

## Perfectionism and Equality: The Liberal Educator's Dilemma

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Perfectionism posits the development of human potential as the ultimate good. Perfectionism enjoins you not just to reach some minimal threshold of competence, but to “be all you can be.” As scholars and teachers, we harbor perfectionist tendencies. Perfectionism is manifested in the pride we feel when one of our students goes on to make a contribution recognized by all in the field, and, conversely, in our disappointment when a student with great gifts chooses not to develop them. Our perfectionist inclinations reveal themselves in our teaching too. When we design our syllabi we are not satisfied to introduce students to artworks or theories that are merely adequate; we want our students to be exposed to paragons of beauty and power. We are delighted when students come to appreciate and admire the masters we, ourselves, cherish, and we become frustrated when our students don’t “get it,” don’t understand why we exalt the contributions to art, science, or philosophy that we do. Note that these perfectionist inclinations go well beyond any desire to promote individual autonomy.

And yet we are more than educators with perfectionist inclinations; we are thoughtful citizens in a liberal democracy and we are teachers of future citizens. In those roles, we hold dear another value, that of the equality of all citizens (or at least all adult citizens). Our commitment to the ideal of full development of students’ powers of appreciation and creativity as well as to the ideal of equal citizenship gives rise to certain tensions and ambivalences. It is these I wish to explore.

### I.

Thomas Hurka, the most sophisticated contemporary exponent of the doctrine states that perfectionism does not permit the sacrifice of those with the greatest potential.

It is not plausible to prefer a small gain in excellence by the least excellent to a large gain by the best, for example, a small gain in musical achievement by a beginning music student to a large gain by Mozart. We can weigh unit gains to all people equally, but it violates our intuitions about excellence to prefer gains lower down a scale of development. Just as our notions of excellence and perfection exclude satisficing or aiming at less than the best, so they exclude caring less for the best.<sup>1</sup>

Note here how easily the perfectionist assumes a hierarchy of excellence and note how natural we *scholars* and *educators* find this assumption. We all live in a *hierarchical republic* of letters, a realm of closer to and further from the truth, of well and poorly established, of original and mediocre, of clumsy and elegant, of profound and superficial.

If we teach physics, we must believe that (a) Galileo’s and Copernicus’ accounts of motion of objects or of the earth’s motion respectively are superior to those of (b) Aristotle and Ptolemy, because they are closer to the truth. If we teach biology, we must believe, likewise, that (a) the Darwinian account of human origins is superior to (b) the creationist’s account because it is true.

The realm of arts and humanities, a realm in which the “true” and the “false” have limited applicability, is nonetheless, represented in our minds as hierarchical. If we teach art appreciation we must believe that (a) Edward Hopper’s famous depiction of a diner has greater artistic merit than (b) Norman Rockwell’s equally well-known rendition of a soda fountain, and that (a) Frank Lloyd Wright’s Johnson Wax office building in Racine is a greater work of architecture than (b) The Sears tower in Chicago. If we teach poetry we must believe that (a) Emily Dickinson’s “Wild Nights — Wild Nights” is superior to (b) Rod McKuen’s “Another Monday, Two Months Later.”<sup>2</sup> If we teach the novel, we must believe that (a) Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* is a greater work than (b) Tom Wolfe’s *Bonfire of the Vanities*. If we teach history, we must believe that (a) Ernst Cassirer’s, account of the enlightenment is superior to (b) Dorinda Outram’s.<sup>3</sup> If we teach music, we must believe that (a) Bach’s “Passacaglia for organ in C minor” is a greater work than (b) Pachelbel’s “Canon”; that (a) Thelonious Monk’s “Round Midnight” is a finer jazz composition than (b) Henry Mancini’s “Moon River.” If we teach film, we must believe that (a) *The Bicycle Thief* is a greater film than (b) *The Heist*. If we teach philosophy we must believe that (a) Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* is a greater work than (b) A.J. Ayer’s *Language, Truth, and Logic*, and if we teach philosophy of education, we must believe that (a) Dewey’s *Democracy and Education* is a greater work than (b) my own *Back to Basics*. Finally, if we are basketball coaches, we must believe that (a) Tim Duncan is a greater basketball player than (b) Vince Carter. (Parallels might be found in every field of athletic and artistic performance as well, from playing tennis to playing the trumpet.)

When I say “we must believe,” I am, of course, not talking about any logical or metaphysical necessity; I mean simply that no one who has mastered each domain sufficiently well to be a teacher can help but see things this way. Having seen them this way, we teachers will, as I have said, try as hard as we can to enable our students to share our enthusiasm and understand its basis. Of course, the fact that there is consensus on some judgments does not imply that agreement is to be found more generally or that standards, themselves, are fixed once and forever. Aesthetic, athletic, even scientific judgments can be and often are contested, sometimes bitterly — but it is the background of shared judgments that gives debate point. There is no point in arguing either about *pure* matters of taste, for example, whether chocolate ice cream is better than vanilla, for example, or about incommensurables — for example, whether Leonardo’s contributions are greater than Bach’s. Let me remind you that as college and university teachers, we engage in a host of activities such as evaluating colleagues for tenure, reviewing books, judging manuscripts to be worthy or unworthy of publication, selecting papers for PES programs, all activities that presume the kind of hierarchy I have identified.

Now there would be little difficulty in acknowledging both a hierarchy of excellence within the various genres I have identified and a fundamental equality of citizens, were it not for the fact that the “a” works in each pair tend to be *less accessible* than the “b” works. (By less accessible, I do not necessarily mean simpler, just easier to grasp. For example, the Galilean laws of motion are notoriously counterintuitive.)

To be sure, there are some great works, especially in the arts, that are accessible to all with a minimum of tutelage; Michaelangelo's statue of David and the Taj Mahal come to mind. But it is more likely that the great achievements, certainly in science and mathematics, but in literature and the arts as well, will be inaccessible to the untutored.<sup>4</sup> How many, even in this room, for example, can understand "string theory" or appreciate Schönberg's music. This is not surprising. Why would the subtlest and most original minds create works that can be absorbed at a glance (in the case of the visual arts) or a single hearing (in the case of music) or a skim (in the case of poetry, mathematics, science, or philosophy)? Nature is maddeningly complex and what is immediately assimilable is likely to pall quickly as well, which is not to say that great works cannot capture our attention.

Whether in the arts, sciences, or in philosophy, appreciation depends on intellectual and imaginative capacity nurtured over time to develop qualities of attention, discernment and sensitivity to nuance. This means that, given the inevitable scarcity of resources and time, a predictable result of our attempting to instill appreciation of the (a) list will be that some citizens will come to the conclusion that we teachers regard them as inferior (or superior) to other citizens. In other words, the distinctions among works become distinctions among people, and for young people in public schools and colleges, distinctions instituted by representatives of *the state*.

An objector will immediately claim that ranking students in physics or poetry is a far cry from ranking them as *citizens*. In response to the charge that public school teachers knowingly impair the self-respect of some citizens, the accused teachers may say that this is very far from their intention, that it occurs solely when a student who does not measure up academically "*chooses* to put that construction upon it."<sup>5</sup>

Some of you may recognize this language from the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (the case that established the "separate but equal" doctrine), language dubious in its own context, and, I submit, in this one too. The fact of the matter is that teachers ought to expect that their ratings of students as better and worse at understanding and appreciating human achievements from mathematics to poetry will raise or lower students' sense of their own worth to some degree.<sup>6</sup> Of course, the school's opinion is not the only one students receive, and not always the one that carries most sway; sometimes the young will actively resist its verdicts on their capabilities. But as we know, this is almost invariably a self-defeating strategy, cutting its practitioners off from future opportunities.

Moreover, it is no secret that being or at least being perceived to be a strong student is convertible into economic and political power. This will be true even if teachers do not follow standard grading and grouping practices. It is difficult for us and our public school colleagues to conceal our pleasure when our students "get it," when they master subtleties that escape dutiful but uninspired students, when they feel impelled to go beyond the requirements, when they produce works that show real talent. Even if we mute our enthusiasm in the interests of fairness, the other students know who catches on quickly, who is a plodder, and who is hopelessly lost. Let us be honest: we public school and public university teachers, representatives of the liberal state, play a crucial role in establishing inequalities of recognition and in

allocating individuals to positions in a society marked by enormous inequalities in wealth and political power.<sup>6</sup>

Public school teachers or professors sensing the difficulty (even when they may not be able to articulate it), will be congenial to ways of reducing the tension between their joint commitments to perfectionism and equality. I suspect that since equality is the value that exerts such a strong pull on us, many will welcome an escape achieved by problematizing the notion of an objective scale of excellence. We may be drawn to arguments claiming that the hierarchy of values exists for the teacher *qua* connoisseur but not *qua* *educator*. Or we may find ourselves attracted to attempts to downplay or even to reject the hierarchy, itself. I am here to tell you that these escapes are illusory.

## II

The first escape strategy may be thought to follow from an idea found in Saint John (Dewey). It asserts that no school subject and presumably no particular work or theory is in itself educative except in relation to a particular group of students. From this perspective, depending on the students in question, the works on the (b) list may be every bit as educative as those on the (a) list. Support for this interpretation is provided by a passage in *Experience and Education* (no doubt there are others), where Dewey comments, “It is no reflection on the nutritive value of beefsteak that it is not fed to infants.”<sup>7</sup> (Parenthetically, we have to understand that this was written at a time — 1930s — when steak was considered a highly nutritious food for adults, a time when it was still possible for a decent human being to be a meat eater). Dewey is certainly correct that the adjective “educative” is always relative to students. With some students, the works on the (b) list may be just as or more educative. A high school student, might, for example, develop more skill and a greater love of music by exposure to the Pachelbel piece rather than the Bach.

Despite this, Dewey is no relativist when it comes to science or the arts. One may need to *begin* with Pachelbel’s Canon or with Rockwell’s illustrations but one should not end there — not unless one has reached the limit of the student’s capacities. Dewey’s view is thoroughly teleological: *children* derive sufficient nutrition from milk, but eventually when they mature they too should be able to savor and digest beefsteak. In *Democracy and Education*, in the context of a discussion of values, Dewey notes that genuine musical appreciation means more than being “able to converse with some correctness about classical music.” Speaking of a hypothetical student he notes that “if in his own past experience, what he has been most accustomed to and has most enjoyed is ragtime, his active or working measures of valuation are fixed on the ragtime level.”<sup>8</sup> Dewey was not being complimentary to ragtime here. The general point is that while it is true that the educative potential of a particular text or artwork is relative to the students’s level of development, this fact cannot be used to deny either the hierarchical ordering of works or our wish that students appreciate the best.

## III

Several lines of argument aim at downplaying the hierarchical aspect of subject matter: one aimed especially at the sciences, begins by pointing out that truth and

falsity is only one of several desiderata of scientific theories. According to this argument, neither the scientist, nor (by implication) the science teacher is obliged to judge theories solely according to how they fit the facts. Therefore, the argument concludes, theories are not better and worse absolutely but only relative to the particular criteria the scientist selects, which depends on her purposes.

This argument may be persuasive to some philosophers, but it is not the way teachers of science view the matter. Nor, I'm convinced, is it the way that parents or grandparents of schoolchildren view it, even if they happen to be philosophers. Imagine your daughter or granddaughter coming home from public school and reporting that her biology teacher said that in view of the multiple criteria of scientific worth, of which correspondence to the truth was but one, she had decided to teach only the creationist account since it is the most accessible and awe inspiring. Surely you would be on the phone to the principal within the hour. Now I am not implying that the creationist account may not be presented as one contender for truth. But the teacher, even if she is a fundamentalist, will feel obliged to note that the immense body of evidence favoring the Darwinian view cannot simply be ignored. Unless I misjudge you, you would not wish it otherwise.

A second way of down-playing the hierarchy of value is to contend that education, rightly understood, should aim to purvey the tools with which students can live autonomous lives, not to transmit judgments of better and worse. Critical pedagogues might fit this description. Consider an example. A disciple of Paulo Freire might be said to care nothing for instilling in students an appreciation of "the best." He aspires merely to be a catalyst for the oppressed to take control of their own lives.<sup>9</sup> That is correct as far as it goes, but Freire also says that in order to take control of their own lives the oppressed must see the world aright, as Freire himself did. How does a critical educator accomplish this? Only by means of a sublime theory, in Freire's case a peculiar blend of Marxism and Christian liberation theology. But is it a Freirean educator's goal to transmit that theory to his students? Surely it ought to be: On what basis would a Freireian educator wish to withhold from his students the very theoretical lens that enables its user to bring into focus the oppressive nature of Western, capitalist societies? It goes without saying that the Freireian educator can't *begin* with Marx or Habermas, but then no traditional educator begins with T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*.

E.D. Hirsch, Jr.'s cultural literacy program offers another kind of tool kit.<sup>10</sup> Hirsch's idea is that a vital democracy depends on a *lingua franca* that all have proficiency in. Without access to the forums where political options are discussed, forums such as the *New York Times*, citizens are, in effect, disfranchised. But, argues Hirsch, such access depends on a fund of background knowledge that educated parents provide at home, a fund that poor children need to acquire at school. What is known by educated people is good for all to learn simply *because* educated people hold the power. Educated people don't acquire cultural knowledge because it is good; it becomes good because educated people acquire it.

Hirsch is usually criticized from the left, but his real vulnerability is on the right, for his educational views are thoroughly pragmatic, even vulgarly so. An item is

worth learning because those with influence know it, period. Suppose we agree that empowering those with little power is our primary goal, why think that acquisition of cultural capital is the best route to it? Hirsch's program rests on the dubious empirical claim that those who hold the power are those with the right kind of *cultural* capital. Suppose, as seems more plausible to me, it is not cultural but *financial* capital that is the key to power and influence in American society. As popular author Robert Kiyosaki notes, "One of the reasons the rich get richer, the poor get poorer, and the middle class struggles in debt is because the subject of money is taught at home, not in school."<sup>11</sup> If Kiyosaki is right, Hirsch's own rationale would support making *this* a centerpiece of the curriculum. A traditionalist has an entirely different message from Freire or Hirsch, one that I believe will actually resonate with most teachers and, perhaps, even with you:

Every human being is born an heir to an inheritance to which he can succeed only in a process of learning....A "picture" may be purchased, but one cannot purchase an understanding of it....To initiate a pupil into the world of human achievement is to make available to him much that does not lie upon the surface of his present world. An inheritance will contain much that may not be in current use, much that has come to be neglected and even something that for the time being is forgotten....If he [the teacher] has no confidence in any of the standards of worth written into this inheritance of human achievement, he had better not be a teacher; he would have nothing to teach.<sup>12</sup>

#### IV

These lofty sentiments penned by the late Michael Oakeshott, lead us directly to recent attempts to discredit them, to not simply *downplay* the hierarchical dimension, but to *deny* that the "standards of worth" are anything but *arbitrary* impositions of cultural power. My first example of this "hermeneutic of suspicion" is aimed at the sciences; the second, at the humanities.

An attempt to reject the authority of science is found in sociologist Steve Woolgar's *Science: the Very Idea*.<sup>13</sup> Woolgar opposes the view that what we call scientific discoveries are authentic discoveries of objects existing "out there" in the world. He argues that these objects are fabricated by the scientists themselves. To illustrate, the first sentence of a description of "pulsars" offered by scientists at Princeton goes like this: "Since the pulsar's discovery in 1967 by Jocelyn Bell and Anthony Hewish at Cambridge Observatory, astrophysicists have gained much more information on these unusual objects."<sup>14</sup> Woolgar's view of the discovery does not jibe with that of the scientists:

But *we* see that the character of the object, and *whether or not there was an object*, changed with changes in (what might loosely be called) the social context: that is, changes in the personnel involved, the equipment brought into play, the literature consulted, constraints on communicating knowledge, criticisms and justifications for behavior. Before the very possibility of an "it" had begun to stabilize, the object (and the non-object) enjoyed at least five separate incarnations.<sup>15</sup>

Having illustrated the point with the pulsar and several other cases, Woolgar's general conclusion is this:

The argument is not just that social networks mediate between the object and observational work done by participants. Rather, the social network *constitutes* the object (or lack of it).<sup>16</sup>

Now, I submit that no physics teacher can see the matter this way. So much the worse for physics teachers, Woolgar may say. But my point is that adopting

Woolgar's line does not enable the adopter to escape from the hierarchical republic of letters, from judgments of better and worse, true and false. For Woolgar wants us to accept his story of the way pulsars became an item in the physicists' lexicon at a certain point in history, not because it is a grand, seductive yarn, but because it is *true*. Woolgar asks us, in effect, *not* to leave the world of better and worse because closer to or further from the truth, but to exit the illusory world of physics and enter the real world of social history.<sup>17</sup>

In a provocative essay first published in 1974, the late French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu explicitly compares the world of high culture to the world of fashion.<sup>18</sup> His argument is "based on a structural homology between the field of production of one particular category of luxury goods, namely fashion garments, and the field of production of that other category of luxury goods, the goods of legitimate culture such as music, poetry, philosophy, and so on."<sup>19</sup> Bourdieu claims that creative artists like Marcel Duchamp perform a kind of "transubstantiation" in which, to take his example, an ordinary object, a urinal, is transformed in being "marked by a painter who has signed it and because it is exhibited in a consecrated place which, in receiving it, makes it a work of art, now transmuted economically and symbolically."<sup>20</sup> Bourdieu asks how this "power of the proper name is produced" and rejects the obvious reply that the painter's value is a function of the uniqueness of the work he produces.<sup>21</sup> Bourdieu's answer is rather that "what is involved is not the rarity of the product but the *rarity of the producer*."<sup>22</sup> Bourdieu goes on to ask how *this* scarcity is produced, and his answer for both the field of high culture and that of fashion is this:

What makes the value, the magic of the label, is the collusion of all the agents of the system of production of sacred goods. This collusion is, of course, perfectly unconscious. The circuits of consecration are all the more powerful when they are long, complex and hidden even from the eyes of those who take part and benefit from them.<sup>23</sup>

To this kind of argument I want to respond in three ways. First, the art teacher cannot look at art in this way for to do so, to desacralize it, in Bourdieu's terms, deprives her of that "confidence in any of the standards of worth written into this inheritance of human achievement" without which she cannot be a teacher. The second point is that while the account does seem to accommodate Duchamp's urinal, we need to remind ourselves what an anomalous artwork it is. Any art lover who has seen a revered work such as Michaelangelo's *David* knows that the object, itself, plays the central role in its consecration. The third point, once again, is that one who accepts this demystification of high culture does not remove herself from judgments of better and worse. In accepting Bourdieu's account not just as splendid entertainment but as true, and hence *superior* to the view it is intended to replace, the critic simply locates himself in a different, but *no less hierarchical space*.

I have not canvassed every attempt to deny or subvert the hierarchy of values within which we professors and teachers live. Consider Wittgenstein's demolition of the perennial philosophical puzzles, Rorty's claim that no conceptual scheme is more or less adequate to represent the world, Foucault's positing of "regimes of truth," instead of truth *simpliciter*, Derrida's efforts to destabilize the received meaning of texts: Insofar as these philosophers hope to convince us that their

perspective is not simply “cool” or “fun” or “cutting edge,” but *superior* to that of their competitors, they inhabit a hierarchical world. These seminal thinkers and their myriad epigones are convinced that here, *unlike* the world of fashion, something vital is at stake and I agree; the alternative is to admit with Bourdieu that we are in the same business as Donna Karan and Oscar de la Renta, only we, poor slobs, do not recognize it.

Most of the great unmaskers do not renounce the distinction between valid and invalid, better and worse: as we have seen, they simply shift the focus of attention to a different part of the landscape. Yet some practitioners of the hermeneutics of suspicion appear to challenge the very distinctions, themselves. I would argue, that, even the most radical deconstructionists must retain a distinction between the adequate and inadequate — at least when it comes to interpretations of *their own* texts. Consider Derrida, for example, who is often taken to have shown that texts have *no* determinate meaning. This is certainly not the stance he adopts when discussing his own texts. In a published interview, Raoul Mortley asked Derrida whether deconstruction could be understood in the same way Plotinus had understood sculpture. The sculptor confronts the marble block, removing bits of stone, piece by piece, until “in the end he finds the beauty of the form of the statue within the stone.”<sup>24</sup> Derrida answers:

No... The image you used, the image of abstraction or subtraction, which aims to restore an internal beauty or being which is hidden beneath appearances which must be removed, does not seem very close to what I am doing with deconstruction.<sup>25</sup>

In other words, Mortley does not provide a legitimate alternative interpretation to Derrida’s texts; he *misreads* them. If the possibility of *misreading* didn’t exist, I might add as an aside, there would be no need for teachers in the humanities.

## V

I have argued that as educators we inhabit a hierarchical republic, but just because this polity feels like home to us does not mean that we ought to pledge our loyalty to it. A disciple of St. Jack (Rawls) may argue as follows: “Can we not honor our obligations to both perfectionism and equality by exposing students only to those excellent works that are accessible to all students? Such a policy will, the argument might go, favor the interests of the vast majority of students even if a “talented tenth” (to use Du Bois’ phrase) were to profit less than it otherwise would?”

Notice, first, how radical such a proposal actually is. It would preclude our teaching many of the texts we currently teach with full awareness that some proportion of our students will simply not grasp them, even with our guidance. I think the policy is misguided for three reasons: first, because it overlooks the fact that only those who commune with the exemplary works in art and science during school and college will be poised to advance our understanding of the world and to enrich the lives of future generations with new and powerful works of art. Second, among those capable of grasping the new and difficult will always be some who are also capable of inventing new ways of making it (or at least its core ideas) accessible to larger and larger cohorts of students. Finally, as Thomas Nagel has argued, some human achievements have value even when there are few who appreciate them.

These pursuits do of course serve the interests of the individuals directly involved in them, and of certain spectators. But typically the pursuit of such ends is not justified solely in terms of those interests. They are thought to have an intrinsic value, so that it is important to achieve fundamental advances, for example, in mathematics or astronomy even if very few people come to understand them and they have no practical effects.<sup>26</sup>

Where is all this leading? Is it to a plea for a form of meritocracy that compensates individuals according to the level of excellence they achieve? Perfectionism could easily be associated with a distributive ethos favoring those who make the greatest contributions to the culture (which is certainly not what we now have), but such a distribution would be *just* only if individuals were, themselves, responsible for whatever degree of accomplishment they achieved, and surely they are not. Many factors conspire to create excellence, including not only personal effort and persistence for which individuals may legitimately take credit, but native talent and favorable nurture, for which they may not. So this kind of meritocratic distribution is ruled out by considerations of justice.

Note that the position I adopt here is dependent on some basic empirical claims about the way the world is — for example, that there is such a thing as innate endowment and that some few come into the world with magnificent endowments in, for example, athletics or mathematics, while most of us do not.

This is just the kind of claim that some of you may reject as not simply false but as mystification — taking something that is evidently socially constructed — talent — and treating it as if it were a natural fact about the world. I certainly would agree that talent is relative to cultural context: what we recognize and nurture as talent, for example in mathematics, might remain invisible in a pre-literate hunter-gatherer society. Had Paul Erdős, a man obsessed by mathematics who lived out of a suitcase and plastic bag, been born into such a society, his brilliance might well have gone unnoticed, and his life been “poor, nasty, brutish and short.” But — and this is the part the social constructionists miss — that my innate aptitude for basketball is minuscule beside that of Michael Jordan or my aptitude for mathematics infinitesimal beside that of Erdős is no less demonstrable a fact than that the great Midwestern plains are suited to the cultivation of corn but not olives.

The point I want to press here is that the moral legitimacy of transferring, through taxation, some of the earnings of the talented to those with less talent, is *strengthened* once it is admitted that a person’s level of talent is to a large extent a matter of good luck in her choice of parents. If the world were entirely socially constructed, the claim that no person can take credit for his or her talent becomes no more (and no less) credible than its opposite, undermining the argument for redistribution.

Of course, even if I am right about distributive justice and its presuppositions, other grounds for instituting differential rewards might be proposed, for example that they provide the motivation without which those with the greatest potential would cease striving to be the best they can be? This is an empirical claim, one I find highly implausible; those with the greatest gifts typically feel a powerful urge to express themselves regardless of remuneration or acclaim — think of Erdős who never had a job or a home, or of Wittgenstein, of the jazzman Eric Dolphy or of Emily

Dickinson. Even those supremely gifted athletes who earn millions often spend free time back in their old neighborhoods, playing for the sheer joy of it.

Those with modest capabilities, whose unsung labor makes possible the leisure and materials required by us academicians, these are the ones whose motivation needs a spur from extrinsic rewards. Because they have fewer opportunities for self-expression, and none for recognition, a just society will see to it that they are *more*, not less, handsomely remunerated.

The love of intellectual and artistic excellence we have acquired through many years of study, in school and out, is nothing we need be ashamed of. We should, on the other hand, feel uncomfortable about our complicity in a set of arrangements whereby those of us who love the best and try to share our appreciation with our students enjoy a material standard of living that far exceeds that of the secretary who fills out the forms we need to travel to conferences like this one or the janitor who cleans our offices in the evening while we read philosophy and relax with our families.

If we as public school teachers or professors have contributed to the sense of inadequacy that is the most memorable lesson some of these secretaries and janitors learned in school, do we not have an especially strong obligation to mitigate the harm we do by working toward a more egalitarian distribution of wealth and income? I say we do.

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1. Thomas Hurka, *Perfectionism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 79.
  2. See *Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960); and [www.Mckuen.com](http://www.Mckuen.com).
  3. Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz Koelln (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1951); Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
  4. A persuasive and readable account of the problem of subjectivity and objectivity in art is found in Robert Fogelin, *Walking the Tightrope of Reason: The Precarious Life of a Rational Animal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), chap. 6.
  5. *Supreme Court Reporter*, vol. 166, 163 U.S. 537, *Plessy v. Ferguson* — 18 May 1896, p. 1143.
  6. See Hervé Varenne and Ray McDermott, *Successful Failure: The School America Builds* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1998), chap. 1.
  7. John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Collier Macmillan, 1938), 45.
  8. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930), 275.
  9. See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 1970).
  10. E.D. Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).
  11. Robert T. Kiyosaki (with Sharon L. Lechter), *Rich Dad, Poor Dad: What the Rich Teach their Kids about Money that the Poor and Middle Class Do Not* (New York: Warner Books, 2000), 14.

12. Michael Oakeshott, "Learning and Teaching," in Timothy Fuller, ed. *The Voice of Liberal Learning: Michael Oakeshott on Education* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 45, 48, 49.
13. Stever Woolgar, *Science: The Very Idea* (New York: Ellis Horwood/Tavistock and Methuen, 1988).
14. <http://pulsar.princeton.edu/pulsar/index.shtml>.
15. Woolgar, *Science*, 65; emphasis added.
16. *Ibid.*; emphasis added.
17. Here I take no position on scientific realism, the position that the physicist's elementary particles are real entities. I simply note that the sociologist of science does not escape the question of truth and falsity. A readable account of the strengths and weaknesses of constructivism and realism in science is found in Part I of Philip Kitcher, *Science, Truth, and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). For a critique, see Paul Roth, "Kitcher's Two Cultures," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 33, no. 3 (2003): 386-405.
18. Pierre Bourdieu, "Haute Couture and Haute Culture," in *Sociology in Question*, trans. Richard Nice (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 1993), 132-38. For an articulation of Bourdieu's mature position, see *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).
19. *Ibid.*, 132.
20. *Ibid.*, 137.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*
24. Raoul Mortley, *French Philosophers in Conversation: Levinas, Schneider, Serres, Irigaray, Le Doeuff, Derrida* (London: Routledge, 1991), 96.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 130.