

Michael Oakeshott's Cold
War Liberalism

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CHAPTER 3

Conserving the University as a Place for Liberal Learning

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Thatcherism is sometimes seen as the culmination of Cold War liberalism: Margaret Thatcher, with Ronald Reagan, not only reinvigorated a sense of the West as the paragon of freedom but also started a new ideological offensive against Soviet communism. One of the most contested arenas of the Cold War came to be the traditional place of learning and research: the university. The university of the free world was to reflect free market conditions—in Thatcher's vision—not be sheltered from it. Of course, ironically, in the British university market competition did not at all emerge freely but was engineered by the state. With the fall of the Iron Curtain, the university policies initiated under Thatcher vicariously spread to the Eastern bloc as well as other parts of the world in the name of marketization. Governments adopted them not only as a means to ensure competition but also as a mechanism to reshape the very character of the scholar to make academics more productive, disciplined, and responsible. The current legitimization crisis of the university is now felt globally, but one might argue that it started with Thatcherism.

Under Thatcher's government, the university professor came to be suspected, and was found to be in need of assessment and made accountable to rigidly set professional standards in order to spur the university's performance in meeting the demands of industry in the

competitive global economy. The inspiration behind Thatcherism—although Thatcher herself was an unlikely student of philosophical speculation—is often traced to two university professors, Friedrich von Hayek and Michael Oakeshott, who apparently measured up well by her standards. Two memorable gestures indicate that Thatcher believed herself to have been influenced by the philosophies of Hayek and Oakeshott. But, as I will show, to assume that Oakeshott had any such influence on the so-called philosophy of Thatcherism¹ is mistaken and even Hayek's ideas about the university are completely contrary to Thatcher's ideas and her policies concerning higher education. Accordingly, this chapter compares and contrasts two characteristically distinctive arguments against the Thatcherization of the university given by the allegedly Thatcherite philosophers, Hayek and Oakeshott. Both arguments are not only important philosophical contributions to the theory of liberal education but also responses to the historical and political context of the Cold War conflict concerning higher education and research.

Hayek claims that the university must be sheltered from the market because innovative thinking can only develop in the absence of measurable standards and expectations. Moreover, real breakthroughs in research go against expectations, accepted norms and opinions, thus revealing hidden anomalies of the commonly accepted rules and standards. Hayek sees the university professor as the maverick pioneer spearheading economic progress, or as the avant-garde in the Cold War competition for dominance. According to Hayek, the function of the university is to create such intellectual heroes of human progress and to serve as the hothouse of groundbreaking innovation. The more the intellectual hero challenges the commonly accepted standards, opinions, and truths the more time is needed for the recognition of what values and benefits his or her research results will deliver. During this time the researcher needs protection from the pressures of standardized assessment and external demands in the form of university tenure.

Oakeshott, equipped with an unerring nose to smell utopianism, shrewdly understands that conceptions of education justified by pursuing a higher end are based upon a morality of social engineering. And this includes Hayek's utopia of capitalistic progress as much as its communist counterpart, the Marxist-Leninist theory of education. Still, it is Oakeshott's position on the university that is

often criticized as having nothing to do with practical reality. This is mistaken: his ideal of liberal education is practically available and (to quote what he said about his concept of civil association) “[i]t is no more an ideal type than the kitchen sink.”² It is entirely up to us whether we acquire partnership in the fully realizable educational experience he recommends. Oakeshott's vigilant caution about both idealistic and utilitarian ultimate ends (his characteristic skepticism) enables his unique conception of higher learning. And, I argue, this conception transcends the Cold War alternatives of education serving socialism or capitalism.

As a gesture of her high esteem, Thatcher proposed to the Queen that Oakeshott be knighted. But Oakeshott did not want to be honored this way. Indeed, it is difficult to believe that there was another British politician Oakeshott could have detested more than Margaret Thatcher. Her ideological extremism, which aimed at using harsh economic tools to change the souls of Britons,³ and her vulgar philistinism have nothing in common with Oakeshott's philosophy of civilizing conversation. Indeed, Thatcher's philistinism seems to be manifest in her need to connect her partisan beliefs with the highest brand of philosophical speculation, as represented by these two thinkers.

Thatcher's gesture acknowledging Hayek's influence on her could not have been more demonstrative. Banging a copy of *The Constitution of Liberty* down on the table before holding it aloft for those attending a Conservative Party policy meeting to see, Thatcher declared: “*This is what we believe.*”⁴ Clearly, she had not read the book as far as its penultimate chapter, “Education and Research.” In this chapter, Hayek argues passionately that the university, that is, higher learning and research should be sheltered from market conditions. The way to do this, he says, is to make sure that university professors with a proven record are not held accountable to anyone.

It is true that the book Thatcher respected so much argues that freedom in general emerges from market competition framed by the rule of law, but it also claims (in that penultimate chapter) that intellectual freedom is freedom *from* the market. Hayek argues that economic progress is ultimately generated by the academic freedom of the university where the boundaries of knowledge are pushed. Intellectual liberty can only be ensured if thinking is free of any economic, political, social, disciplinary, practical, or dogmatic concerns

and pressures, when consequences in general are suspended. This is the reason why those with a proven record of working on the cutting edge of knowledge "should be given the security of tenure."⁵ Academic freedom, according to Hayek, lies in security while freedom in all other areas lies in competition within the rule of law. The security of the tenured professor is guaranteed by the exclusive privilege not to be held accountable to anyone. How do we know that the knowledge produced by tenured professors is useful if any assessment of that utility is prohibited in the name of academic freedom? We can't know, but have to trust patiently that it will turn out to be so. Margaret Thatcher certainly did not have the patience.

Politicians like Thatcher cannot be entirely faulted for tendentiously missing Hayek's most relevant points on the need to shelter the university from market conditions when in fact his arguments contain many contradictions. In "Education and Research" Hayek uses both "freedom" and "knowledge" in contradictory senses: freedom as competition versus freedom as being secure from competition, a positive notion of knowledge according to which it is valued as the "chief good that can be had at a price," versus a skeptical notion according to which curtaining-edge thinking should be characterized as "no-knowledge," "where our ignorance is greatest—at the boundaries of knowledge, in other words, where nobody can predict what lies ahead" and "wherever man reaches beyond his present self, where the new emerges and assessment lies in the future."⁶ Hayek's argument for university tenure is that the activity of "pushing the boundaries of knowledge" should be valued blindly for its own sake because it is not yet assessable knowledge that could be deemed useful for the present. The real engine of human progress is this invaluable activity amidst our greatest ignorance that eventually and incidentally leads to a production of assessable values.

So, Hayek's answer to the question how we know whether the tenured professor was doing anything useful, when he is not allowed to be assessed, is simple: academic work in itself is not useful because it is purposeless, and not having any purpose excludes having an obvious use. The first sentence of *The Constitution of Liberty*, that "knowledge is perhaps the chief good that can be had at a price, but those who do not possess it often cannot recognize its usefulness"⁷ squarely contradicts the argument of the penultimate chapter. While the logic of this sentence resonantly reverberates today in the

overwhelming propaganda for the marketization of the university, what follows after it is an argument demonstrating that teaching and research at the boundaries of knowledge are not professional activities with clear standards and measurable or assessable results.

Hayek's university is a place of innovative thinking in which standards are surpassed and renewed, but certainly not respected and obeyed. The tenured professors are allowed to enjoy their privilege of standing above standards as the very rich may enjoy their luxury because they experiment respectively with innovative knowledge and with new products and services that will eventually benefit the community when their innovation trickles down. For Hayek, the tenured professor and the successful capitalist are the twin heroes of human civilization whose superhuman efforts bring benefits to the masses. The benefits of university research and capitalist enterprise are both material and spiritual; they ensure the renewal of productivity at the same time as they express human freedom.

Hayek ends the chapter on education and research by quoting Wilhelm von Humboldt about academic freedom, a quotation John Stuart Mill used as the motto for his essay *On Liberty*. Indeed, liberal philosophers since Adam Smith emphasize that the productivity of the market is a mechanical kind that depends on the creative productivity of liberal education. The liberality of education is based upon the freedom of students and teachers from any concerns outside of education. From the student's point of view this freedom is the privilege of being exempted from work; from the teacher's point of view it is the privilege of tenure. Hayek explicitly equates academic freedom with the institution of tenure. The distinctive contribution of higher educational research—which makes it able to spearhead progress—comes exactly from its undetermined, unpredictable, purposeless character. This looks like the perfect defense for the purposeless pursuit of knowledge, the perfect justification why the university should be sheltered from the market. How is it possible then to turn the same reasoning against Hayek's intention and use it as an argument for the marketization of higher education?

Hayek's defense of liberal learning is based upon the recognition that what at first appears to be a purposeless pursuit of knowledge just for its own sake is in fact the most useful kind of activity serving a higher end. All we have to do, then, is to explain how our seemingly purposeless research turns into the most useful kind of

knowledge. And this is exactly where Hayek's defense of education for education's sake backfires. Nobody can prevent economic thinking where profit is involved. If higher educational research will more or less predictably bring us useful results then it would be irresponsible and unjust by those who finance it not to demand these predictions in advance and make important decisions accordingly. There are certain funding authorities that go so far in exercising this logic of responsible decision making that they fund only projects that have been running successfully for more than a year. There goes Hayek's idea about the professors not being accountable for anyone. There goes academic freedom: if—because all learning must have useful result—purposeless learning is but a temporary illusion, so is academic freedom.

According to Hayek's defense of liberal learning, education for education's sake—that is, the purposeless pursuit of knowledge—is just a temporary state of mind of someone who has not yet been able to recognize that, in fact, it has an underlying purpose and serves a higher end. Is liberal learning then merely false consciousness? The inconsistency of Hayek's argument is that he is giving a consequentialist justification for suspending the validity of consequentialist rationality within the bracket of higher education. In this way the rationale of nonutilitarian learning is still utilitarian.

Although Hayek—in contrast to the Thatcherites—was against the marketization of higher learning and research (after all, he believed that the tenured professor must stand outside of the market economy to be able to push its boundaries by innovation), he is still commonly seen as the philosophical begetter of Thatcherite policies. Moreover, some hold him responsible even for the current trend of marketization and accountability measures in education.

For instance, in his last public lecture,⁸ Tony Judt—who decided to leave his native Britain because of “the Thatcherite assault against British higher education”—argues that “the shortcoming of our time” is that we are locked in a mode of discourse that allows us to think exclusively in economic terms, for which defenders of the free market, in particular Friedrich von Hayek, are responsible. Even if Judt is right and Hayek's enormous influence is to blame for the economization of public discourse, Hayek himself does not use “the etiolated economic vocabulary” but the language of German Idealism, especially and explicitly that of Wilhelm von Humboldt.

For Hayek, as for Humboldt, the university is a place where research is the other side of teaching. Just as Hayek's purposeless pursuit of knowledge has in fact the ultimate purpose to propel the advancement of the market, Humboldt's purposeless education has in fact the purpose to promote the progress of humankind by fulfilling its potentials. Hayek's argument helps us to hear the logic of market capitalism in Humboldt's voice by explicitly linking Humboldt's human progress to the advancement of the market.

It is as difficult to find a true manifestation of purposeless education as it is to find an example of a higher educational movement or theory that can consistently claim that the purpose of learning is only to satisfy private, vulgar, selfish ends. Even Napoleon's educational heritage of the *Polytechnique*, positioned diametrically opposite the Humboldtian university on the conceptual map, was clearly meant to pursue a very lofty end: the *gloire* of the French Nation. As one can see, the higher-end logic works both ways. On the one hand, the purposeless pursuit of knowledge helps realize the most useful value of a higher purpose by being an instrument of benefit for all. On the other, viewed from a higher perspective, pursuing knowledge to fulfill selfish ends loses its instrumental character and is transformed into a higher purpose. Who looks like a vulgar grabbing thief from one perspective, can look like the *Zeitgeist* on horseback from the other.

The question arises: Is it possible to justify liberal learning without resorting to proving its ultimate usefulness for the individual or the community or the state or the economy? Are all justifications consequential by nature? The desperate attempts to justify liberal education on the ground of its ultimate usefulness in the achievement of moral, scientific, economic, political, or patriotic goods has resulted in the loss of its very identity, which was predicated on being a countermode to the everyday modes that seek the profit of these goods. Liberal learning is supposed to free its students' thinking from the concerns of profit of any kind. Therefore, scholarly thinking about liberal education itself should also be free from concerns of self-justification if it does not want to lose its own ground. Yet, what should that ground be, after we have left the slippery and self-defeating arguments used by Hayek to prove the ultimate usefulness of useless learning? We can find this ground by following Michael Oakeshott's theory of liberal education, which elegantly sidesteps

the trap that has swallowed Hayek's defense of purposeless learning and spat it out as statements of purpose and assessment exercises.

Oakeshott is very much aware of the trap of consequentialist justifications even if based on higher ends and refuses to enter any discourse on the legitimization of the university: "[T]he current talk about the 'mission' and the 'function' of the university goes rather over my head." He continues:

And one of the criticisms of contemporary universities that they are not as clear as they ought to be about their "function." I am not at all surprised. There is plenty that might properly be criticized in our universities, but to quarrel with them because they are not clear about their "function" is to make a mistake about their character. A university is not a machine for achieving a particular purpose or producing a particular result; it is a manner of human activity. And it would be necessary for a university to advertise itself as pursuing a particular purpose only if it were talking to people so ignorant that they had to be spoken to in a baby language, or if it were so little confident of its power to embrace those who came to it that it had to call attention to its incidental charms.⁹

As we can see, Oakeshott is in perfect agreement with Hayek that any kind of expectation of the university to meet outside standards is mistaken. Still, there is a huge difference between their respective arguments about *why* the university should not be assessed by its performance.

Hayek romanticizes the professor as the heroic genius who thinks for others the unthinkable and thereby offers the strongest possible justification for the professors' privilege on the basis of their performance that is so extraordinary that it can only be assessed at a later time when the masses finally learn to appreciate it. Oakeshott, in contrast, refuses to offer any justification, and if pressed to spell out "in baby language" what to appreciate about the university, he will name "its incidental charms." "Charm" is a manner, not a "what" to be measured or assessed but a "how". As Oakeshott's explicit definition goes: the university is "a *manner* of human activity"¹⁰ (emphasis is mine). And even this manner is unreliably incidental. Being able to observe rules by staying true to this characteristically nonpurposive manner, or "adverbial" or style, however, is vitally important in Oakeshott's philosophy as the basis for the modal distinction between nomocracy and telocracy, or civil and enterprise association.

As opposed to Hayek's enhanced elitism, in Oakeshott's conversational model, any learner may display this "manner," or in other words, "the incidental charms" of liberal education. There is no hierarchy between professors and students in his educational theory. He refers to university researchers as learners, and teachers are also learners, according to him, as they study their students. Despite the general misunderstanding of his work in this respect, the liberal education Oakeshott believes in is not elitist and, moreover, not even hierarchical, for genuine conversation is accessible by all who engage in it. Unlike Hayek, he does not name the professors' originality as the ultimate purpose and prize of learning. Nor even the expert knowledge of specialists gives them a privileged place in the "conversation of mankind." Specialist knowledge can only attain its value as part of the general conversation without dominating it, that is, it has to assume the conversational manner.

In conversation the distinctive, incompatible modes come into contact; they influence each other despite their incomparability, not in a deterministic but in a free way. "Thoughts of different species take wing and play round one another, responding to each other's movements and provoking one another to fresh exertions."¹¹ Like gambling, conversation operates noncausally, nondeterministically. Conversation is not reaching toward facts, certainties, or conclusions: consequential rationality is suspended.

Putting this in different terms, reason is manifested in various modes; these specific articulations come into being relatively to each other. Their coming to being is not causally determined but coincidental and can even be a coincidence of opposites. There is no hierarchy among the various modes of reason. Conversation is a meta-mode that indulges the coincidental interplay of a variety of voices. And there is an important ethical dimension to conversation: being human is the ability to engage in "talk . . . without conclusion."¹²

Education, properly speaking, is an initiation to the skill and partnership of this conversation in which we learn to recognize the voices, to distinguish the proper occasions of utterance, and in which we acquire the intellectual and moral habits appropriate to conversation. And it is this conversation, which in the end, gives place and character to every human activity and utterance.¹³

Conversation becomes the focal point of all human achievement with Oakeshott's claim that "the final measure of intellectual achievement

is in terms of its contribution to the conversation in which all universes of discourses meet."¹⁴ This means that any discipline or discourse is measured by what it is able to bring from outside its boundaries to the nonspecialized and purposeless conversation. This fits Oakeshott's idea that all modes of discourses are dynamically spurred and enlivened by their limits and their contrasts with other modes. Any true learning through creative understanding will redraw disciplinary boundaries in the process of attaining definition and specification from one another.

Oakeshott emphasizes that conversation ultimately "gives place and character to every human activity and utterance," and that even moral discourse acquires its moral character by engagement in the interplay with the others. His argument does not fully articulate but certainly suggests a remarkable solution for the theoretical problem of liberal education concerning whether its content should be specialized or general.

Learning here [that is, liberal learning in the university] is learning to recognize and discriminate between these languages of understanding, it is becoming familiar with the conditions each disposes upon utterance, and is learning to make utterances whose virtue is not that they express original ideas (that can only be a rare achievement) but that they display genuine understanding of the language spoken. It is on this account that a learner may be recognized to understand an utterance such as that of philosophical or historical understanding and yet not be a philosopher or a historian; and also that a teacher may be recognized to have something into which he may initiate a learner which is not itself a doctrine.¹⁵

Liberal learning is both specialized and general at one and the same time, because it is in fact a genuinely interdisciplinary process in which specialized learning finds its way to participate in the general conversation by losing the dogmatism characteristic to expert learning. Oakeshott, thereby, offers a theory of liberal education with fully democratic partnership. No expert, not even Hayek's genius professor, has more authority in the conversation than anyone else who has acquired "its skill and partnership."

Oakeshott offers the idea of conversation as a corrective to the instrumental kind of rationality that he says became the hegemonic mode since the seventeenth century. What is at stake for him in working out a corrective is freedom of thinking. The playful rationality of conversation suspends the rules of causation and logical

implication: "self and not-self, imagining and image, are neither cause and consequent nor consciousness and its contents: the self is constituted in the activity of making and moving among images¹⁶ Self and not-self divulge each other freely in the indeterminate process of learning that is at the same time self-learning.

Oakeshott's anthropological view is that we are not born human but become so through education, and that our humanity is not simply a product or result of education but a quality intrinsic to the process of education. The growth of our minds is not determined by laws like the growth of a tree out of a seed. Unlike Hayek, whose theory of liberal education is rooted in the tradition of German Idealist educational theory that justifies purposeless education as the only learning that can serve the higher end of the fulfillment of human civilization, Oakeshott rejects this tradition precisely because it is teleological: "Nor is learning a teleological process in which a suppositious seed of *humanitas* in each of us grows and realizes or develops what is already potential in it."¹⁷ Strictly speaking, the growth of mind cannot be the result of an educational influence or simply caused by something.

The human condition that we acquire through liberal learning in the conversation of mankind is moral freedom. Moral freedom, however, can only emerge in a nonteleological process of learning. Just as genuine charm cannot be willed or pursued as an end or used as a means to an end, moral freedom can only emerge from liberal education incidentally. Moral freedom cannot be made the ultimate end of education because it is not the end result of the process of learning but intrinsic to it. Oakeshott's ironic answer to the question "What is the function of the university" is that it is "its incidental charms." His irony, as always, is to be taken literally in order to reveal the depth of its meaning. If you call attention to the charms of liberal learning and expect them to function regularly according to plan, they disappear like magic. The incidental charm of the university is moral freedom. But it is not a regular function: you are not able to plan it, bank on it, or base any justifications on it. The benefits of liberal education—be it economic success or moral freedom—are incidental by-product that cannot be turned into pursuable ends.

Oakeshott's theory of liberal education as nurturing the ability to join the conversation of mankind is the only one besides that of Socrates, which is able to explain how purposeless learning (and research) is possible through the conversational alternative to instrumental rationality. Oakeshott is the only modern theorist who does

not try to justify liberal learning by turning its incidental by-products into pursuable ends.

Oakeshott does not claim that useful education should be abandoned for liberal education, however. He knows well that in our everyday existence useful knowledge and practicality are like gravity, and liberal education is like the probabilistic laws of quantum physics that we do not usually encounter or are aware of in our everyday existence. He still believes that purposeless education is the better half of the coupling, not for its ultimate usefulness but for the creative and moral freedom it makes possible. He suggests that the separation of the various modes of being, such as the practical, the scientific, and the poetic, has gone too far. As a result, the poetic mode is locked in the aesthetic ghetto in order to keep reason pure from its inference and keep practical activity predictably productive in the mechanical, technical sense. Modernism is usually defined as the separation of these modes and Oakeshott proposes a modernization by letting the poetic mingle with the other modes, relaxing them and infusing them with creativity and flexibility.

We are used to a very simplified notion of teaching as indoctrination. Instead it would be worthwhile to think about it as mimesis. Mimesis as a mode of disseminating knowledge has acquired two opposing definitions. According to the first, which is Plato's, mimesis is transference of form and therefore representational. According to the second, Aristotle's, mimesis is a reenactment of creative knowledge in the poetic sense of production as opposed to the mechanical sense of reproduction. Understanding education as mimesis in the Aristotelian sense of *poiesis* does rhyme with Oakeshott's ideas. Oakeshott's solution for the aporia of intellectual freedom is to relax the antagonism between technical and poetic modes of mimesis by curbing the *superbia* of the former and, at the same time, letting the latter be acknowledged as the creative principle that makes thinking go beyond the laws of necessity and received opinion. The return to a certain impurity of reason allows for a plurality of rationalities under the aegis of conversation. Being educated means being able to entertain these various modes side by side.

This essay has reexamined the thought of two thinkers who are often portrayed as intellectual godfathers of Thatcherism. Paying close attention to what they actually said about higher education and research reveals that the ideas of neither can serve as a justification

for what has been happening with higher education in Britain and in many other states in the last 30 years or so: both argue that the university should not be expected to perform by any external standards and its scholars should not be accountable to deliver any kind of results. Yet the contrast between the respective reasons they give for purposeless education is even more remarkable than the fact that they have nothing in common with Thatcherite educational policies.

Hayek, in line with his economic theory (at least according to Oakeshott's somewhat satirical assessment¹⁸), plans the unplanable. He offers a hothouse for a privileged intellectual elite so that they can deliver "unexpected" innovation to ensure economic growth in the long term. Sheltering the university from market conditions is justified—in Hayek's argument—by the extraordinary intellectual performance of the tenured professors, an elitist view rooted in the Romantic cult of the genius. Of course, Hayek's insistence that university research is of the utmost importance for the economy should be seen in the context of the Cold War with its hysterical competition in scientific and technological progress. Ironically, the argument behind the Socialist academic system in the Eastern bloc, with its research institutes designed to keep the ideologically unreliable scholars and scientists away from students but still working on innovation, looks identical to that of Hayek's.

Oakeshott argues that liberal learning is learning how to be human; it is an initiation into the nonmaterial inheritance that is the birthright of every human being. Acquiring this inheritance is self-reflection as "self and not-self" divulge each other in the activity of learning. In this nonteleological process of learning, the human condition of freedom and responsibility can unfold incidentally. On this ground, Oakeshott insists that learning is always individual because all nontechnical, genuine knowledge is self-knowledge. And conversation, which is characteristically social even if this conversation can be with one's self, is the best model of liberal education.

Moreover, Oakeshott's conversation can be seen as egalitarian, at least in the sense that it implies equal access. No individuality is injured by joining it; there is no commonality of goals, faith, opinion, and no merit or relevance is required for participating. Those who want to participate can do it only by taking on the attitude of being tuned to the human condition of freedom and responsibility (which is not a potential but a condition) that is the only commonality.

Oakeshott also describes this process with Henry James' term, as the "ideal of consciousness" in which one acts like a moral agent by recognizing one's freedom and its burdens at the same time.

Oakeshott's conception of liberal learning seems to be independent from external circumstances but in fact, as he acknowledges, learning does have traditionally recognized institutional contexts: first the family, then school, then university. Liberal learning, which is participating in intermodal conversation, can really only begin after childhood when the young adult—having been educated familiarly and formally—is ready to shoulder the freedom and burden of moral agency and to learn in a manner that is best found in the university.

Returning to the context of the Cold War and Thatcherism, Oakeshott criticizes the concept of the modern university developed in German Idealism as well as Thatcherite marketization of the university. The Jena-Berlin university movement (shaped by Goethe, Schiller, the Schlegel brothers, Fichte, Schleiermacher, and the Humboldt brothers) has become the template of the modern American research university that Hayek so much admired and, through Marx, that of the socialist university as well. Oakeshott disagrees with both of these ideas and argues against productivity and social engineering as educational principles:

But the real assault upon liberal learning comes from another direction: not in the risky undertaking to equip learners for some, often prematurely chosen profession, but in the belief, that "relevance" demands that every learner should be recognized as nothing but a role-performer in a so-called social system and the consequent surrender of learning (which is the concern of individual persons) to "socialization" the doctrine that because the current here and now is very much more uniform than it used to be, education should recognize and promote this uniformity... And although this may seem to be very much a matter of doctrine, of merely how education is thought about and spoken of, and to have very little to do with what may actually go on in a place of learning, it is the most insidious of all corruptions. It not only strikes at the heart of liberal learning, it portends the abolition of man.¹⁹

Oakeshott's educational philosophy is a remarkable and not yet fully understood attempt to offer a third way beyond education either serving capitalism or socialism, beyond the ethics of productivity versus

the ethics of social engineering, beyond education enabling the satisfaction of appetites versus education to sculpt perfect humans in the mold of abstract ideals. Therefore, what comes after the end of the Cold War does not have to be (as it overwhelmingly is the case) that Thatcherism overtakes the university with no resistance against it as the spoil of this war. Oakeshott has given us an alternative that has to be taken seriously for nothing less than education's sake.

Notes

1. Jan-Werner Müller, *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth-Century Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 225.
2. Michael Oakeshott, "On Misunderstanding Human Conduct: A Reply to my Critics," *Political Theory*, vol. 4 (1976), 356.
3. "Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul." *Sunday Times*, May 3, 1981, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/speeches/displaydocument.asp?docid=104475> (accessed September 17, 2013).
4. <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/archive/hayek.asp> (accessed September 17, 2013).
5. Friedrich von Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 377.
6. *Ibid.*, 394.
7. *Ibid.*, 377.
8. Tony Judt, "What Is Living and What Is Dead in Social Democracy," *New York Review of Books*, December 17, 2009, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2009/dec/17/what-is-living-and-what-is-dead-in-social-democracy/> (accessed November 3, 2013).
9. Michael Oakeshott, "The Idea of the University," in *The Voice of Liberal Learning* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001), 106.
10. *Ibid.*, 106.
11. Michael Oakeshott, "The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind," in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (London: Methuen, 1962), 489.
12. *Ibid.*, 490.
13. *Ibid.*, 490–91.
14. *Ibid.*, 491.
15. Michael Oakeshott, "A Place of Learning" in *Voice of Liberal Learning*, 28–29.
16. Oakeshott, "Voice of Poetry," 496.
17. Oakeshott, "Place of Learning," 8.
18. "A plan to resist all planning may be better than its opposite, but it belongs to the same style of politics." Michael Oakeshott, "Rationalism in Politics," in *Rationalism in Politics*, 26.
19. Oakeshott, "Place of Learning," 20.