all things considered, are generally on Eliot's side and that his long series of years were of great service to his age and to his nation. The writer agrees essentially with the following comments written by the Negro president of Tuskegee Institute, R. R. Moton, almost a decade after Eliot's death:
For more than fifty years the names of Harvard and Eliot were synonymous in education. They stood at the highest point of progress in this field and represented the most substantial achievement and clearest, sanest leadership in American culture. The institution under the guidance of the man became for nearly all other schools the pattern of academic accomplishment; the man, reflected in the institution, became the unchallenged leader in the evolution of educational methods and standards for the whole company of those charged with the development of American youth. To attain a degree from Harvard was the pinnacle of achievement for undergraduates and graduate students alike; and parents and public accepted without question her diploma as the hallmark of scholarship and culture.

From the walls of Harvard, Eliot sent out into American life the men who were to become its leaders in business, in industry, in statecraft as well as in arts and letters; and it was no mere gesture of sentimentality that led him to honor Booker T. Washington, the founder of Tuskegee, with an honorary degree. Eliot recognized in the philosophy and practice of this great leader in Negro education the direct application of education to life and its problems which Harvard had already adopted as its own.

In his own person, Charles William Eliot embodied the finest traditions of New England and of America. He represented the finest flower of democracy in whose principles he believed with deepest conviction. Without proclamation the doors of Harvard University stood open to the humblest seeker after truth, without regard to race or color. Its opportunities for advancement in scholastic achievement were at the full disposal of those who knew how to use them, and Harvard men who are Negroes have
the same veneration for President Eliot that men everywhere have for him who ungrudgingly admitted to the fellowship of truth, virtue, and honor all men who bore the marks thereof in their own character.  

The second part of this dissertation examined Eliot's role as an historical figure in the broad sweep of the American past. Motivated by Ralph Barton Perry's characterization of Eliot as "an advisor to the American people on things in general," Chapter Three documented and critically evaluated Eliot's efforts to alert his fellow citizens to two of the major problems that have plagued industrialized societies throughout this century - the difficulty of preserving individualism in an increasingly organized society and the secularization of American life and thought.

While Eliot may have underestimated modern organization's threat to the individual, he did astutely conclude that organization as such does not crush the individual. Even the tightest of organizations depends on individual creativity, Eliot said, and creativity exists as long as man has any moral initiative of his own. A hardly insignificant message of his 1910 book, The Conflict between Individualism and Collectivism in a Democracy, was that men can be made free only when they are inwardly bound by their own sense of responsibility.

In the second part of Chapter Three, it was pointed out that secularization was, for Eliot, largely a positive good and consequently he enthusiastically supported the nonsectarian university ideal and "the new religion." While Eliot provided at Harvard University an academic freedom and scholarly atmosphere far different from the closed mindedness usually found in denominational institutions, a sad consequence of nonsectarianism as a university policy has been antagonism to religion.

Chapter Four examined the adequacy of Henry May's interpretation of Eliot as a Grover Cleveland-type conservative who made little or no permanent contribution to American history. A detailed analysis of Eliot's position on the major political, social, and economic issues of the 1900-1925 period indicated that he appears to have been definitely in the mainstream of Progressivism rather than Conservatism. Motivated by an intense faith in individualistic values, Eliot opposed the rapid concentration of power in the hands of large corporate entities and the consequent emergence of an impersonal society. Like most of the Progressives, Eliot sought to recapture and reaffirm the older individualistic values but they attempted to do so without undertaking any fundamental economic
reforms or altering to any great extent the structures of American society.

In stressing the role of the expert and the ideals of scientific management, for instance, Eliot favored reforms directed not at making the government more democratic and responsive to the wishes of the American people but to making it and the American people more efficient. Thus, Eliot's advocacy of federal regulation of business was not motivated by fear or hatred of large corporate enterprise. His goal was the elimination of senseless and destructive competition in the economic system by making business and government partners in the effort to eliminate the ups and downs of the business cycle. The Progressivism of Charles Eliot reflected the desire of various professional groups to substitute planning for competition, to raise the "expert" to a position of paramount importance, and to end the inherent defects of democratic government by making government conform to the ideals of efficiency and planning.

Judging Eliot on his role as a private citizen, the writer feels that Eliot used his prestige responsibly and well to alert his fellow citizens to the transformations being wrought by industrialism, democracy, and science. As the successful administrator of a
great educational institution, as an influential leader in the field of education in general and as a wise and active public citizen, Eliot’s life illustrates a great possibility of a free and open society - that a capable and public-spirited man can use his office for the larger interests of the community. However one might disagree on Eliot’s views, his writings and activities exhibited unusual breadth and catholicity of interests. Whatever else might be said, one cannot fail to take Eliot seriously or to recognize his commitment to the cause of peace, intelligent action, and human betterment.

Was the United States any better off because of the long life of Eliot? William Howard Taft was one who strongly believed that American life was the better because of Eliot’s career. As Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, Taft gave the following evaluation of Eliot:

His primacy in all educational reform, his interest in adjusting the equities of the laborer and the capitalist, and the useful candor in which he points out the shortcomings of each, his abiding enthusiasm for the promotion of municipal governments in which the welfare of the citizen is most intimately bound up, his yearning for the enlargement of the lungs of congested cities in parks and playgrounds, his activity in the husbanding and preservation of the National
Resources, his patient, persistent, consistent advocacy of the reform of the Civil Service, his earnest labor in the cause of international peace, have prompted his lay sermons and made men hearken to him.

His life has borne testimony to his deep love for his fellow men, and his constant solicitude for the right solution of their problems. It has given him a pulpit from which he has preached as few men have preached to our people. It is not fulsome to say that he has wielded greater power with the intelligent democracy of this country than any other unofficial citizen of his time. On behalf of the American people, I tender to Dr. Eliot their profound congratulations on his long life of usefulness and honor, and their deep and grateful appreciation of the work he has done for them as their untitled champion for more than half a century. 5

Woodrow Wilson agreed with Taft's favorable evaluation of Eliot. Four years before his election as president of the United States, Wilson gave the following reaction to Eliot's work in behalf of American education and the American people:

No man has ever made a deeper impression upon the educational system of a country than President Eliot upon the educational system of America. His gift for leadership, his discrimination in the choice of men, and his power to conceive and execute large plans have made him the most conspicuous and influential figure of the last forty years in American education. He has moreover shown a public spirit and a sense of duty in all matters affecting the life of the community in which he has lived and the life of the

country at large which have made him the leading private citizen of the Republic. His counsel has been felt in affairs for a generation, and always felt in the interest of right action and wholesome sentiment.  

H. L. Mencken, who had long fought the Anglo-Saxon monopoly of American culture, surprisingly reacted favorably to Eliot's work. His peroration on Eliot was typically Menckenesque:

Eliot was a curious and mysterious man, full of inexplicable talents and equally inexplicable stupidities. Eliot was a state of mind far more than a body of ideas. What President Eliot thought, said, and did was often irrational and sometimes downright foolish, but taking one day with another his cogitations undoubtedly ran in a salubrious direction, and so it is quite reasonable to list him as one of the important men of his time.

Eliot became invested toward the end, if only by living so long, with the occult grandeur of a sage. But even if he had died at fifty he would have been remembered, for he began his life's work at thirty-five, and before ten years had come and gone he had left a mark on American education which remains brilliantly plain to this day.

Eliot was simply a university administrator - high-geared, bold, revolutionary, and immensely competent. He knew how to attract learned men to his staff, how to keep these learned men in order and, most

---

6 Chicago Record Herald, November 5, 1908, p. 7.
of all, how to get the money to pay them. His general tastes, as he revealed them in frequent speeches and books, were healthy and respectable but scarcely exciting. Eliot indulged himself in critical thinking only within the confines of his trade. Otherwise he was a good New Englander and rather inclined to commercial ways of thought.

All the same, there was a touch of genius in him. Charles William Eliot accomplished things that were beyond ordinary men - even beyond most men of the abler sort. There was a fine resolution in him and an eagerness for perfection, even though he often defined it ineptly. His tolerance was large and real. He never cherished grudges, and had a shrewd eye for the virtues and uses of his enemies. Somewhat stiff and pedantic of manner, he seldom made men love him but he almost always made them respect him. If Charles Eliot was not really great, then he was nearly so.7

It seems very appropriate to refer to some judgments on Eliot made by both educational and academic historians and interpret these views in the light of the findings and conclusions of this dissertation. The first part of this study, of course, aimed to provide an extensive and in depth historical study and evaluation of the quality of Eliot's contributions to American education. The findings of this dissertation will now be compared with the reactions to Eliot of the following educational historians - Adolph Meyer, H. G. Good, John Brubacher, R. Freeman Butts, Lawrence Cremin, Edward Krug, and

7H. L. Mencken, "Master Pedagogue," Nation, CXXXI (December 3, 1930), 617.
Lawrence Veysey.

Adolph Meyer took a dim view of Eliot's elective system, although Eliot was, Meyer admitted, "the most able and the most formidable advocate of the Spencerian credo." In his skeptical comments on the elective system, Meyer noted that "despite democracy the right of unlimited election is no longer the campus vogue, and even at Harvard it has long since departed." In Chapter One of this dissertation, the writer took a different view of Eliot's elective system. Eliot, this writer concluded, needed such a device in order to achieve at Harvard a substantial lease on life for the natural and physical sciences. What Eliot really fashioned at Harvard was a device for bringing science and the other new disciplines into equality with the older subjects, a device for bringing a new spirit of inquiry and scholarship into the life of the university and for bringing Harvard into a position of commanding leadership in American life.

H. G. Good took a more kindly view of Eliot and the elective system than did Adolph Meyer. For H. G. Good, the elective system


was a successful educational reform. Its excesses had to be eventually curbed but the old requirements were not reinstated. Good's comments seem to agree with a conclusion of Chapter One of this dissertation that what the elective practices did to freshen college studies, to break down pedagogical rigidities, to undermine the old-style disciplinarians, to shift the emphasis from memory work to inquiry, to add variety to solid acquisitions, depth to breadth, and enthusiasm to the dusty walls of learning should not be forgotten. Also, where Adolph Meyer did not consider Eliot as an independent educational thinker in his own right, H. G. Good and the present writer agree that Eliot was (along with Dewey and Parker) a major theorist of the Progressive Education movement in the United States.

The comments of John Brubacher on the elective system agreed essentially with the conclusions of the present writer given in Chapter One. That is, the elective system came about in part because the traditional classical curriculum did not satisfy middle-class aspirations. Brubacher and the findings of this study agree that the

10 Ibid., p. 392.

elective system was really an element in a far broader social
development. The elective principle and equal study values,
laissez-faire and economic enterprise, manhood suffrage and the
absence of class barriers - all these marched together.

Chapter Two of this dissertation emphasized, among other
things, Eliot's work in behalf of popular education, including public
secondary schooling. R. Freeman Butts and Lawrence Cremin
and Edward Krug agreed with the conclusion of this researcher that
Eliot was a real force in the shaping of popular education in the United
States. Incidentally, Butts and Cremin cited Eliot's important
1888 address, "Can school programs be shortened and enriched?", as being influential in the new organization of secondary education.
In that particular speech, according to Butts and Cremin, Eliot raised
questions that excited considerable discussion during the next two or
three decades. As for the elective system, Butts and Cremin,

12 R. F. Butts and Lawrence Cremin, A Cultural History of

13 Edward Krug, Charles W. Eliot and Popular Education

14 Butts and Cremin, p. 391.
like the present writer, concluded that it was a necessary reform for its time. That is, somebody had to break the shelf of the self-satisfied and inadequate curriculum of the old American college; Eliot did the thing that was needed at the time.

Robert Ulich also agreed with the present writer that Eliot effectively promoted popular education. In commenting on Eliot's role as chairman of the Committee of Ten, Ulich believed that Eliot's report signaled the end of the four-year secondary school as an academic and selective institution. Krug also praised Eliot's efforts, as chairman of the Committee of Ten, to make the secondary school a broader channel to higher education by making the English course acceptable for college entrance.

Clarence Karier reacted favorably to Eliot's educational work. In commenting on Eliot's work with the Committee of Ten, Karier called Eliot's report "a catalytic agent which set off intense, serious analysis of secondary education programs by educators

15Ibid., p. 447.


17Krug, p. 1.
eventually resulting in a working uniformity in the secondary school curriculum." Karier also felt that Irving Babbitt and President A. Whitney Griswold of Yale University had unfairly blamed Eliot as being partly responsible for the alleged decline of liberal education in the United States.

Lawrence Veysey considered Eliot as "easily the most commanding figure among all the nineteenth century university presidents" and praised him for admitting Negroes to Harvard at a time when this represented a brave policy.

Of the six educational historians just cited, all seem to agree that Eliot was an exceptionally successful educational leader. All of these scholars would probably agree that an in depth historical study of Eliot's role in the development of American education has long been overdue. The writer believes that Chapters One and Two of this dissertation will serve as a needed historical analysis of the quality of Eliot's contributions to American education.


19 Ibid., p. 208.

Since Eliot was a major public figure during the Progressive Era, it seems appropriate to examine the judgments academic historians had of him. This writer probed the works of some leading scholars of American history for this purpose. The historians to be cited are Samuel Eliot Morison, Henry Steele Commager, Richard Hofstadter, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Merle Curti, Rush Welter, and Allan Nevins.

Samuel Eliot Morison had little doubt of Eliot's effectiveness as an educational leader:

One after another the great universities of the country followed the reforms that Harvard had adopted; it was clear by the middle nineties that the Harvard of Eliot, instead of striking off on an individual line toward Germany, had set new standards for higher education in America. For Eliot did not confine his spoken and written word to higher education, much less to Harvard: his first two books of collected articles and addresses - American Contributions to Civilization (1897) and Educational Reform (1898) - covered the entire field of education from the kindergarten to the research institute, in their relation to fundamental problems of democratic society. By the turn of the century he was one of the leading public figures of the country; his opinion and support were sought on every variety of public question. In his outlook on life he represented the best of his age - that forward looking half century before the World War, when democracy seemed
capable of putting all crooked ways straight - the age of reason and of action, of accomplishment and of hope.21

Henry Steele Commager also gave Eliot high marks as a positive force in American education. "Not until Eliot reformed Harvard and Gilman built The Johns Hopkins did the American have a real university," according to Commager.

Richard Hofstadter had high praise for Eliot's view that academic freedom, like academic searching, defined the true university. "Not since Jefferson," said Hofstadter, "had an academic leader acclaimed academic freedom so aphoristically and from so high a tribunal. Where Jefferson's tribute to academic freedom spoke for a waning hope, Eliot's words were harbingers of a mood that would thoroughly conquer."

In commenting favorably on Eliot and the elective system, Arthur M. Schlesinger was impressed with the fact that the elective


system made possible greater specialization of teaching by the faculty and that the diversity of course offerings stimulated an increase in research scholarship.

Merle Curti commented on the elective system as follows:

Step by step concessions were made to the modernists who spoke principally for the needs of an expanding civilization in which the natural and social sciences were foundation stones. The first great step was the elective system which President Eliot inaugurated at Harvard. It is true that this reflected not only the needs of the new industrial civilization but the good old Emersonian doctrine that the individual knows what is best for him and can be trusted to rely on himself. In any case the elective system dealt a blow to the classics and opened the way to collegiate training more directly suited to the needs of a business and technical civilization. 25

Curti also approvingly noted Eliot's efforts to make available in the Harvard Classics the great writings of ancient and modern literature to enrich, refine, and fertilize the observant reader's mind. 26

26 Ibid., p. 596.
In developing the theme that education and the life of the mind were affected by the expanding forces of business through the leadership of educators as well as under the aegis of businessmen themselves, Curti observed:

With the inauguration of Charles W. Eliot as president of Harvard in 1869, a new type of college administrator appeared. Eliot was primarily neither a teacher nor a research scholar. He had not come from a business family nor were his associations in his formative years principally with business men; but he was above all else an administrator, and with the skill and foresight and persistence of a man in business he guided the transformation of Harvard from a small undergraduate institution with a few loosely affiliated schools into a great modern university. 27

In substantiating his idea that spokesmen for the middle class were much more fully committed to democracy than their antebellum predecessors, Welter cited Eliot as an example. Welter mentioned that Eliot insisted that Alexis de Tocqueville had been mistaken in his criticisms of American political mediocrity. The American people, Eliot said, had decided the great issues of the Revolution, the Constitution, and the Civil War wisely and deliberately.

27Ibid., p. 515.

Welter also cited Eliot as a middle class spokesman who tirelessly insisted that the very processes of democratic deliberation would educate public opinion but noted that Eliot had qualified his democratic faith. To solve the problems democracy created, Eliot proposed that the people be taught to recognize the wisdom and authority of experts in the conduct of public affairs. Welter concluded that Eliot was atypical of middle class spokesmen who expected the "scholar in politics" to be a man of liberal or humane education rather than a master of a special technical competence.

In analyzing the relationship between scholarly independence and civil service reform, Welter pointed out that Eliot served as president of the National Civil Service Reform League. After Eliot became president of the League in 1909, according to Welter, he helped convert it to efficiency rather than purity as its standard of politics, although previously most members concentrated their energies on preventing democratic mistakes rather than strengthening public administration. Eliot, Welter concluded, relied more on specialized

29Ibid., p. 195.
knowledge than the popular will as the necessary basis of modern government.

In Chapter Four of this dissertation, the writer reached somewhat the same conclusions as Rush Welter did in Popular Education and Democratic Thought in America - namely, that Eliot relied more on specialized knowledge than on the popular will as the necessary basis of modern government. What Welter overlooked, and what this writer stressed in Chapter Four is that middle class Progressives like Eliot represented a makeweight for compromise between militantly organized and class-conscious capital and equally militant class-conscious labor. The United States urgently needed that makeweight before World War I, until the nation could reconcile the contending ambitions of capital and labor on a better basis than dynamite and the general strike, and the company police and the lockout. Time was needed to relax the emotions of men, time and just enough action to lull the social pangs of the economic groups below, and not frighten the wealthy groups above.

Allan Nevins saw fit to comment on Eliot’s elective system. It was, Nevins concluded, an effective educational reform for its

\[30\text{Ibid., p. 238.}\]
own time. "Eliot's bold course," said Nevins, "struck the shackles from the student in college after college."

In analyzing the judgments that these distinguished educational and academic historians had of Eliot, this writer is impressed with the fact that these scholars unanimously considered him a major figure in American history - one deserving of more detailed historical study, both by educational and academic historians. Hopefully, the findings of this dissertation may stimulate further study of Eliot as a significant figure in American educational history and in American social and political history.

The present writer would suggest several areas for further study of Eliot as an historical figure. In the first place, a modern biography of Eliot is needed. Such a work would be of real interest to students of educational and academic history, as well as to a general audience. A man who was, in the words of Woodrow Wilson, "the First Citizen of the Republic" is deserving of this attention.


32 Chicago Record Herald, November 5, 1908, p. 7.
In the field of educational history, Lawrence Cremin has suggested that a fascinating monograph could be written examining the alleged influence of Herbert Spencer upon the educational and social thought of Eliot. This writer agrees that an examination of the relationship between Spencer and Eliot deserves further study, although the writer believes Eliot was an independent theorist in his own right. Considering that Eliot was the first honorary president of the Progressive Education Association and John Dewey the second president, Eliot’s role in the Progressive Education movement needs further investigation - and so does his relationship with John Dewey. Incidentally, Eliot became with the passing of time a political internationalist, although his ideas on international education have yet to be seriously studied. Also, his efforts to improve the professional study of Education (including teacher education at all levels) would make a worthy research topic.

The evidence presented in Chapter Four surely placed Eliot in the mainstream of the Progressive movement in American political life. Still, his relationship to this period of reform needs further

---

investigation. This writer suspects that an investigation of Eliot's personal correspondence and relationship with Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft and Woodrow Wilson could be of considerable interest to scholars of American history. The personal papers of these men are fortunately accessible to scholars, and the writer himself is planning to carry out this research. With the recent emphasis on Black Studies, Eliot's correspondence and relationship with Booker T. Washington should also prove rather interesting.

Although there has been a continuing assessment of Eliot's theories and practices throughout this dissertation, a few final words might be said in assessing Eliot as an historical figure. The evidence of Chapters One and Two indicated that Eliot made positive and permanent contributions to American education. He led, for instance, in the movement to introduce into elementary and secondary education that training in the careful observation and interpretation of phenomena out of which alone progress in science and technology can spring. He recognized the sanctity and significance of individual endowment and predilection, and procured opportunities within schools and colleges for the development of the student in whatever way seemed appropriate to the student himself and to society.
As president of Harvard University and counsellor of other institutions, Eliot contributed significantly to the evolution of the American college into the American university. He was perhaps the first American college president to properly understand the character, scope, and function of university training in such professions as law and medicine. The improvement of medical and legal education in the United States was partly due to his purposeful initiative and convincing advocacy. College education was richer and freer because of his work at Harvard, American scholarship more respected because of his example, the teaching profession more esteemed because of his fine spirit and high example. To his courage and far-sighted judgment, the American people owe the freeing of the college curriculum from the old fetters of required work and student liberty to drink from the many springs of learning and to choose where to drink deeply.

Charles Eliot lived long enough to see American higher education almost entirely transformed in spirit, method, and purpose, and much of the change was due in part to his writings, addresses, and notable administration as president of Harvard. It must have been gratifying to him to have lived long enough to see the results of
his labors. He had to his credit a great record of service, not only in building Harvard into our foremost university, not only in leading the way in educational progress and reform, but also in helping in the solution of a great number of problems which have been prominent and perplexing in American social and political life.

His long life was of effective service to American education and to the American people as a whole. His powerful mind touched and illuminated human interests of many different kinds. His unfailling courage, his power of moving and convincing speech, and his willingness to accept unpopular conclusions when they followed from well-supported premises, brought him distinction, influence, and esteem in unstinted measure from his fellow Americans of every sort and kind. His constructive and tireless efforts to further the cause of higher education, to upbuild national integrity, and to bring to the American people at large a fuller appreciation of the world's best thought left a positive impress upon American life.

For a just estimate of Charles Eliot's actual historical accomplishment, a recognition of his service to Harvard University or even to the cause of education at large is not enough. His singular combination of intellectual vision and benevolence conferred upon
him the authentic title to leadership in all the beneficent activities of the United States. The force of his leadership and example permeated and enriched the entire cultural atmosphere of his time. With unalterable faith in the master currents of his own time and land, he extended the meaning and the domain of liberal culture by his resolute championship of freedom, of science, of popular education, and of democracy.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


Whyte, William. *The Organization Man.*


Periodicals

Outlook, XC (November 14, 1908), 67-69.

Forum, LXXXI (January, 1929), 1-10.

Bryson, Gladys. "The comparable interests of the old moral philosophy and the modern social sciences."

Chicago Record Herald, January 23, 1906, p. 10.

Chicago Record Herald, April 5, 1906, p. 5.

Chicago Record Herald, March 2, 1907, p. 2.
Chicago Record Herald, October 30, 1908, p. 3.

Chicago Record Herald, November 5, 1908, p. 7.

Chicago Record Herald, February 11, 1909, p. 4.

Chicago Record Herald, December 12, 1909, Part I, p. 11.


Eliot, Charles. "Voter's choice in the coming election."
Atlantic, CXVIII (October, 1916), 433-440.

Eliot, Charles. "What is a liberal education?"
Century, VI (June, 1884), 203-212.

Frost, William. "Greek among the required subjects."
Bibliotheca Sacra, XLII (April, 1885), 327-350.

Mencken, H. L. "Master Pedagogue."
Nation, CXXXI (December 3, 1930), 617-620.

Miller, D. S. "Life of Harvard's greatest president."
New Republic, LXVI (March 4, 1931), 677-678.

Moton, R. R. "Charles W. Eliot."


West, Andrew. "Must the classics go?"
North American Review, cxxxIII (February, 1884), 151-172.
The dissertation submitted by Brother John O'Connor has been read and approved by the following faculty members of Loyola University: Professor Gerald Lee Gutek, Chairman of the Department of Educational Foundations and director of the dissertation; Professor Ralph Eldin Minger, Associate Professor in the Department of History; and Professor John Wozniak, Dean of the School of Education.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.