

# **The Aims of Higher Education**

Problems of Morality and Justice

Edited by  
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## Modeling Justice in Higher Education

ERIN I. KELLY

### I

Some scholars argue that a liberal arts education fosters critical thinking and promotes democratic values. I argue that a liberal arts education indeed has this potential but that institutional limitations inhibit its fuller development. Meeting certain institutional requirements of justice—including fair equality of opportunity—is critical to the functioning of colleges and universities as just institutions that support critical and creative thinking, ethical reasoning, and democratic ideals. This argues for revising certain popular conceptions of value and merit in college admissions and in academic scholarship, and for developing a campus environment that will enable all students to engage in critical, creative, and ethical thinking within and beyond the university.

### II

The United States has had a strong history of liberal arts orientation in education that stresses breadth of intellectual exposure to the humanities, arts, social sciences, mathematics, and natural sciences in a learning environment characterized by Socratic inquiry, reflection, dialogue, and essay writing. The concept of liberal arts education is, broadly speaking, education to allow the flourishing of individuals and society at large. Liberal arts education aims to equip individuals with the knowledge, critical-thinking skills, experience, and capacity for reflection that will enable them to lead thoughtful, fulfilling lives as individuals and to participate cooperatively and productively in politics, the economy, and other spheres of social life. This was the vision of Horace Mann, William James, John Dewey, W. E. B. Du Bois, and other great educators in American history. They were, to be sure, influenced by Plato and

Jean-Jacques Rousseau and also by well-established examples of university systems in Europe, especially England. Still, a liberal arts model seems to have evolved in broader form in the United States, penetrating secondary schools to some extent, as well as being thoroughly established in many American universities and colleges and emphasizing, more than in Europe, a participatory, democratic ideal.

In emphasizing liberal arts education as a means to collective as well as individual flourishing, defenders of liberal arts education stress its value as good preparation for democratic citizenship. They claim that by challenging students to consider a variety of perspectives, experiences, and values, liberal arts education develops the imagination, a capacity for empathy and understanding, and a reflective appreciation of value pluralism.<sup>1</sup> This development might happen in the imaginative engagement with characters in a work of literature, by considering a philosopher's reflections and skeptical questions, through comparative study of different historical eras and cultures, by grasping the dynamics of social groups, by identifying the empirical causes of social change, and so forth. The various disciplinary approaches all require students to consider a subject from a vantage point that is not merely subjective and to make judgments of relevance in relation to parameters that are significant to some or many human beings even though they might not reflect the student's own values. It is argued, and I think reasonably so, that developing these skills helps to enable people in a diverse society and world better to understand one another and to work together.

Advocates also claim that because liberal arts education emphasizes learning and the accumulation of knowledge as a collective endeavor that depends on active participation and codeliberation, it cultivates a democratic culture of inclusion. When conclusions must be based on evidence that can be evaluated by other people and are supported by rational argument rather than mere appeals to authority, participants in intellectual inquiry can reckon with each other as equals.<sup>2</sup> Rational discussion involves taking one's interlocutor seriously as a person with a capacity for rational thought, inquiry, and judgment. These qualities mark persons as equals in a relevant political sense—as fit to participate fully in political society and to enjoy all the rights and benefits of citizenship. Affirming through rational dialogue the status of participants as political equals is an important source of support for democratic institutions. Furthermore, reckoning with the equal standing in conversation of one's interlocutors helps participants to develop the virtues of reasonableness and mutual respect, despite disagreements that arise between them.<sup>3</sup> These virtues are valuable to the democratic process.

Proponents of liberal arts education emphasize that in these ways aspects of intellectual, emotional, and social development promoted through liberal arts education are important to the healthy functioning of a democratic polity. These are important points, and we should be concerned about overly narrow assessments of educational outcomes. In particular, we should be wary of a quantitative, market-oriented "knowledge and skills" model that neglects assessments of innovative, reflective, creative, and collective thinking.<sup>4</sup> In an era of standardized testing and demands on students to memorize and regurgitate volumes of information, we must retain broad and balanced indicators of social health in educational outcomes. Higher education contributes to socially valuable outcomes in ways that standardized testing and statistical measurements of income earning potential are likely to miss.<sup>5</sup> The contribution of liberal arts education to creativity and critical thinking, for example, might well be crucial for research and innovation across a broad spectrum of fields of learning as well as for the development of leadership, cooperation, and problem-solving skills.

Still, we should not oversell the contribution of liberal arts education to the realization of a broader democratic and egalitarian political culture. The goal of generating an inclusive, liberal, intellectually rich and informed political culture in American society is beyond the power of universities alone to achieve.<sup>6</sup> Obstacles to achieving a just democratic society are significant and dispersed throughout our society. They include glaring and consequential socioeconomic inequalities and also institutionally and sociologically entrenched forms of race and gender bias. Broad social change would be required to transform this.

Neither should we uncritically endorse and defend the status quo of liberal arts education itself. The primary beneficiaries of rational dialogue between equals are the people who participate, and their experience is conditioned by the nature of the deliberative community. While our universities and colleges are more inclusive than they once were, they are characterized by many of the same unjust inequalities that characterize other civic realms. This limits the value of liberal arts education as preparation for democratic citizenship. Colleges and universities are in a good position to address this problem. The institutions of higher education could work more effectively to rectify unjust inequalities restricting access to higher education and the community of scholarship. This is especially urgent in elite institutions that are selective. Pursuit of the goal of greater inclusion could help to advance justice within the university. By achieving more inclusive representation by race, gender, and socioeconomic status, institutions of higher education, and liberal arts institutions, in particular, could also serve as models of

justice for other institutions. While this would not directly effect change beyond the university, it could, by example, publicly raise the bar for the evaluation of other institutions. By shaping the experience of its members in ethically desirable ways, an inclusive learning community is also potentially self-transformative. A model of education as the collective undertaking of an inclusive and deliberative community of equals has never been fully realized on a scale as large as that of a college or university.<sup>7</sup> Yet it is the best model we have of justice and self-realization. Achieving more inclusive representation is our best hope for increasing the potential of institutions of higher learning to make a positive contribution to broader social justice.

Thus, while it is doubtful that colleges and universities could effectively transform American society into one that is genuinely democratic, they could do something more modest: they could model justice. They could strive to be just communities. This essay explores the virtues of a model of higher education as an inclusive, deliberative, and collective enterprise with potential agency for beneficial and broader social change.

### III

Modeling justice in institutions of higher education through fair inclusion by race, gender, and socioeconomic status would require revising some other familiar and relevant models of the value and function of the university:

1. The first is an *economic development model* of the university as an instrument for advancing society's economic growth. In this model, educational outcomes are assessed by their contribution to aggregate economic growth. Contribution to economic growth, regionally and nationally, is of course a familiar aspect of the mission of many schools. For example, a 2003 report commissioned by the eight research universities in the Boston area claims that those universities "not only have a large direct financial impact, but more importantly, they form much of the intellectual underpinning of the regional economy, producing human capital and new technologies that fuel economic growth."<sup>8</sup> The eight presidents of those universities signed the report with evident pride and approval.

By emphasizing economic development as a model, I refer to the view that the contribution of higher education to national economic growth is its primary justification. Universities themselves do not commonly adopt this model but are sometimes pressured to justify their public funding by at least implicit appeals to this view. A problem with the economic development model is that its aggregative approach neglects matters of the distribution of

wealth in society. Furthermore, this model lacks an ethical evaluation of the goals and effects of investment and spending. Without a conception of distributive justice or an ethics of investment and consumption, the economic model is an impoverished perspective from which to evaluate the aims of higher education.<sup>9</sup>

2. The second is a *business model* of the university as offering services demanded by its paying customers. According to this model, a university education should benefit students in line with their expressed aims and goals, such as career advancement, competitive advantage, and increased social status. This model is misguided but not lightly dismissed. Higher education should serve important interests of students, but its aim is not restricted to this mission. A business model of higher education is too individualistic and uncritical. It lacks a collective, public dimension expressing shareable evaluative criteria and joint aims.<sup>10</sup> Just institutions do not merely serve people's existing aims, goals, and self-identified needs; they shape and limit valued aims in line with fair consideration of the interests of all members and, more broadly, of stakeholders. This is an abstract way of saying that universities should guide their members in formulating personal aims and interests that are in line with a broader conception of the social good and the university's role in public life. Since institutions of higher education confer upon their graduates the goods of social status and a competitive advantage in seeking employment, they should do this responsibly: with sensitivity to whether conferring these advantages selectively could be justified to those who lack them.
3. The third is a *scholarcentric model* of the university as a platform for scholarly research with disciplinary autonomy. This model is attractive to research faculty. What I most challenge here is not the value of excellence in research but the value of disciplinary autonomy in the design of departments to suit the research agendas and disciplinary commitments of current faculty.<sup>11</sup> Thus I do not reject a scholarcentric model of the university, but I would qualify it. A paradigm of disciplinary autonomy is not sensitive enough to whether the quest for knowledge advances the ethical value of knowledge. Modeling social justice must include examining the ethical value of scholarly pursuits. This means that those pursuits should be open to meaningful evaluation and criticism by members of the broader university community who are charged with promoting greater inclusiveness, whether university committees, external reviewers, or those in positions of academic leadership perform this assessment.

Criticizing a scholarcentric model of the university is controversial among research faculty and is in tension with some rationales for the tenure



system. The tension arises because these measures challenge the autonomy of scholars to define what is of value within their fields, which is what the tenure system protects. I do not advocate eliminating the tenure system, which I think is important for other reasons. But I do support revising the ideal of the university as a platform for scholarly research with disciplinary autonomy, despite the tension this brings with the rationale for tenure. Revisions of a scholarcentric model and the other two prominent and popular conceptions of the social function of the university are needed because of the requirements of social justice for more inclusive representation.

Modeling justice in the university would not displace the other three roles I have described, but it would constrain and balance them so that they contribute to the university's mission without distorting it. Justice is a virtue of the whole institution, organizing and prioritizing its many dimensions.

#### IV

One might worry about whether it makes sense to model a university after a just society, as justice looks different in different contexts. Plato sought to describe a just soul in order to understand a just city, but a just person might not be like a just city. Perhaps justice is not a uniform value, ordered by similar principles in all of its domains.

In significant ways, just universities are unlike democratic political societies. For example, university presidents are typically chosen not by a democratic vote on campus, but by a university's board of trustees. There are many important differences between a voluntary organization and a political society. Still, we should not thus conclude that the concept of justice is inapplicable to universities. Furthermore, the university as a model of justice is not merely an analogy.

Fair opportunity for education is an entitlement in a just democratic society. I will take this for granted, but it is not exactly clear what this means and how it applies to higher education. For example, should everyone have an opportunity for college education, or are just entitlements to education satisfied by adequate secondary school education? A decent secondary school education might prepare people to participate in civic life, to acquire employment, and to understand the rights and obligations of citizenship. College education is costly, and if that cost is to be shared collectively, its value needs a convincing public justification. Hopeful proclamations about the value of higher education to the further democratization of American political culture do not suffice. On the other hand, a personal-fulfillment

rationale for universal college education is also unlikely to survive scrutiny in a pluralistic society.

A compelling basis for staking a fair-opportunity requirement is the actual social function of universities in regulating the production and distribution of wealth, opportunity, and other social goods, such as knowledge, innovation, and culture. The institutions of higher education are major contributors to the preparation of adults for skilled employment, research and development, creative design (in television, film, advertising, and architecture, for example), social commentary and opinion making, and positions of leadership. A college degree is virtually a prerequisite for the promise of recognized social contributions in these arenas. This is a strong reason to maintain that a fair-opportunity requirement extends to institutions of higher learning.<sup>12</sup>

Elite colleges and universities should be subjected to a high level of scrutiny on this measure. Elite institutions have a greater impact on the production and distribution of wealth, opportunity, knowledge, innovation, and culture; admission is highly selective. Furthermore, they are expensive. Students at elite liberal arts institutions spend four years living and studying together, full-time, in an interactive and intensive learning environment. Their peers are not primarily competitors for scarce resources, but partners in a collaborative campus community. This is a resource-intensive endeavor. Careful thinking is required to understand what could make the opportunity to attend fair.

Merit currently plays a role in admissions decisions and is influenced in significant measure by talent, although, as we will see, by other factors as well. If merit is an appropriate criterion, then all potential candidates should have a fair opportunity to be evaluated on their merits. Supposing that fair opportunity is an entitlement and hence should have broad social support, some who share the cost of educating the meritorious would not themselves meet the selection criteria. If this is not unfair, it could only be because there is a rationale for selection by merit that could also be addressed to those who are not selected.

The nature of this rationale, as well as the content of merit judgments itself, will be a function of an understanding of the proper social function of the university; this, in turn, connects with questions about the role and justification of social institutions more broadly speaking—the subject of theories of justice. If we understand higher education, for example, as an instrument for maximizing social utility overall, then those people with the greatest potential to contribute would be most qualified. It would be unfair to deny access to individuals whose education would serve to maximize social utility,

but not necessarily unfair to deny it to others. If higher education is an instrument for maximizing society's economic growth, then restricting access to persons with the best prospects for contributing to maximal economic growth would not be unfair. If our understanding of the proper function of the university is influenced by perfectionist goals of producing excellence, then selecting by criteria that evaluate prospects for excellent achievement would be appropriate. If higher education is shaped by the utopian goal of preparing each person fully to realize his or her potential, then fairness requires that every person should have the opportunity to attend. In each paradigm, fairness requires equal opportunities for those who are suitably qualified.

Fundamental questions about the social function of higher education and hence about the relevant criterion of merit for admission are not easily resolved, especially since universities serve complex roles. I will not attempt to resolve these questions and will address them only in a limited way. I will not, for example, take up the question of whether a greater number of people overall should be entitled to receive a liberal arts education.<sup>13</sup> I will assume, however, that any reasonable conception of fair equality of opportunity will not discriminate by race, gender, or socioeconomic class. The social purpose of the university, however exactly we specify it, should not depend on differential access by race, gender, or class.<sup>14</sup> To this extent, judgments of merit must be constrained by fairness. But since there is no good reason to suspect that raw talent and potential for development and contribution are distributed according to race, gender, or socioeconomic status, this qualification does not distort our common conception of merit.<sup>15</sup> We are free rationally to accept a basic requirement of justice: that qualified and motivated individuals should have equal prospects for attaining positions of social importance, regardless of gender, race, or socioeconomic class of origin. This means that any aggregating and maximizing calculations of the university's value—for instance, attention to the role of the university in promoting a society's economic growth—are objectionable to the extent that they obscure or depend on discrimination by race, gender, or socioeconomic status.

Talent and motivation as criteria of merit might be thought of as useful criteria for correcting historical patterns of discrimination in which some people have attained elite positions by virtue of their social privilege rather than by merit. But talent and motivation as criteria of merit are not easily disaggregated from other factors, because what counts as relevant talent and motivation is socially freighted. Valued aspirations for individuals and institutions are socially conditioned and might be biased, requiring talents

and characteristics that reflect the experience and culture of a privileged elite.<sup>16</sup> For example, politicians who are perceived as electable or business leaders who exude authority are more likely to be male, white, and from economically privileged backgrounds. Opportunities to develop talent and motivation are also socially freighted: they are not equally or even randomly distributed but are marked instead by social class, among other factors.<sup>17</sup> We know, for example, that girls are socialized to prefer less quantitative fields of study. We also know that many urban schools fail miserably to prepare students for college. Lack of opportunity is correlated with underdeveloped talent and lower motivation. Natural talent can wither and die.

These challenges raise broader questions of social justice that institutions of higher education have limited means to address. Instead, as I have indicated, my focus is on some possible changes that are within the purview of institutions of higher education to effect.<sup>18</sup> Thus, I acknowledge but do not fully address hard questions about the bearing of gender, race, and socioeconomic class on opportunities to develop talent and motivation as well as on relevant measures of talent, as important as those questions are. Instead, I have chosen to focus on the ethical imperative of achieving greater inclusivity along lines of race, gender, and socioeconomic status according to roughly current appraisals of talent and motivation, including grades and test scores. I do this with some caution and qualification. While I urge broadening current criteria and how we think about them, I do not strongly repudiate current attention to grades and test scores.

The aim of inclusion fits with the self-conscious mission of many colleges and universities. I am speaking here not only of those universities and colleges that embrace affirmative action policies, but also of those whose aim it is to cultivate democratic values, ethical reasoning, critical thinking, and multicultural education. A sampling of liberal arts institutions from around the country bears this out. Terms such as "diversity," "inclusion," and "multiculturalism" are prevalent in the mission statements of many schools. For example, in its mission statement, Yale University states, "Yale seeks to attract a diverse group of exceptionally talented men and women from across the nation and around the world and to educate them for leadership in scholarship, the professions, and society."<sup>19</sup> The mission statement of Colby College includes the goal of providing "a demanding, expansive educational experience to a select group of diverse, talented, intellectually sophisticated students."<sup>20</sup> These themes echo across many American colleges and universities.

Advancing inclusivity by race, gender, and socioeconomic class connects with efforts to remedy historically obvious dimensions of injustice. Under-

representation is the product of some of the most blatant forms of injustice and is still very much with us today. Addressing other dimensions of injustice will not resolve this problem. The important dimension of corrective and distributive justice is, however, only part of the story I am telling. A genuinely inclusive, deliberative community also models democracy in a participatory sense. Liberal arts colleges and universities are possible sites for the development of an inclusive and deliberative community of equals. The potential for a more inclusive university education to significantly shape the experience and values of its participants also represents its brightest prospects for making a broader social contribution toward greater justice. While higher education is not and is not likely to be universally available, its availability to a substantial segment of the population could be justifiable, provided that segment is diverse and representative.

I am arguing that higher education that is inclusive along the lines of race, gender, and socioeconomic class, and that has a participatory and deliberative orientation, has the potential to shape the values and aims of the members of its community of scholarship to make a valuable civic contribution beyond the university. This rationale for higher education has limits. It does not apply to all institutions of higher learning.<sup>21</sup> Many college students do not receive a deliberative liberal arts education. They attend large lecture classes, they commute to large and diffuse public institutions where they are mostly anonymous, they interrupt their college careers to work (assembling credits over time), and they study vocational fields. Students in these contexts learn not through sustained and deliberative interaction with involved professors and peers, but as relatively passive recipients of information imparted from their professors, at some distance. This model of learning emphasizes formal transfer of knowledge or skills from faculty to individual students. It is modular and not oriented toward community building. Some elements of liberal arts education might be prominent, but without a participatory and deliberative emphasis.

Considerations of distributive and corrective justice provide an argument for fair opportunity to attend institutions of higher education, whether participatory and deliberative or not. I have argued that socially disadvantaged and historically excluded populations should have equal access to important goods conferred by higher education. This imperative of justice could be satisfied by a variety of institutional options, including vocational and technical training as well as large public universities. It does not necessarily require a liberal arts education. The participatory justice argument I have introduced, however, is directed to liberal arts institutions, in particular. If we are to maintain selective liberal arts institutions, rather than, say, utiliz-

ing available resources to expand the enrollment capacity of more accessible public institutions, private liberal arts colleges and universities are under moral pressure to reveal unique and valuable contributions whose benefits extend beyond the select class of people who attend these institutions. In other words, the achievements of elite liberal arts institutions should be subjected to ethical evaluation.

I will now elaborate some criteria of ethical evaluation designed to enhance the university as a model of justice. Specifically, I will address student admissions, pedagogy, and the climate on campus for student life and scholarly research. My discussion will be organized by three basic points:

1. Colleges and universities should stress publicly that desert or merit in admissions is best understood as a matter of potential for success and contribution.
2. Scholarship should be evaluated in relation to what I will call "social intelligence."
3. An inclusive and fair campus climate anchors the prospects for critical thinking and creative understanding.

## V

The scales of justice are a familiar metaphor for a concept of desert. Desert so understood involves the moral notion that praiseworthy achievers should be rewarded (and, symmetrically, blameworthy wrongdoers should be punished). In this way of thinking, an assessment of past behavior fixes the relevant reward, apart from the implications of past behavior for future performance and from any beneficial consequences that may flow from conferring the award. Furthermore, achievers are thought to be morally entitled to their just deserts. Failure to receive their due would be cause for moral complaint. This notion of desert is backward looking; individual moral desert is fixed without reference to consequences.

Desert is not plausible as an admissions criterion. Admissions committees are charged with identifying persons who will benefit greatly from the school's resources, who will succeed academically, and who will contribute to the school's academic and social mission. Admissions officers look for candidates who merit admission in this, complex, forward-looking sense.<sup>22</sup> Grades and standardized test scores are used to predict success rather than serving as achievement indicators of deserved rewards. There is confusion, however, and even resentment in the broader public's perception of judgments of merit in admission. Legal cases have been built on the view that



admitting applicants with lower grades and test scores than their competitors is evidence of unfair treatment, in view of the plaintiffs' superior achievements, even when universities make it clear that the admissions criteria used further the school's mission in important ways. The U.S. Supreme Court has not been unsympathetic to the argument that affirmative action by race is racial discrimination, although it has also not fully accepted the plaintiffs' arguments, leaving room for admissions criteria to be designed around merit as individual potential for successful engagement in the collective educational enterprise.<sup>23</sup> It is likely that the court's ambivalence on the consideration of race in university admissions has fueled public suspicion of university admissions policies.

Universities with progressive admissions policies should maintain their stance and communicate it more fully to the public, making clear that diversity is critically important to the collective learning environment. Inclusion and balance by race, gender, and socioeconomic status promotes the critical-thinking enterprise, since critical scrutiny of values, biases, and assumptions is facilitated by thoughtful encounters with people who have had different social experiences. It should also be stressed that racial diversity and the inclusion of American minority groups is especially important, given the profound impact of race on American history, politics, culture, social stratification, and social dynamics.<sup>24</sup> In this respect, the demands of corrective and distributive justice to remedy disadvantages to historically excluded and mistreated minorities also promote the collective and individual advancement of learning.

Universities can also communicate more forcefully than they have that diversification of a student body is best accomplished by limiting the role of grades and test scores in admissions decisions. Grades and test scores serve a helpful threshold function for assessing whether a candidate merits admission, provided that relevant adjustments are made in view of evidence indicating that certain groups tend to underperform on standardized tests.<sup>25</sup> However, it should be stressed that candidates also merit admission based on other factors of practical intelligence, such as ability to overcome obstacles, strength of motivation, commitment, and resilience, as well as the contribution their individual and cultural perspectives could make to the learning community. These factors do not compete with merit as criteria of admission. They are themselves measures of merit in the relevant forward-looking sense because they figure into the prospects of individual and collective success in learning. The point is that the relevant notion of desert encompasses potential, it has individual and collective dimensions, and it is not a moral measure of deserved rewards. While many admissions offices

may affirm this approach, its ethical substance and importance warrants public clarification and emphasis.

Grades and test scores as measures of qualification reveal imbalance by socioeconomic class of origin in the population of students attending elite colleges and universities. Amy Gutmann emphasizes what she refers to as the "big squeeze" in college admissions. In a recent study, Gutmann found that 36 percent of high school seniors who are highly qualified for admission to elite colleges and universities (they have high grades and combined SAT scores over 1200) come from the top 20 percent of the income bracket, while 57 percent of selective university students come from this same income bracket. This means, she concludes, that the "wealthiest 20 percent of American families are overrepresented on elite college campuses by a margin of 21 percent."<sup>26</sup> Gutmann documents underrepresentation of the other income groups all the way down to the lowest income bracket. She found that inadequate financial aid was not the only factor contributing to the underenrollment of qualified students from middle- and lower-income brackets. Also important is the perception that elite universities are unwelcoming. Outreach and retention programs, in addition to need-blind admissions, are crucial to correcting uneven socioeconomic representation of qualified students.

## VI

I now turn to the evaluation of scholarship. I propose that scholarship be evaluated for its production of knowledge as "social intelligence." In referring to knowledge as social intelligence, I mean that knowledge can be understood and evaluated in relation to the community of knowers that it empowers. To understand knowledge in relation to social intelligence is to think about how knowledge is built and with whom it is shared. It is to examine who the knowers are, who produces knowledge, and who the intended audience is of knowledge production. The intelligent social group includes those persons who generate and/or can manipulate and expand knowledge. This is the group that renders information useful or in other ways valuable. It might be considerably smaller than the group of people that benefits from the generation of knowledge. Many people benefit from the engineering expertise involved in designing bridges and airplanes, yet few know anything about the principles of engineering and current innovations in the field. At issue here is not the wider social value of advances in research, but rather membership in the intellectual community. The intelligent social group has access to knowledge and can influence its consump-

tion, application, and development, and it has social power that passive beneficiaries lack. Concern with fair opportunity in higher education must address the academic community surrounding scholarship and evaluate its inclusiveness. Fair-opportunity considerations should extend to membership in the community of scholarship.

Institutions involved in education should be concerned with whether the group of people involved with the production and consumption of scholarship is socially representative along lines of race, gender, and social class, and whether students and research faculty at the university are all in a position fully to participate in the scholarship community. This would be to understand social intelligence as the model of deliberative democracy, as opposed to a notion of democracy that emphasizes representation. Consider two differing ideas of political equality. One is that political equality of persons means that the interests of all persons should be given equal weight in collective decisions. This fits with a notion of democracy as representative. The other is the idea that political equality requires equal opportunity to participate in collective decisions.<sup>27</sup> This includes a deliberative requirement. Evaluating knowledge in relation to social intelligence expresses the value of people's opportunities to participate in collective endeavors that affect their basic interests. This expresses a deeper notion of democracy as self-government. It requires more than the production of knowledge as socially beneficial.

I am suggesting that a notion of social intelligence on the model of deliberative democracy be used to evaluate scholarship. Specifically, I am applying it to the community of scholarship and aiming to broaden the social intelligence of scholarship as it bears on the content and conduct of research. If academic departments and, more broadly, academic disciplines are not diversified by race and gender, they should be required by university leadership to broaden their content by opening up new lines of research and/or by hiring women and minorities who are productive scholars, whether or not their subjects of research are race and gender focused. Here I am acknowledging a distinction between race and gender as it bears on the subject of research and the race and gender of researchers themselves. I will count both types of diversification—by topic and by researcher—as progress in terms of race and gender inclusiveness. Inclusiveness by topic potentially calls attention to the nature and sources of justice concerns, increasing our ethical sensitivity. This may facilitate change, if indirectly.

Emphasizing the importance of greater inclusivity does not necessarily imply that there is something wrong with specialized scholarship whose focus is not race and gender. Diversity can be achieved more broadly in aca-

demetic departments, by hiring minorities and women in those or other areas and also by including areas of scholarship that do study the dynamics of race and gender. Yet subfields that create a chilly climate for women and minorities call for scrutiny, particularly if they lack practical application. Insistence on knowledge for its own sake is troubling when proponents wield scarce resources without inclusive assessment of its promise.

Another strategy for promoting greater inclusiveness emphasizes the value of cross-disciplinary lines of research and centers of scholarship that are designed around inclusive academic research programs, with an eye to cross-fertilizing more recalcitrant fields of study. For example, in "cluster hires" faculty positions are offered to select departments that agree to participate in the curricular development and research advancement of interdisciplinary fields of study. An interdisciplinary committee participates in the selection of candidates for those positions.

Access to the community of scholarship, I have argued, is ideally regulated by a notion of fair equality of opportunity that privileges talent and motivation as qualifications for membership in the community of scholarship and should not otherwise discriminate. Developing the ideal of deliberative democracy in this context contrasts with proposing a broader, society-wide notion of democratic participation that could imply a more radical shift in our thinking about the aims of higher education. Still, applying the idea more narrowly within an understanding of equal opportunity that is structured by the importance of talent and motivation has significant implications for the meaning of equality and inclusion within the academic community. It means that we should be vigilant about whether that community makes up a healthy cross-section by race, gender, and socioeconomic class, as we should expect it would were objectionable bias to be eliminated.

## VII

Finally, I turn to some matters of campus climate for students and address the ethics of pedagogy. The phrase "critical thinking" has become popular in descriptions of what university education should aim to cultivate in students.<sup>28</sup> It is not, however, always clear what is meant by the term. In aiming to articulate a plausible understanding, let us first distinguish between passive and active thought. In passive thinking students absorb information but do not consciously identify reasons to endorse or to reject the value of this information. Memorization and regurgitation of information are examples of passive thinking. Active, critical thinking, by contrast, survives reflective endorsement. It involves judgment and evaluation and is guided by values.<sup>29</sup>

In reflectively endorsing the relevance of information, a person's self-conception and values are used as guides for appraising information and orienting the quest for knowledge.<sup>30</sup> Values enable a person to explore new information by placing him or her in a position to evaluate whether information is worthy of consideration. In thinking critically, one has a sense of the point of exploring information. For example, it might serve a potentially valuable social purpose, sharpen our understanding and appreciation of the natural world, or be emotionally and intellectually satisfying. Because a framework of values places a person in a position to recognize information as providing reasons for further thought and for drawing conclusions, critical thinking is connected with self-affirmation. It involves coming to conclusions by means of reasons that one affirms as relevant. When a person adopts reasons as a basis for drawing conclusions, he or she may become aware that they say something about who he or she is. The person is one who has certain aims in the thinking enterprise that he or she believes makes it worthwhile. To avoid cognitive dissonance, we put ourselves under some pressure to see that the reasons we recognize fit together, if not into one overall rational scheme, then at least into rational clusters, eliminating obvious conflicts. We have a stake in seeing that these clusters cohere, more or less, over time so that we can experience ourselves as unified persons.

Critical thinking, as I have just described it, is an exercise in autonomy. By autonomy, however, I do not mean isolation. In fact, critical thinking as an exercise in autonomy typically requires social presence. It requires that other people affirm the integrity of one's intellectual capacities. Without relevant social acknowledgment it is very difficult for people to use critical thinking to learn new things. This is because in thinking critically one reaches out from what one understands and thinks is important to explore new information and ideas and also to reflect on one's assumptions and commitments. Critical thinking begins from and is oriented by a person's values and reasons, but it also involves scrutinizing the values and reasons upon which a person's identity depends. Thus it involves self-evaluation. This requires constructive modes of challenge that can facilitate individual self-evaluation. A diverse community with a collective commitment to honest and open inquiry is an invaluable tool for critical thinking and learning.

Thinking critically together with other people introduces an ethical dimension. A process of self-examination can be difficult and even painful. One might discover that some of one's values, assumptions, and commitments do not have the support of reason—they cannot be justified or do not, on reflection, seem worthwhile. Students who are open to learning sometimes discover this. Critical thinking as an exercise in self-reflection

can provoke a palpable sense of vulnerability and disorientation; social support may be needed to enable the critical-thinking exercise to continue. Educators thus have a complex role: as supporters and as guides who introduce worthwhile sources of challenge and promote collective reasoning that satisfies ethical requirements of mutual respect.<sup>31</sup> Teaching a diverse group of students complicates the responsibilities involved in teaching. The starting point for critical thinking differs across people, particularly in a diverse group in which different people have different life experiences and values. Educators must develop multiple strategies for engaging students. This suggests a certain ethics of teaching—emphasizing that instructors should not only model active, engaged learning, but should also use multiple and varied representations of course content and incorporate student-centered teaching (such as dialogue, informal writing, group discussion, team projects, and other forms of cooperative learning).

When critical thinking is a genuinely collective enterprise, all participants must be recognized as capable of rational judgment and honest self-evaluation. Each will be treated as capable of gaining knowledge and evaluating information in good faith. This means that participants are under ethical pressure to recognize one another as capable of challenging, scrutinizing, and evaluating the bases of knowledge claims. They must recognize one another as worthy interlocutors. One is thus challenged to broaden one's self-assessment to rationally engage the perspective of other people, although their starting points may be quite different from one's own. Accepting this challenge expresses ethical respect for the autonomy of other people and enables mutual and collective growth.

Evidence from social psychology supports my proposal that we understand critical thinking as an exercise in autonomy that depends on ethical group dynamics. Studies confirm, for example, that threats to self-esteem (e.g., stereotype threat), cultural alienation, and the perception of bias and unfairness significantly affect the academic performance of women and students of color.<sup>32</sup> Fair and socially affirmative responses to these threats have been shown to improve student performance significantly.<sup>33</sup> This is evidence in favor of an ethics of pedagogy that is student centered, participatory, and sensitive to the importance and difficulty of creating group dynamics that engender mutual respect and equal standing.

## VIII

This essay has attempted to give content to the idea of the university as a model of justice in meeting reasonable institutional requirements of justice



that address historically rooted sources of exclusion, and in promoting an inclusive culture in the academic community, on the model of the university community as a participatory democracy. I have argued that this realizable ideal of the university encompasses the university's approach to admissions, scholarship, campus climate, and pedagogy. Inclusivity in these aspects of a university's policies and mission is required as a matter of fair equality of opportunity, and it is critical to developing the potential of liberal arts education to enhance critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and democratic values. Were universities successfully to model justice in the ways I have described, faculty and students broadly representative of the wider population and enabled fully to participate in the learning and research community would be in a strong position to represent their own experiences and to shape the values of the institution. By influencing their peers as well as developing personally, all members of the academic community could influence the social role and contribution of the university. This would raise the prospects for universities justly to contribute to the broader social good, rather than merely serving the interests of a privileged population.

### Notes

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1. See Martha Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).
2. See Jürgen Habermas, "Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification," in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen, introd. Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990).
3. See Eamonn Callan, *Creating Citizens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
4. This theme is prominent in Amy Gutmann's essay "What Makes a University Education Worthwhile?," this volume.
5. While broad-based assessment tools are important for all educational institutions, learning outcomes in liberal arts institutions might be especially challenging to measure.
6. By "liberal," I mean a society that protects equal basic rights, fair opportunities, and a decent standard of living for all.
7. Oberlin College and Berea College are examples of institutions with a history of strong commitment to racial diversity. That is admirable, yet those institutions have not achieved full commitment to modeling justice as I describe it.
8. See *Engines of Economic Growth: The Economic Impact of Boston's Eight Research Universities on the Metropolitan Boston Area* (New York: Appleseed, 2003); [www.appleseedinc.com/reports/Boston\\_summary.pdf](http://www.appleseedinc.com/reports/Boston_summary.pdf) (accessed August 28, 2014).
9. For a helpful and more detailed development of similar lines of criticism, see Christopher Bertram, "Defending the Humanities in a Liberal Society," this volume. Bertram raises concerns about the environmental effects of consumption, among other concerns.
10. For discussion of problems with the business model, see Peter Katopes, "The 'Business Model' Is the Wrong Model," *Inside Higher Ed*, September 20, 2011, <http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2009/02/16/katopes> (accessed August 28, 2014).
11. For a discussion of this type of model and its effect on the preparation of students to participate in a diverse democracy, see Barry Checkoway, "Renewing the Civic Mission of the American Research University," *Journal of Higher Education* 72, no. 2 (March–April 2001): 125–47.
12. This argument does not depend on whether institutions of higher education succeed in promoting a democratic and egalitarian political culture in the broader society.
13. It might be argued that institutions of higher education should be expanded so that more people have an opportunity to attend. Alternatively, merit as a criterion for admission could be jettisoned and replaced by open enrollment or a lottery system. This takes us back to questions about the value of higher education, and whether this value has (or ought to have) strong enough public support to prioritize equal chances or universal access as a matter of justice.
14. This claim is not in tension with affirmative action policies, which aim to correct historically entrenched patterns of discrimination.
15. Despite a long history of gender discrimination, many selective colleges (although not in the Ivy League) now have more female than male students, reflecting qualifications gained prior to college and perhaps also reasonable judgments about potential. This raises some serious questions about whether primary and secondary school education is failing adequately to serve boys. Thanks to Harry Brighouse for calling this issue to my attention.
16. See, e.g., discussions of cultural bias in standardized testing.
17. Greg J. Duncan and Richard Murnane, eds., *Whither Opportunity? Rising Inequality, Schools, and Children's Life Chances* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, and Chicago: Spencer Foundation, 2011); J. Brooks-Gunn and F. F. Furstenberg, "The Children of Adolescent Mothers: Academic and Psychological Outcomes," *Developmental Review* 6 (1986): 224–51; Todd R. Risley and Betty Hart, *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children* (Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes, 1995); Edmund W. Gordon and Melissa P. Lemons, "An Interactionist Perspective on the Genesis of Intelligence," in *Intelligence, Heredity, and Environment*, ed. Robert J. Sternberg and Elena Grigorenko (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 323–40.
18. For discussion of the responsibility of universities to address racial inequalities in pre-college education, see Lionel K. McPherson, "Righting Injustice in Higher Education," this volume.
19. <http://www.yale.edu/about/mission.html>.
20. See [http://www.colby.edu/academics\\_cs/catalogue/2011\\_2012/general\\_information/colby\\_plan.cfm](http://www.colby.edu/academics_cs/catalogue/2011_2012/general_information/colby_plan.cfm) (accessed August 28, 2014). See also the mission statements for the following schools: Colgate College <http://colgate.edu/about/generalinformation/mission/html>, the University of Washington (<http://www.washington.edu/diversity/>), the University of North Dakota (<http://und.edu/discover/leadership-and-educators>



- /mission-statement.cfm), and Grinnell College (<http://www.grinnell.edu/offices/president/missionstatement>), to name a few.
21. Thanks to Peter Levine for his suggestions on this paragraph.
  22. This is something like the notion of desert that David Schmidtz refers to as a promissory notion. See David Schmidtz, *Elements of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), chapter 8.
  23. See *Grutter v. Bollinger* 539 U.S. 306 (2003). See also *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* 438 U.S. 265 (1978). The Supreme Court is currently considering a challenge to the consideration of race in university admissions: *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin*, No. 11–345 (2012).
  24. This argument appears to be absent from the respondents' arguments to the court in *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin*. The respondents argue for the educational benefits of diversity without emphasizing the central importance to American society of the dynamics and social history of race. They do not go beyond the stance taken by the petitioners in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*.
  25. See Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips, *The Black-White Test Score Gap* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1998); and Richard E. Nisbett, *Intelligence and How to Get It: Why Schools and Cultures Count* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009).
  26. Amy Gutmann, "What Makes a University Education Worthwhile?" this volume.
  27. See Joshua Cohen, "Procedure and Substance in Deliberative Democracy," in *Philosophy, Politics, Democracy: Selected Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009). See also Ronald Dworkin, "The Curse of American Politics," *New York Review of Books*, October 17, 1996.
  28. I am not supposing that a liberal arts education is the only way to cultivate critical thinking.
  29. For a thoughtful discussion of values associated with critical thinking, see Kyla Ebels-Duggan, "Autonomy as Intellectual Virtue," this volume.
  30. See Christine M. Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, ed. Onora O'Neill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), especially chapter 3, and *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), chapter 1.
  31. See Paul Weithman's thoughtful discussion in this volume on the importance of teachers as academic friends. In their contributions to this volume, both Weithman and Ebels-Duggan stress the importance of teachers' demonstrating love for the ideas they teach and admiration for the tenacity needed for developing complex ideas. Their discussions helpfully counter a tendency in some approaches to critical thinking of a negative debate-style emphasis on the vulnerability of complex positions to objections.
  32. See Claude M. Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi and Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010); Geoffrey L. Cohen and Claude M. Steele, "A Barrier of Mistrust: How Negative Stereotypes Affect Cross-Race Mentoring," in *Improving Academic Achievement: Impact of Psychological Factors on Education*, ed. J. Aronson (San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 2002); Yen J. Huo, Heather J. Smith, Tom R. Tyler, and E. Allan Lind, "Superordinate Identification, Subgroup Identification, and Justice Concerns: Is Separatism the Problem, Is Assimilation the Answer?," *Psychological Science* 7, no. 1 (1996): 40–45; Albert Bandura, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1986); and Carol S. Dweck, *Self-Theories: Their Role in Motivation, Personality, and Development* (Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis/ Psychology Press, 1999).
  33. G. L. Cohen, J. Garcia, N. Apfel, and A. Master, "Reducing the Racial Achievement

Gap: A Social-Psychological Intervention," *Science* 313 (2006), 1307–10; and G. L. Cohen, J. Garcia, V. Purdie-Vaughns, N. Apfel, and P. Brzustoski, "Recursive Processes in Self-Affirmation: Intervening to Close the Minority Achievement Gap," *Science* 324 (2009): 400–403. Even seemingly small interventions have been shown to have a significant impact. See T. D. Wilson, "The Power of Social-Psychological Interventions," *Science* 313 (2006): 1251–52; and Julio Garcia and Geoffrey L. Cohen, "A Social Psychological Approach to Educational Intervention," in *The Behavioral Foundations of Policy*, ed. Eldar Shafir (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).