

HUTCHINS' IDEALS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

Robert M. Hutchins (1899-1977), with his keen sense of liberal arts education, criticized American higher education of the 30's. His criticism still holds true in the 80's.

With the rapid development of industry and mechanical revolution, "human beings" lost their humanity. People become smaller and insignificant. The growth of scientific technique reduced human beings to professional specialists. And the division of knowledge caused isolation in higher learning fields. All of these confusions and hazards made Hutchins realize the need of advocating traditional liberal arts education to cultivate human intelligence, with a positive value of "humanity," virtuous view of life and rational thinking ability. To achieve these purposes of education, it is necessary to reorganize the educational system of higher learning. The changes were described in his book *The University of Utopia*.

As the youngest president of the University of Chicago in 1929, Hutchins tried to realize his ideals. He changed the school system, combined the last two years of high school and the first two years of the university and formed liberal college. Every young student who was in the last two years of high school was required to enroll in studying the Great Books which were edited by Mortimer Adler and Hutchins himself. After four years of liberal arts training, the students could decide if they wanted to continue their education in the university or to stop their education and seek other professional training. No matter what they decided, the basic understanding of human values and the ability of rational judgement were firmly installed in them. This should be the main purpose of higher education.

Hutchins was not an educational philosopher per se. However, his conservative viewpoint on higher education had a great impact on today's liberal arts education.