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Hutchins, Adler, and the University of Chicago: A Critical Juncture

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As dean of Yale University's Law School, Robert Hutchins stressed social science theory and research as central to the university's work. Within a few years, as president of the University of Chicago, he abandoned the social sciences for philosophy and the great books. Hutchins's conversion seems ironic because it took place at an institution renowned for the work of its faculty in social science theory and research. This article is an attempt to make sense of Hutchins's shift in thinking at a critical juncture in his life and in the university's history.

Robert M. Hutchins experienced an intellectual conversion during the first four years of his presidency of the University of Chicago. At Chicago, Hutchins was known as a persistent critic of the social sciences. Yet before his appointment there, as dean and faculty member of the Yale Law School he strongly supported the social sciences, encouraging the integration of social science theory and research into the study of law. Between 1929 and 1933 he shifted from advocating social science to advocating philosophy as the focus for integrating the college curriculum and as the most respectable intellectual endeavor of the university ("The Higher Learning, I," in Hutchins 1936*b*, pp. 24–32). The catalyst for that transition was his friendship with Mortimer J. Adler.

Hutchins's first few years as president of the University of Chicago represented a critical juncture in his life. He might have followed a number of paths to try to shape the university in the early 1930s. The question guiding this article is, Why did Adler's ideas about undergraduate education and the ordering of the university's intellectual life make sense to Hutchins at that crucial point in his life?

A number of factors contributed to Hutchins's disaffection with the modern university. The requirements of his new position and the demands the Depression put on the university framed his choices.

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November 1990 57

The social crisis of the Depression led Hutchins to question the efficacy of the social sciences to solve social problems (Hutchins 1940). And the rise of fascism in Europe shaped educators' discussions about the content and function of higher education to train for democratic leadership and participation.¹ However, these factors alone do not adequately explain Hutchins's transition from the social sciences to philosophy.

A more powerful source for the path Hutchins chose was the link between the education he received in the Protestant evangelical culture of his early life and formal schooling and his receptivity to Adler's ideas. Interestingly, one can find in that culture suggestive sources for both his early fascination with the social sciences and his later conversion to Adler's ideas.

The Protestant evangelical culture of Hutchins's early life contributed to his later conversion in three principal ways. First, his father, a paragon of virtue and a religious and educational leader, served as a strong model for the way Hutchins would perceive the leadership role. Numerous other members of the Hutchins family also exhibited distinctive leadership qualities and were models for Hutchins. Second, his early interest in the social sciences was framed by his exposure to them at Oberlin Academy and College. The transformation of Oberlin College from an evangelical institution to a progressive institution played an important role in Hutchins's conception of the social sciences. Finally, in a related way, the shared perception at Oberlin (and at Yale University, where Hutchins received his B.A.) of the primary function of higher educational institutions was that of training the coming generation for leadership and service.

The Protestant evangelical culture enveloped Robert Hutchins's early life and education. His father, William (Will) James Hutchins, was a Presbyterian minister in Brooklyn, New York, when he was invited to teach Bible and homiletics in Oberlin College and Theological Seminary. Robert was eight years old when his family moved to Oberlin in 1907. He attended public elementary school, Oberlin Academy (1911–15), and Oberlin College (1915–17) before he joined the Oberlin unit of the U.S. Army Ambulance Corps during World War I. His summers were spent traveling with his father to Congregational, Presbyterian, and Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) camps, where Will

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Hutchins preached and led Bible classes. In short, Hutchins's whole childhood was spent in the Protestant evangelical and progressive networks of the early twentieth century.

Will Hutchins was an exemplar of moral and spiritual leadership. He had followed his own father into the ministry, although he chose the Presbyterian rather than the Congregational church. His preaching, less emotive than his father's, relied on rational persuasion. He addressed his sermons to the social and moral obligations of his parishioners in a changing society. Young Robert heard his father preach at least once, and often twice, on Sundays. Within the family, Will Hutchins led prayers every morning before breakfast. He ceaselessly reminded his sons of their moral obligations, while their mother Anna reinforced this teaching with lessons on thoughtful and proper social behavior.²

At Oberlin, Will Hutchins exhibited a similar care in his more public teaching duties. He was renowned for his rigorous, socially oriented Bible classes for freshman men. He offered comfort and counsel to many in his new community. On the Oberlin campus, he spoke frequently to YMCA and other groups on the relationship between Christianity, social service, and personal conduct. He articulated permanent Christian values, emphasizing connections between intellectual work and moral sturdiness. He delivered sermons all over Ohio, often bringing his two older sons Bill and Robert with him. His father's preaching and teaching were Robert Hutchins's first, most powerful, and most consistent exposure to educational and moral leadership.

This exposure was reinforced by the Hutchins family's educational accomplishments and moral leadership. Will Hutchins had received a Phi Beta Kappa key at Yale College, and Robert vied for and earned one himself (Hutchins 1939). Robert's mother, Anna Murch Hutchins, had studied Latin at Cleveland High School, attended Oberlin College, and graduated from Mount Holyoke College. His parents, uncles, and aunts had attended Oberlin. Some had gone on to Yale, Williams, and Union Theological Seminary. His paternal grandfather, Robert Grosvenor Hutchins, had attended Andover Theological Seminary and knew Washington Gladden and other prominent Protestant ministers and progressive reformers.

The extended family included a lawyer, businessmen, a physician, and ministers, all persons of locally known integrity who made significant contributions to their communities and who served on boards of trustees at schools and colleges. All three of Will and Anna Hutchins's sons became educators, teaching and administrating in educational institutions. Formal education in the Hutchins family was not merely a means to social or economic advancement. It was primarily a way to serve and lead the community.

The Hutchins family had strong ties to the Oberlin community. From a long-standing evangelical tradition, still largely manifest when Will and Anna were students in the 1890s, Oberlin College was becoming a progressive institution in the period before World War I (Barnard 1969). While maintaining its historic commitment to principles of Christian behavior, Oberlin followed a pattern similar to that George E. Peterson (1964) describes in his study of the New England colleges. Intellectual rigor and a concern for social issues became increasingly important to students and faculty as Christian pietism decreased in importance. The courses Oberlin offered in the social sciences reflected a serious effort to relate theory to contemporary social problems. Some of the humanities courses Hutchins took also were taught in a social and historical context (Oberlin College, 1917).³

Public speakers who came to the Oberlin campus revealed much about what was valued at Oberlin College. Debates and lectures by prominent progressives, including Raymond Robbins, Scott Nearing, and Lincoln Steffens, argued the need for ethical political leaders, strong labor unions, world peace, women's rights, government regulatory responsibility, and social service (Barnard 1969).⁴ The president of Oberlin College, Henry Churchill King, linked Christian religious commitment with social consciousness, or sacred respect for individuals. Like many progressive Christians, his goal was to regenerate democracy in a time of great social and economic change (Love 1956). Oberlin's teaching continued to be grounded in religious belief. However, social and intellectual rather than evangelical obligations increasingly dominated the curriculum and extracurricular activities.

Courses and faculty members' activities show that there were implicit assumptions underlying the social and intellectual aims at Oberlin. These assumptions included a common commitment to principles simultaneously interpreted as Christian and democratic. Course descriptions and faculty interests illustrate the shared belief that rigorous scholarship had the potential to reflect and confirm what were essentially Protestant beliefs about virtuous behavior.⁵ Because it could contribute significantly to the reform of American society by using democratic definitions of social and economic justice and ethical conduct in political life, scholarship could be judged by broad moral as well as intellectual standards. The assumptions underlying this conception of scholarship were manifest in classes, debates (in which Hutchins participated), the student newspaper, and public lectures.

Oberlin's culture equipped Hutchins with values and attitudes that shaped his conceptions of educational leadership and the purposes of higher education. First, the educational leader had an intellectual and

moral responsibility to guide the community in the most principled way possible, whether or not the community agreed with his ideas. Second, the higher educational institution's primary responsibility was to train the next generation of leaders and citizens to serve society. This training required rigorous thinking about significant issues and problems. A good education allowed students to discover guides to moral conduct through the curriculum. Knowledge would better enable or even compel students to contribute to the public good (Hutchins 1936*b*, pp. 87–94; Barnard 1969). The ends of education in the social sciences at Oberlin, for example, were social reform through scholarship, education, and politics. Although Oberlin's tradition was religious, social science studies allowed the institution to take on a powerful secular mission in the twentieth century.

When Hutchins returned from war service in 1919, he planned to study history and government at Yale, with an eye to public service. Instead, having exhausted Yale's offerings in the social sciences, he became fascinated with the study of law in his senior year. The combination of law and social science work promised strong, secularly derived rules to guide public institutions and public leaders. These rules would be based on research in the facts of social conditions. Their scientific authority, beyond whatever moral authority they might exhibit, would be appropriate for guiding leaders in the twentieth century. Hutchins's work at Yale reflected Oberlin's progressive effort to anchor the study of the social sciences to the needs and obligations of social change, both of which would emerge *ipso facto* out of the data of social science investigations.

On the Yale faculty from 1925 to 1929, Hutchins was a forceful advocate of social science research to enrich and reform the study and administration of law (Schlegel 1979; Kalman 1986). He was eager to reform legal education by raising standards and developing new curricular emphases. With sociolegal research as the basis of the curriculum, he believed the law school could educate practitioners who would be useful to society first and able advisers to their clients second. If properly trained to see the social and economic effects of current procedure, they might actually engage in reform of legal procedure (Hutchins 1928*b*).⁶

While he was dean of Yale's law school (1927–29), Hutchins presented eloquent arguments for the potency of the social sciences to increase understanding of human problems and suggest action to solve them. He proposed that "a prospective law student should spend most of his time in college on the social sciences" (Hutchins 1928*b*, p. 12). His own work as a dean and as a scholar gave evidence of a commitment

to the further development of cross-disciplinary research using social science theory and methods. He went so far as to suggest that “the law is one of the social sciences” (Hutchins 1929, p. 697).

One major problem of his advocacy was that he did not fully understand what academic social science research was in the 1920s. Although the study of society had been developing in American universities since the 1880s, the methodologies used by researchers in different academic disciplines were still maturing. Social science research was growing more specialized and differentiated in the 1920s. Social scientists were collecting data and developing quantitative methods of research that would give them a realistic picture of social conditions and allow their conclusions to be tested by others. These methods made their work more “scientific,” objective, and authoritative and less immediately concerned with social reform or discovering guides for reform.⁷ As models had been developed to test their hypotheses in each area of specialization, social scientists’ work necessarily had narrowed in scope and increased in complexity.⁸

Hutchins was familiar with some of this work through the president of Yale University, James Rowland Angell, under whom he had worked as secretary of the Yale Corporation since 1923. Angell, although not a social scientist, had contributed significantly to the shaping of academic psychology at the University of Chicago. He was committed to developing cross-disciplinary social science research at Yale. Angell introduced Hutchins to people in the foundation world, including Beardsley Ruml of the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial (LSRM), a major patron of social science research projects in universities. Ruml, who also was not a social scientist, believed that the social sciences were interdependent. Good social science research, he thought, required cross-disciplinary studies to enhance understanding of social phenomena (Ruml 1930; Bulmer and Bulmer 1981). Hutchins shared this view.

An examination of Hutchins’s attempts to develop legal research shows that he had little concrete sense of what social scientists did, despite his ongoing contact with Ruml. His suggestions about how social science theory and methods would inform legal scholarship were vague. In a proposal he wrote in 1926, for example, his language is replete with references to the need to collect “the facts” and treat “statistically and otherwise” whatever data were to be gathered. He thought that, if “soundly analyzed,” facts on the effectiveness of certain legal practices would disclose “how the rules [of law] actually work.” And by discerning how such rules worked, “improvements” would result.⁹

In his 1928 appeals to the LSRM for funds for the Institute of Human Relations to support cross-disciplinary work in law and the social sciences, Hutchins’s perception of social science research was

only slightly more sophisticated. He proposed, for example, that legal issues could be better understood if social scientists from different academic disciplines used their distinct “approaches” to study the “fundamental situations” of sociolegal behavior. Requiring researchers willing to consider “problems in their bio-social instead of their conceptual setting,” the proposal only minimally addressed the problems of method and naively assumed that scholars would agree on exactly what the problems were and how they should be addressed.¹⁰ After prompting from an official from the LSRM, Hutchins outlined a specific project on families and delinquency and included the kinds of data the research team would use, incorporating provisions for control groups but still avoiding the issue of method.¹¹ He appeared not to understand the work of social scientists beyond data gathering and the potential for informing in the interest of reform.

His own work in psychology and evidence was based on library research rather than experimental research and was prompted in part by the abuse of justice he perceived in the Sacco-Vanzetti case (Hutchins 1927, 1928*a*). Indeed, beyond increasing the prestige of the law school by generating new scholarship and acquiring grants, one of Hutchins’s most pressing concerns as dean of the law school was to educate young men to be ethical lawyers (Douglas 1971, p. 166).

Knowledge of the whole of social reality, which situated the facts of legal cases in a social as well as legal context, could arm future lawyers with a sense of their responsibility in society. In an era when increasing numbers of law graduates chose to work in the business world, Hutchins hoped such social knowledge could steer them from unethical practices and help them to make “intelligent guess[es]” about the social desirability of the “practical effect” of legal decisions on “the paramount interests of the community” (Hutchins 1928*b*). Underlying Hutchins’s arguments about justice in the Sacco-Vanzetti case and judgments about social desirability was the assumption that reform guidelines would emerge from social research and that researchers would share definitions of justice and social desirability.

Some references in his proposals indicate Hutchins’s awareness of the problems of method in the social sciences. He noted the need to develop new and better techniques of research, for example, no doubt a reflection of his conversations with Beardsley Ruml, who encouraged his proposals to the LSRM for support of sociolegal research in the law school. But on reading them, one does not get a clear sense of precisely how Hutchins would have proceeded on any of the projects. What the proposals consistently do show is Hutchins’s faith that social science research would lead to reform of legal education, legal practice, legal administration, and ultimately the law itself.

When his faith in the social sciences as central to the university's work was tested in the 1930s, Hutchins abandoned the social sciences for philosophy as the discipline that would provide coherence in the university's work. But his interest in and commitment to cross- and interdisciplinary scholarship as a means of countering departmental isolation and of enhancing the coherence of intellectual work in the modern university continued after he left Yale in 1929.

Hutchins faced a number of related practical problems when he assumed the presidency of the University of Chicago. One was the fate of the undergraduate colleges, which had been under discussion for more than two decades. Many on the faculty had recommended abolition of the colleges because they saw the primary function of the modern university as research, scholarship, and graduate training. Some administrators and trustees, on the other hand, had advocated preservation and development of the colleges to promote alumni involvement with the university and to bring in always-needed tuitions. Hutchins arrived shortly after a faculty committee, led by Chauncey S. Boucher, had designed a new plan for undergraduate education. He was responsible for acting on the plan. Owing to the timing of his arrival at the university, the way he would distinguish himself as the leader of a major research university was entwined with the question of the undergraduate program.

In 1930 Hutchins convinced the university faculty senate to approve a reorganization of the university. This reorganization established the college (covering the freshman and sophomore years) as a division of the university with its own budget and dean apart from the divisions of physical and natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities, whose primary focus was graduate work (Frodin 1950). Challenged by the new status of the college in the university and the need to raise funds in the early years of the Depression, Hutchins was open to ideas about the ideal content of a college curriculum.

In the process of devising his own approach to undergraduate education apart from the previous work of the curriculum committee, Hutchins consulted his friend Mortimer Adler. Adler had studied "great books" with John Erskine at Columbia University and told Hutchins that it was his most significant educational experience (Adler 1977, pp. 128–29). Hutchins's thinking about university teaching and research changed after he invited Mortimer Adler to the faculty in 1930. Intrigued by Adler's familiarity with the books, his apparent erudition, and his description of the class, Hutchins proposed that they teach such a course together at the University of Chicago so that he could read and discuss the books.

They began with a small group of freshmen and sophomores in the college. Seminar students read classic works of the Western intellectual tradition, from Homer to Freud, and met once a week over a two-year period to discuss the books (Adler 1988). Eventually, Hutchins and Adler taught great books courses in all of the divisions of the university, the high school, the university college's adult education program, and in the law school. Throughout the 22 years of his presidency of the university, Hutchins led great books classes (Allen 1983; Ashmore 1989).

He and Adler tried for a number of years to convince the faculty of the college to incorporate the great books in curriculum revisions. He failed to persuade the faculty to develop a college program wholly based on the great books. And although he received foundation money in the 1930s to support the general education program in the college, he could not find financing to institute a great books general education program (General Education Board 1932, p. 6–7). Despite these setbacks, he remained tenaciously loyal to the great books as the basis for an undergraduate curriculum. Owing in part to his assistance in 1937, this approach was adopted as the curriculum of St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland, where it did not have to compete with the research concerns of the modern university (Kass 1973).

While not implemented in a required great books program, Hutchins's ideas did shape the college at the University of Chicago in three principal ways. First, Hutchins supported policy establishing the college as a separate division in the university with its own dean and budget. Second, he encouraged the development of a fully prescribed four-year curriculum in general education, distinct from the graduate programs the university offered. Third, he proposed changes in the university statutes to allow the appointment of faculty members to the college without also requiring their appointment to the departments.

Because Hutchins persisted in these efforts, by the middle 1940s the faculty accepted a single, prescribed curriculum for the bachelor of arts degree, making the college an autonomous unit within the university.¹² Many of the required undergraduate courses included some of the great books to acquaint students with original sources and reflected the faculty's interest in cultivating a general awareness of the academic disciplines and specific intellectual competences rather than disciplinary expertise. Yet, throughout Hutchins's presidency, the faculty refused to create an undergraduate program based primarily on the great books.

With such opposition to his vision of the undergraduate curriculum at his own institution, why did Hutchins remain convinced of its ap-

propriateness for educating undergraduates? Beyond the practical concerns of raising money and the need to attract more undergraduate students by introducing an innovative program during the Depression, using the books made sense to Hutchins. As he read and discussed the books with Adler and the class, he found them to be a potent educational tool. They demanded rigorous intellectual engagement. They explored the most fundamental of spiritual, social, and political problems. The logic of their ethical and moral arguments transcended the contexts in which they were written. Finally, they reflected discussion of the most important virtues, “courage, temperance, liberality, honor, justice, wisdom, reason, and understanding” (Hutchins 1936*b*, p. 4). These were the virtues held in high esteem by his father and the Oberlin community. They were the virtues discussed in the books that most moved him: Plato’s dialogues, Aristotle’s *Ethics* and *Politics*, Aquinas’s treatises, and John Stuart Mill’s works.¹³

By teaching through the books, Hutchins envisioned a secular educational program that embodied discussion of these virtues. At the same time, the program did not rely on religious authority in the way Oberlin’s teachings had. Rather, the discussion could be rooted in the intellectual authority of the Western cultural tradition. The idea of liberal education in the great books provided Hutchins with an acceptable functional equivalent that resonated with his own moral education but that was more suited to the secular modern university that he led. Moreover, the principles of conduct and the discussions about them were explicitly stated. They were not left to haphazard deduction by individuals in a specialized elective curriculum based more on faculty research interests than on a carefully conceived educational program for undergraduates. They promised an order and depth to undergraduate education that Hutchins could not find in the college curriculum at the university and that he thought (retrospectively) had been missing from his own education at Yale (Hutchins 1936*b*, pp. 41–50).

At Adler’s urging, Hutchins also began to question the adequacy of the social sciences to provide greater intellectual understanding of the work of the university, not only at the undergraduate level but also at the level of professional education. Adler’s primary academic grounding was in philosophy. In the process of investigating truth claims while studying social science research of criminal behavior, Adler concluded that the social sciences lacked methods of research and analyses of data rigorous enough to support claims to truth (Adler and Michael 1933). Because social scientists had little or no training in the precise thinking and expression required by logic, mathematics, and physics, their work was a “mess.”¹⁴

Adler's criticism of the social sciences was two pronged. He thought they were not scientific enough. He informed Hutchins that, with a few exceptions, sociologists' work should "be classified as literature" rather than science.¹⁵ Because social scientific studies lacked clearly testable hypotheses, precise research methods, and meticulous conclusions, their claims to authority were no greater than much of what passed as observation and description.

Beyond that, the social sciences had displaced philosophy as a legitimate mode of inquiry. Philosophy, particularly as conducted by Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas, presented rigorous analysis of important questions and treated questions of greater importance than the social sciences did. The subject matter of philosophers' studies was being, or existence, and man's relation to God and the cosmos. Adler perceived this subject matter to be of far greater intellectual consequence than studies of man's sociopolitical relation to man, the focus of pragmatic philosophers in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s who had unduly influenced the study of philosophy and the social sciences (Adler 1977, pp. 47–49).¹⁶

The method of philosophy, which Adler obscurely perceived in 1930 to be a dialectical examination of the academic disciplines to discover their logical inconsistencies and, presumably, faulty claims to truth, was as legitimate and important a pursuit of truth in the university as any mode of scientific inquiry (Adler 1977, pp. 36–54). Philosophy, to Adler, was rational science as opposed to empirical science. While empirical science methods of study could lead to "knowledge of matters of fact," metaphysical methods of study could lead to "knowledge of the relation of ideas" and, by exploring "the ultimate nature of the universe, reality or being," to wisdom.¹⁷

Adler articulated a role for the University of Chicago in the restoration of philosophy (or metaphysics) as the preeminent science in the work of the university. He proposed a "Department of Philosophical Studies" that would support professors analyzing and criticizing the intellectual foundations and work of other academic disciplines, "'dialectizing' the various subject-matters." This exercise would "do for the science and culture of the twentieth century what Thomas did . . . for the thirteenth in the *Summa Theologica*."¹⁸ The final product might be "a *Summa Dialectica*" that would promote the creation of "philosopher-kings."¹⁹ The proposal greatly appealed to Hutchins.

Why was Hutchins captured by such obviously grandiose visions? He was drawn to the idea of shaping a distinctive and significant role for the University of Chicago under his presidency. Rather than promoting research of facts, the domain of the social sciences, the university might take on the study of intellectually essential questions, like those

of existence and the purpose of existence. He thought that under his leadership, with Adler in the philosophy department, there was “going to be no university in the world like Chicago.”²⁰

In the realm of moral and ethical education, philosophy promised far more than the social sciences could deliver. Description of the facts or the conditions of existence was not adequate to provide a rational foundation in ethics and politics or to investigate the ends of the behavior, rules, and social arrangements the social sciences described. In addition to the subjects of its investigations, the methods of philosophy promoted the development of such skills as logic, rhetoric, and grammar. These skills could enable scholars to choose and engage in systematic exploration of important questions, inform the work of social scientists, and provide a common language with which scholars could communicate, no matter what their particular academic discipline. “Masses of social, political, economic, and psychological data” provided information but did not explain how to use it (Hutchins 1936*b*, p. 43).

By requesting Adler’s appointment to the philosophy department at the University of Chicago over the objections of the faculty in 1930, Hutchins demonstrated his belief in the importance of Adler’s work. Six years later, he argued for metaphysics as “the highest wisdom” and the source of “principles and causes” (Hutchins 1936*a*, p. 98). Rather than theology’s organizing the academic disciplines, as had been the case in the Middle Ages, metaphysics was more fitting for the modern university, Hutchins suggested, because it ordered and explored important problems, disclosed theoretical principles, and promoted the pursuit of virtue without demanding religious allegiance. His arguments for the role of metaphysics or philosophy in the modern university also suggest Hutchins’s interest in defining his leadership of a preeminent research university in moral as well as intellectual terms.

In those same six years, Hutchins had served in a variety of public and quasi-public capacities that acquainted him with the effects of the Depression. He mediated labor controversies. He raised money for Chicago’s joint emergency relief fund to feed the hungry and house the homeless. He watched and protested as funds were cut to Chicago’s public schools and junior college, as teachers were fired, and as custodians’ jobs and salaries were protected. He abhorred public officials’ dishonest, greedy, thoughtless, and hypocritical conduct. His disdain for their protection of “the powerful few” rather than “the well-being of the community” was manifest in a fiery speech he delivered to the Young Democratic Club just before the Democratic National Convention of 1932.²¹ An explicit guide for the Democratic party, the speech was

also an implicit indication of Hutchins's perception of himself as a moral critic in a deeply troubled social order.

In addition to the refusal of public officials to conduct public policy in a principled way, the Depression itself indicated to Hutchins the need for a more authoritative basis for making public decisions. Economics, sociology, and political science research, for example, had neither predicted nor prevented the Depression. Nor had such research presented clear means and ends or practical guides for deciding what to do about the results of the Depression. Collecting data and studying statistics did not suffice (Hutchins 1936*b*, pp. 24–32). To bring order to “the chaos of the modern world” required primary emphasis not on the teaching of facts but on rational inquiry and discussion (Hutchins 1936*b*, p. 9).

Hutchins clearly had lost faith in the social sciences as central disciplines in the university. This loss of faith occurred in part because of Adler's arguments about the intellectual inadequacy of the social sciences. But an equally important factor was Hutchins's belief in social science research and what it could accomplish. His Oberlin education had encouraged him to think of social science research and reform guidelines as continuous and related processes. His studies of psychology and evidence exposed flaws in existing exceptions to the rule of evidence and, by implication, suggested criteria for developing new interpretations of evidentiary issues. These criteria were based on a concern for justice. His descriptions of the scholarly work of the Yale Law School and the Institute of Human Relations assumed that exploring the facts and describing conditions would indicate the need for and suggest guides to reform.

Hutchins mentioned problems of methodology in his proposals for curricular change in the Yale Law School and for the Institute of Human Relations, but he did not understand the research methods being developed in the social sciences. Nor did he have the patience to wait for social scientists to hone their theories and methods. When Adler offered him a viable rationale for developing an intellectual foundation to explore important problems and discover principles to guide conduct, Hutchins abandoned the social sciences.

Hutchins had advisers other than Adler in the early years of his presidency. Beardsley Ruml, who became dean of the Division of the Social Sciences in 1931, Charles Hubbard Judd, chairman of the Department of Education, Charles E. Merriam, chairman of the Department of Political Science, Frederic Woodward, vice-president and dean of the faculties, and Chauncey S. Boucher, dean of the college, were a few of the people he consulted when faced with the demands

of running the university in the early years of the Depression. His discussions with Ruml were procedural, including ways to organize the social sciences division to foster cross-disciplinary teaching and scholarship.²² With Judd, Hutchins planned the abolition of the undergraduate program for training teachers and concurred in limiting the Department of Education to research and graduate study.²³ Merriam and Hutchins formed a wary alliance but did not agree on the quality of research in the Department of Political Science at the University of Chicago (Karl 1974, p. 167). In support of Woodward and Boucher, Hutchins enacted the Boucher committee plan for the college, but Boucher and Hutchins disagreed on administrative and curricular issues.²⁴

On the content of undergraduate education and the place of social science study and research in the university, Hutchins listened most to Adler, despite all the background these other men had with the University of Chicago.²⁵ And once he made his argument for the modern university's mission in *The Higher Learning in America*, he refused to modify it in the face of faculty criticism and resistance throughout the remainder of his presidency (Dzuback 1987). There is no evidence in his papers to indicate that Hutchins discussed social science research and theory with anyone who influenced him as much as Adler did at the University of Chicago until the late 1930s, when Ralph Tyler became chairman of the Department of Education, and the early 1940s, when Hutchins organized the Committee on Social Thought with Robert Redfield, John Nef, and Tyler. By then, Hutchins's arguments about university teaching and scholarship were substantially developed.²⁶

The substitution of great books for the social sciences at the undergraduate level in Hutchins's vision of university teaching also provided him with a way to enhance his moral leadership. Large social problems emphasized the dearth of moral leadership in the early 1930s. In addition to the failure of public leaders during the Depression, the rise of fascism in Europe (the University of Chicago, like other universities, took in refugee scholars) in the 1930s was a further suggestion of the need to introduce students to an authoritative tradition whose lessons might help to counteract authoritarianism.²⁷ By exposing students to the books and encouraging them to discuss the ideas the books contained, Hutchins's goal was twofold.

They would read the works on ethics, philosophy, and political theory as an enduring conversation that reached back to the earliest discussions of democracy and self-determination. They would discuss ideas that many before them had contemplated. In addition, students might find models of thinking and debate that would help them to develop and articulate their own positions. This process would prepare

them to resist pressure to conform thoughtlessly to dominant (or totalitarian) social and political creeds or movements. Development of the “intellectual virtues” was a means to cultivate “correctness in thinking,” leading to “practical wisdom” or “intelligent action” (Hutchins 1936*a*, pp. 63, 67). The promise of philosophy to train for wise and prudent leadership and to introduce students to the intellectual virtues was greater than the seemingly trivial fact gathering of the social sciences (Hutchins 1936*b*, pp. 59–69).

Finally, Hutchins was operating in the context of the larger world of higher education at this critical juncture in his life. Higher educational institutions increasingly were faced with students from diverse economic, social, and ethnic backgrounds who went to college for a variety of reasons. With the continuing fragmentation of academic disciplines since the middle of the nineteenth century, research became a primary university function, and more courses and then departments formed around scholarly research. Growing perception of the need to provide a common education was at the core of new programs at colleges and universities in the 1920s and 1930s (Butts 1939; Thomas 1962; Bell 1966; Rudolph 1977; Kimball 1986).

Meeting various needs and providing a shared intellectual experience were the criteria of the Experimental College at the University of Wisconsin, the general honors and contemporary civilizations courses at Columbia University, and the General College at the University of Minnesota, for example. None of these programs established the great books at the core of the curriculum in the way Hutchins tried and failed to do at the University of Chicago in the 1930s and 1940s. However, they all were responses to what appeared to be a chaotic offering of course work whose coherence depended on the random ability of the individual student to give it unity and meaning. Hutchins did not want to leave that process to chance, particularly for students planning to live in “the chaos of the modern world” as scholars or in other capacities.

Conclusion

Hutchins’s experience suggested that the great books and liberal arts could provide stability and unity to undergraduate education much as the religious beliefs and moral assumptions of the Oberlin community and his family had shaped his education. The great books provided a serious and coherent agenda for undergraduate study and the training of future leaders that he had not found at Yale, where the campus social life seemed to dominate and elective study was the norm.

The use of philosophy to inform advanced study and research in the university also served as an acceptable functional equivalent, on the one hand a substitute for the theology of an earlier era and, on the other, a replacement for the preeminence of the social sciences at the modern University of Chicago. Hutchins's recurring arguments about the social sciences in the 1930s contended that they did not provide answers to the most important questions. They did not assist in deciding which problems were most significant or what knowledge was of most worth. They did not provide guides to principled conduct because the focus of their study was what is, not what ought to be. Philosophy furnished the means to make wise choices and to judge the value of ideas and actions.

It seems implausible that Hutchins arrived at those conclusions only by reasoning them out. The ideas did appeal to reason, but they also served particular purposes and answered deep intellectual and educational needs for Hutchins. His friendship with Adler was developing at that critical juncture when he became president. Adler's ideas made sense because they resonated with Hutchins's Oberlin education. These ideas provided firmer ground than the social sciences had for Hutchins to develop his educational crusade at the University of Chicago. The core of an education in the Protestant evangelical culture of his childhood was serious and principled discussion of important ideas and human problems, rooted in a common understanding of democracy and Christian morality. The process of defining oneself in that culture was embedded in the articulation of where one stood in relation to events, ideas, and beliefs.

At Oberlin, Hutchins began with a socially conscious religious orientation from which he extracted a clear intellectual concern for the state of society. At Yale Law School, his thinking assumed a progressive, scientific cast that held great promise for reform. At the University of Chicago, with Adler's influence, his orientation became quasi-philosophic, stressing perennial and universal issues that required a principled, metaphysical approach to human problems.

Hutchins's early training provided him with the predilection to seek the most principled means to fulfill his educational leadership role. He began his presidency by efficiently reorganizing the University of Chicago, yet he was receptive to distinctive ideas to guide his administration. Within a few years, he was defining the university's function in terms of its moral and intellectual relationship to the larger society. At a crucial point in his life, Adler's ideas enabled Hutchins to develop a rationale with which to proceed in his role as educational leader in a chaotic and uncertain era in our history.

Notes

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1. These themes run through *The Higher Learning in America* (Hutchins (1936a) and *No Friendly Voice* (Hutchins 1936b); see also Purcell (1973).

2. I rely on the William James Hutchins Papers, Berea College archives (WJH-BCA), and on an interview with Francis S. Hutchins, January 8, 1985, for much of this information.

3. Students' Grades, Box XXX, 150, Oberlin College Archives; Hutchins, Notes from Bible Class, Box 9, Folder 9-1, WJH-BCA.

4. *Oberlin Review* (1915–17).

5. Stevenson (1986) explores an earlier and related approach to scholarship at Yale.

6. "A Program of Research in the Administration of the Law," ca. 1926 (n.d.), Box 2, Folder 5, Robert M. Hutchins Papers, Special Collections, Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago (RMH-UC).

7. This argument is too complicated to develop fully here. Schlegel (1979) explores it to some extent, as does Purcell (1973). Ruml (1930) mentions this development.

8. This trend became increasingly obvious by the late 1930s; see Karl (1974, p. 260).

9. Hutchins (with Charles E. Clark), "A Program of Research in the Administration of the Law," ca. 1926 (n.d.), Box 2, Folder 5, RHM-UC.

10. Hutchins (probably with Charles E. Clark), "Human Relations Section: Yale Law School," 1928, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, Record Group 1.1, Series 200, Box 67, Folder 804, Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC).

11. Hutchins, "Family Situations and Treatment of Delinquency and Crime," Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, Series 3, Box 79, Folder 826, RAC. Lawrence K. Frank to Hutchins, December 18, 1928, Box 79, Folder 826, RAC.

12. Hutchins was able to support these changes by arguing inside and outside the university community for them, appointing two deans in the 1940s and appointing faculty members to the college over the course of 20 years who agreed with them. Initially concerned with costs and quality, Hutchins proposed small honors classes, focusing on the discussion of texts (similar to his great books classes) for the most able and large lecture courses in general divisional areas (along the lines of the Boucher committee suggestions) for the majority of freshmen and sophomores. By the 1940s, he agreed with college faculty members that small classes consisting of discussion of books ought to replace lectures for all students. He supported their efforts to institute this change. See, e.g., Hutchins 1930; Frodin 1950, pp. 25–99. Levine (1985) succinctly describes the major developments in the college in the 1930s and who was responsible for them.

Hutchins, Adler, and the University of Chicago

13. Interview with Mortimer Adler, May 25, 1985.
14. Adler to Hutchins, "Tuesday" (n.d.), ca. January 1930, Box 4, Folder 2, RMH-UC.
15. Adler to Hutchins, April 8, 1930, Box 4, Folder 2, RMH-UC.
16. Adler to Hutchins, "Wednesday" (n.d.), ca. spring 1930, Adler files, Institute of Philosophical Research (MJA-IPR).
17. Adler to Hutchins, "Dear Bob," ca. 1933 (n.d.), Box 4, Folder 2, RMH-UC.
18. Adler to Hutchins, "Monday—the 27th" (n.d.), spring 1929, Box 4, Folder 2, RMH-UC.
19. Adler to Hutchins, "Tuesday" (n.d.), ca. January 1930, Box 4, Folder 2, RMH-UC.
20. Hutchins to Adler, July 6, 1929, MJA-IPR.
21. Hutchins, "A Democratic Platform," June 27, 1932, Box 19, Folder 8, RMH-UC.
22. Ruml, "Need for Research Facilities, Division of Social Sciences," December, 1931; Ruml to Hutchins, March 7, 1932, Box 109, Folder 10, Presidents' Papers (PP), 1925–45, UC.
23. Judd to Hutchins, November 25, 1932, Box 102, Folder 5, PP, 1925–45, UC.
24. Hutchins, *Report of the President to the Board of Trustees, 1935–1936*, 20, UC.
25. Adler to Hutchins, "Saturday the 25th" (n.d.), ca. 1936, Box 4, Folder 2, RHM-UC, and Hutchins to Adler (n.d.), ca. 1936, MJA-IPR, on Judd's fundamental lack of understanding of Hutchins's argument in *The Higher Learning in America*.
26. Hutchins, "Definitions and Distinctions: The Nature, Scope, and Divisions of Education" (n.d.), ca. 1940, Box 38, Folder 8, PP, 1925–45, UC; Hutchins to Messrs. Knight, Nef, and Redfield, March 23, 1942, Box 59, Folder 6, Frank H. Knight Papers, UC. While Redfield, e.g., agreed with many of Hutchins's ideas about undergraduate education, he had clear reservations about Hutchins's conceptions of social science research; Redfield to Hutchins, September 30, 1936, Box 121, Folder 13, RMH-Addenda-UC.
27. Hutchins and John Dewey debated the issue in 1937, see Dewey (1936–37*a, b, c*); Hutchins (1936–37). See also Purcell (1973) for an analysis of the larger debate.

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Hutchins, Adler, and the University of Chicago

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