Utopia and Human Culture: Alternative Communities of Higher Learning in America

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UTOPIA AND HUMAN CULTURE:  
ALTERNATIVE COMMUNITIES OF HIGHER LEARNING IN AMERICA

by

Eli Kramer

B.A., Johnston Center for Integrative Studies of the University of Redlands, 2012

A Thesis
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Arts

Department of Philosophy
in the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
August 2015
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ALTERNATIVE COMMUNITIES OF HIGHER LEARNING IN AMERICA

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Eli Kramer

A Thesis Submitted in Partial
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Master of Arts
in the field of Philosophy

Approved by:

Dr. Randall Auxier, Chair
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Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
May 1, 2015
AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Eli Kramer, for the Masters Degree in degree in Philosophy, presented on May 1, 2015, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: UTOPIA AND HUMAN CULTURE: ALTERNATIVE COMMUNITIES OF HIGHER LEARNING IN AMERICA

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Randall Auxier

In this thesis I explore the place of the actualized utopian American alternative community of higher learning within a philosophy of human culture. I carry out such a study in order to articulate a unifying description of movement; to find the “target” that orients the activity of actualized utopia, as opposed to a classificatory rule to define a mechanically determined utopian-object. Although these communities have varied in practice since the first generation of them were created in the mid-nineteenth century, I argue that they have played, and continue to play, a particular role in America. They imagine what a world beyond their own could look like; and through their resistance to the perceived status quo (on which they rely for their identity), they prefigure a world that could be. Although this world never comes fully into existence, the actualization (i.e., the process of becoming a dynamic symbolic product of culture) of these communities illuminates new possibilities for human life in the larger culture. While these actualized utopian communities often live long beyond their pre-figurative years, paradoxically their practices largely stay the same. A resistance to the perceived modern culture, and a vision of a world that offers more opportunities for life and dignity, has made these communities places that cultivate persons with a sense of agency. These communities create a sense of active consciousness; they create people who believe the world is changeable. An open humanistic and personalistic theodicy is what distinguishes these schools from a cult of domination, or an organization bent on a utopia that depersonalizes and dehumanizes the opportunities of others in service of a singular vision.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to those who recognize and act on the full significance of the fact that “whatever is actual is possible.” May their works and institutions very existence always revitalize and open us up to possibility.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In November 2013 I was lucky enough to receive the Singer Research Grant for Studies in Experimental Education. This grant allowed me to work on multiple projects pertaining to the issues in “experimental” higher education. I hope to spend my life creating, preserving, and defending, such institutions. Many thanks to Larry Singer for his generosity and support. In addition, I could not have finished such a complex and challenging thesis without the support of the Masters Fellowship from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. I would like to thank Scott Sanders, Lori Colins-Hall, and Nickolas Daily at Antioch College for assisting with archival research and for their honest assessment of the dreams and challenges of Antioch College, both old and new. Also many thanks to Gail Bowman, for her coordination of a visit and discussion with many current administrators, faculty, and students at Berea College, as well, as Sharyn Michell, and Rachel Vagts for their archival support, and review of my thesis. Only an open and supportive thesis advisor would have approved of this project, and thus I am deeply indebted to Dr. Randall Auxier for his weekly conversations, discussions, and support. Without him, I would have been unable to write such an unusual philosophical work. His understanding of, and commitment to, such institutions was a constant reminder as to why this project is important.

I am deeply thankful to Jared Kemling, Elizabeth Hartman, Laura Mueller, Natalie Long, James Anderson, Matt Ryg, Myron Jackson, Gaelan Harmon-Walker, Dr. Kenneth Stikkers, Dr. Douglas Anderson, and many others, who listened attentively and provided feedback on this thesis. I owe a great deal to mentors and colleagues who helped uncover the complex stories around alternative educational thought. In particular, I received the gracious support, mentorship, and friendship of Patricia Karlin-Neumann, Joy Kliwer, Kelly Hankin, James Hall, and of
course Kevin O’Neill, who spent countless hours helping me become the writer I am today. Although I do not personally know many of the scholars who studied these schools, I am nevertheless grateful for their wisdom, especially L. Jackson Newell, due to his breadth and depth of knowledge. I wish to thank my parents, Mark Kramer and Lois Orner, for their support, humor, and feedback. Last but not least, I thank Jacob Storms and Thomas Albanese for their life-long friendship, that continues to grow, wherever we wander in our lives.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ........................................ PAGE
ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................. i
DEDICATION ............................................................................................................ ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .......................................................................................... iii

CHAPTERS

INTRODUCTION: The Incomplete Account of the American Alternative Community of Higher Learning ......................................................................................................................... 1

(PART 1: Human Culture)

CHAPTER 1 – The Creation, Conservation, and Progress of the Symbolic Forms of Human Culture .................................................................................................................. 17

CHAPTER 2 – Higher Learning in America ..................................................................... 37

(PART 2: UTOPIA)

CHAPTER 3 – Antioch College ....................................................................................... 54

CHAPTER 4 – Berea College ......................................................................................... 86

CONCLUSION – Toward a Comprehensive Philosophy of Utopia and Possibilities for Utopian Higher Learning Communities in the Next Forty Years ................................................. 108

BIBLIOGRAPHY .......................................................................................................... 125

VITA ............................................................................................................................... 130
INTRODUCTION:

THE INCOMPLETE ACCOUNT OF ALTERNATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITIES
OF HIGHER LEARNING

In this thesis I explore the place of the actualized utopian American alternative community of higher learning within a philosophy of human culture. I carry out such a study in order to articulate a unifying description of movement; to find the “target” that orients the activity of actualized utopia, as opposed to a classificatory rule to define a mechanically determined utopian-object. Although these communities have varied in practice since the first generation of them were created in the mid-nineteenth century, I argue that they have played, and continue to play, a particular role in America. They imagine what a world beyond their own could look like; and through their resistance to the perceived status quo (on which they rely for their identity), they prefigure a world that could be. Although this world never comes fully into existence, the actualization (i.e., the process of becoming a dynamic symbolic product of culture) of these communities illuminates new possibilities for human life in the larger culture. While these actualized utopian communities often live long beyond their pre-figurative years, paradoxically their practices largely stay the same. A resistance to the perceived modern culture,

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1 In this thesis I reimagine utopia as a cultural concept. I attempt to refute the popular understanding of utopia as an idealized and unactualizable dream. It is worth mentioning that Sir Thomas Moore’s coinage of the word “utopia” had a double meaning; utopia’s Greek root is both ou-topos (no-place/nowhere) and eu-topos (good-place). Although these are idealized dreams of the “good” as manifested in community life, they can be actualized, albeit, under tremendous strain, and on a very limited scale.

2 By “philosophy of human culture,” I mean any attempt to abstract and describe the form of the trends of human life (as manifested in its works). My work is in the tradition of Ernst Cassirer. Although I am not writing a thesis on Cassirer, I will rely heavily on his theory of culture and my own method of cultural genealogy is a sub-methodology of Cassirer’s larger cultural phenomenological approach.
and a vision of a world that offers more opportunities for life and dignity, has made these communities places that cultivate persons with a sense of agency. These communities create a sense of active consciousness; they create people who believe the world is changeable. An open humanistic and personalistic theodicy is what distinguishes these schools from a cult of domination, or an organization bent on a utopia that depersonalizes and dehumanizes the opportunities of others in service of a singular vision.

The rest of this Introduction elaborates the problems that emerge for anyone interested in these utopian schools and why a more thorough analysis of their place within a philosophy of culture is necessary. Chapter 1 explores the philosophy of culture through a Cassirerian lens, reimagining Ernst Cassirer’s use of the term “utopia” not as an over-zealous soteriology, but rather as a community that pre-figures, and therefore augments, the culture that is to come.  

Chapter 2 explores how philosophical idealism, amongst other forces, has not only informed the development of the German university and its migration and development in the United States, but also influenced the transcendentalist, abolitionist, and the broader progressive milieu in the nineteenth century. In particular, Chapter 2 examines Emerson’s “The American Scholar” as a representative articulation of the mid-nineteenth century American higher learning oeuvre. The chapter ends with an analysis of difference between cults of domination and actualized utopias. The cult of personality that developed around Richard Wagner is used as primary example of the distinction because the Wagnerian cult took the very same forces that made the foreparents of American alternative higher education, and put them in service of human domination. This

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3 Although the full ontological implications of actualized utopia are beyond the scope of this thesis, at least some of these implications will be touched upon in the Conclusion. For those interested, Royce’s communitarian ontology would be a good place to start reflecting on the fuller ontological questions related to community, and in this case, utopia. For more see: John E. Smith, *Royce’s Social Infinite: The Community of Interpretation*, 1969 ed. (Archon Books, 1969), 126-169.

4 Chapter 2 also (briefly) explores how the Association Movement influenced (coupled with an organic conception of the project of knowledge) the actualized utopian higher education movement.
chapter further clarifies the theoretical constructs of this thesis by making a distinction between communities that cultivate value and possibilities for persons, and those that are more interested in actualizing their singular vision for the world through the flattening of the play between the “symbol” and its “object.” Chapters 3 and 4 explore the founding of two of the earliest (and most important) alternative American colleges, Antioch College and Berea College, as examples of actualized utopia. I limit the studies of these schools to their formative years in the mid-nineteenth century. I thus will focus primarily on why utopias develop and how they relate to the broader culture in which they are situated. Apart from an overview of their respective histories, these chapters explore the experiences of early students (especially students of color and women) anecdotally to illuminate what sort of persons such schools helped develop. Each section concludes with a discussion of the theoretical implications to be drawn from the experiences of these schools. The empirical examples thus reform and refine the theoretical scaffolding of this thesis. The thesis concludes with a discussion of these utopian communities of higher learning as institutionalizations of the renewing aspects of culture, and a short speculative discussion of the possibilities for such communities in the next thirty to forty years.

Although the subject at hand certainly has its merits, the reader may still wonder why a philosophical investigation is necessary. To answer this question, an autobiographical sketch of my history with these communities, and a brief overview of the literature surrounding higher learning and alternative higher education, is instructive.

The United States is unique in its long history of actualized utopian communities. In particular, the middle of the nineteenth century heralded some of the earliest and most prominent of these counter-cultural dreams. As Richardson notes in his seminal biography on Emerson, the

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5 Although I am not able to closely dissect why and how utopias continue after their formative years (in this thesis), I do tentatively explore some possible explanations.
utopian community of Brook Farm (which Emerson affectionately thought of in the planning stages as a familial Transcendentalist university) was not only, “…one expression of the communitarian impulse that was felt all over America in the early and middle 1840’s…” but was reminiscent of similar impulses in other decades in American history. “With dozens of communes being founded, with abolition, temperance, peace, and the women’s movements on the rise, and with repeated, waves of interest in phrenology, mesmerism, and clairvoyance, it was an emotionally charged and politically turbulent decade similar to the 1790s and 1960s. All three were decades of utopian euphoria fueled by a widely shared and wildly exciting conviction that the structure of society could really be fundamentally and rapidly changed.”

Even in more depressed and cynical moments in American history, such as the Great Depression, utopian communities like Black Mountain College and Deep Springs College flourished. Curiously (or what seems curios upon first glance) this utopian urge in America has often manifested itself in the conservative world of American colleges (and higher education in general). In every generation of America, whether times are good or bad, little Platonic republics survived, influencing the general culture.

I became acquainted with the actualized utopian higher learning movement when, as an undergraduate, I participated in a 2010 seminar hosted by the Johnston Center for Integrative Studies (formally Johnston College) of the University of Redlands, and supported through a generous grant from the Consortium for Innovative Environments in Learning (CIEL). The class was entitled “Outdated and Underrated: Exploring Experimental Colleges and Universities.” This seminar traced the history of American alternative programs, colleges, and universities.

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7 Robert D. Richardson, *Emerson: The Mind on Fire*, 340-341. During the 1840’s Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witnessism, Seventh-Day Adventism, and Christen Scientism, were founded. They were also a part of this “utopian euphoria.”
Two problems emerged for me from this class. First, although these colleges recognize a kinship across time and geography, it remained unclear just what made a school “experimental” or “alternative.” The literature on these schools testifies to this lack of clarity, as does the myriad of consortia (like CIEL) that attempts to organize and to defend these schools. Words like “alternative,” “experimental,” “maverick,” “innovative,” etc., never fully account for the range of communities and practices that scholars want to recognize. What does the socially engaged Antioch College have to do with the classical Western education given at “Hutchins’ College” at University of Chicago? Do these radical, but very divergent alternative schools, really share something important?\(^8\)

The second problem is the relationship between alternative communities of higher learning, higher education, and human culture. As an intern and speaker for CIEL, I found that even alternative schools supported by a well-organized consortium not only failed to present themselves to a broader public, but also were systematically ignored by the higher education community. Unfortunately, American educators have often forgotten, or simply ignored, alternative institutions of higher education on the larger stage. This is all the more tragic as many of the practices these schools take pride in could be adapted in order to help ameliorate the current challenges facing higher education. In January 2012, I went to the “American Association of Colleges and Universities” (AAC&U) annual conference as a CIEL panel speaker. At AAC&U, experts discussed developing models of civic democratic education in order to make higher education more meaningful in a world in which it seems increasingly outdated and expensive. However, no one mentioned schools like Antioch College or Berea

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\(^8\) Although Joy Kliewer’s research primarily focused on the alternative higher education movement of the nineteen-sixties, her literature review is probably one of the most extensive ever completed on these institutions in the United States. See: Joy Rosenzweig. Kliewer, The Innovative Campus: Nurturing the Distinctive Learning Environment (Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, 1999), xv-14.
College (and many others) that have been creating sophisticated, community-based, civic-democratic education for over 150 years, and who boast a wealth of experience, data, and resources that could serve as launching points for new models in higher education. Surprisingly to some, Berea’s endowment is at least five times larger than most schools of its size, while still maintaining its mission of free education for underserved communities in Appalachia.\footnote{Currently the endowment fluctuates around 1 billion dollars for a school of approximately 1,600 students. See: "U.S. and Canadian Institutions Listed by Fiscal Year 2013 Endowment Market Value and Change in Endowment Market Value from FY 2012 to FY 2013," National Association of College and University Business Officers and Commonfund Institute, 2014. Colleges of a comparable size typically have an endowment ranging from 100-300 million dollars.} Why do these schools receive so little attention? Do these schools only function as isolated communities resisting the culture of the day, or have they simply failed to organize around a coherent genealogy? I am not convinced the former is the case, and it is to the latter hypothesis I turn to in this thesis. These schools need a common story about themselves so they can respond to the present and envision a future for themselves and others.

One might wonder if such a genealogy has not already been attempted, or at least a broader genealogy of American higher education that included these schools. Many have attempted to make sense of the complex history and philosophies of American higher learning.\footnote{I recognize that accounts of higher education have changed in different periods of American history. However, almost all of them recognize a cultural shift that happened when America went from a purely collegiate system to a blended university system.} Nevertheless, such historical/theoretical interpretations are unable to account for these utopian communities. Part of the difficulty is that these schools largely fall outside of the traditional narrative of American higher education.

There is no better way to understand this common narrative than by studying the work of Thorstein Veblen. Veblen’s classic critique of the American higher education system, *The Higher Learning in America*, in its early chapters gives a fairly common account of the history
and philosophy of American institutions of higher learning. He introduces the book by defining what exactly is meant by higher learning:

In any known civilization there will be found something in the way of esoteric knowledge. This body of knowledge will vary characteristically from one culture to another, differing both in content and in respect of the canons of truth and reality relied on by its adepts. But there is this common trait running through all civilizations, as touches this range of esoteric knowledge, that it is in all cases held, more or less closely, in the keeping of a select body of specialists-scientists, scholars, savants, clerks, priests, shamans, medicinemen—whatever designation may best fit the given case.11

He then went on to describe how the West chose the scholar, in search of eternal truth, as its specialist in esoteric knowledge. Scholars became the specialist on the frontier of what Western society, as a culture, considered important. Veblen distinguishes this “higher learning” from the project of moral or civic learning done in colleges/seminaries, and from the type of vocational education done at technical or professional schools. He believed the American attempt to mix a university, whose mission is higher learning, with the vocational school, led to many problems. This mixing was perpetuated because businessmen (not scholars), through industrial capitalism, became the privileged model of success. Businessmen therefore gradually became leaders in the university system, rather than the scholars actually practicing higher learning. Thus, undergraduate education and professionalization increasingly became the valuable assets of universities, while the business class dismissed the project of higher learning. Although the ever sardonic Veblen never offered clear solutions to the situation, it is clear that he, like many who followed him, believed that early American colleges and seminaries were interested in cultivating a certain moral or civic-minded person, while the later German university model, as implemented at schools like John Hopkins University and the University of Chicago, started the project of studying and advancing knowledge in all of its varieties. The conflation of these two

projects is what Veblen thought made the American education system unique and also problematic.

Institutions like Antioch and Berea (and later communities of higher learning) are typically seen as colleges interested in cultivating a particular type of human being. This may be part of the reason they are regularly ignored in broader circles; they supposedly have little to do with the project of higher learning. However, if one looks closely at the history of these schools, it becomes clear they do not so easily fall into such a neat categorization. At the same time that German universities were taking up the idealist project of critique from philosophers like Kant, Humboldt (Wilhelm), Schelling, Hegel, and Fichte, the transcendentalists were reconstructing those ideas in the American context. For the idealists, transcendentalists, abolitionists, and Whiggish/Republican progressives of the nineteenth century, the project of bildung (the organic development of culture) was intended to create critical and self-conscious subjects who were able to understand themselves and the broader culture. They thought that only such persons, who would be “scholastic” in a broad way, could advance knowledge. Bill Readings in the bombastic, but very insightful, *The University in Ruins*, points to exactly this structure in the German university system as it was adopted in America. Readings noticed the relationship of “agent to knowledge” that is embedded in idealistic thought, and that Veblen missed in his history. Unfortunately, Reading’s also still privileged the university as the center of all knowledge projects. He accurately pointed to the implicit connection between aspiring nation states and the project of cultural critique and development. An idealist influenced university system that critiques and moderates its (aspiring) nation, but to some degree is also supported by that nation, no longer can function in the modern world because power and the aspiring nation no longer exist as they once did. Instead, we are in a world where transnational corporations are the
primary nexus of power. The popular administrative discourse around “excellence” signifies nothing. There is no human cultural project; instead it is a metric that measures any sort of growth. The university is becoming a transnational corporate project of maximizing capital.

For better or worse, Reading’s thinks this is the world in which we find ourselves. The older project is no longer possible. He recommends,

…that we should recognize that the loss of the university’s cultural function opens up a space in which it is possible to think the notion of community otherwise, without recourse to notions of unity, consensus, and communication. At this point, the University becomes no longer a model of the ideal society but rather a place where the impossibility of such models can be thought—practically thought, rather than thought under ideal conditions. Here the University loses its privileged status as the model of society and does not retain it by becoming the model of the absence of models. Rather, the University becomes one site among others where the question of being-together is raised, raised with an urgency that proceeds from the absence of the institutional forms (such as the nation-state), which have historically served to mask that question for the past three centuries or so.\(^\text{12}\)

Despite his diagnosis of the current university system being fairly accurate, and his proposed amelioration being provocative (but not terribly useful), the type of cultural (in the broadest sense of human activity) project completed at utopian communities of higher learning did not fall into the problematic relationship to the country-aspiring-to-be-a-nation-state that the American university system did. They still practice some of the more useful ideas from the idealist tradition. In particular, these schools enact an ideal society, which does not ever come fully into existence on a large scale, but that on a small scale actualizes a life world that is always in a healthy open relationship with its initial idea, and spreads throughout the larger society by offering the very types of possibility for “being-together” that Readings is interested in.

Those who have paid closer attention to the history and philosophy of American colleges have also often missed the unique position of the utopian community of higher learning. In The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in

\(^{12}\text{Bill Readings, The University in Ruins (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 20.}\)
America, Burton J. Blestein argued that:

With the creation of the university in America, an institution unlike any in Europe, the middle class succeeded in establishing an institutional matrix for is evolving types of behavior. By and large the American university [and the modern college] came into existence to serve and promote professional authority in society. More than in any other Western country in the last century, the development of higher education in America made possible a social faith in merit, competence, discipline, and control that were basic to accepted conceptions of achievement and success…Historically speaking, the culture of professionalism in America has been enormously satisfying to the human ego, while it has taken an inestimable toll on the integrity of individuals.\(^{13}\)

I also agree with Bledstein that: “Historians have listened too closely to spokesmen like [Charles William] Eliot, [Andrew Dickson] White, and [Daniel Coit] Gilman, who perhaps exaggerated the notion that the revolution in higher education occurred only after the Civil War. In fact, critical voices were raised at least a generation earlier.”\(^{14}\) Schools like Berea and Antioch are evidence of such “critical voices.” The forces of a growing middle class, however, that many other “old-time colleges” failed to cater to, did not affect actualized utopian colleges in the same way. Although middle class economic and social forces certainly put immense pressures on these alternative institutions, their ideals were actualized and extended beyond the typical “old-time college.” Thus, Bledstein’s account is immensely illuminating of the situation in which these alternative schools have been imbedded, but does not account for them as their own force in American life.

George Marsden in *The Soul of the American University* revealed yet another aspect of the nineteenth higher education system, especially as it influenced colleges. He used a series of secondary sources to create a clever synthesized account of the “methodological secularization” of the American college and university system. He argued that the early American moral


seminary-based college system, through a mix of Darwinian naturalism, historicism, and biblical higher criticism, and certain moves made by university presidents to accommodate those paradigms in a Christian worldview, made the American higher education system lose its “soul.” He meant that with the loss of a moral religious center, colleges and universities became open to rampant protestant capitalism, and later, once the scientific paradigm of objectivity collapsed under its own weight, left the university in the very ruins Readings discussed.\textsuperscript{15} He concluded the book by suggesting that the new academic pluralism is still stuck in an earlier dogmatic naturalism, and there is no reason why “Christian scholars should be excluded.” In fact, their humanist and possibly anti-corporate attitude has a lot to offer. Again the utopian college is missed in this story. Although the evangelical community on which Berea College was founded, and the Christian community on which Antioch College grounded itself, were fairly secularized\textsuperscript{16} in the their respective early years, the ethical moral center of that life was kept.

This idea of the “moral center” has been missed not just be educational historians and theorists but by philosophers as well. In “The Professor and the Prophet,” Richard Rorty challenged his former student, Cornel West, to tell him what a philosopher might do better than an activist trained as an activist. Rorty throughout his life remained deeply skeptical that the philosopher, and academics in general, had much to lend to significant change in the world, save contemplative criticism and “edifying conversation.” When Rorty speaks of academics, he is referring mostly to the Ivy League level scholars he lived and worked with throughout his life. He largely ignored (or at least did not feel it was important for his projects to mention) the type of higher learning that was done at alternative institutions, and the type of scholars who lived and

\textsuperscript{15} Marsden’s book is largely an attempt at a legitimate scholarly interpretation of William F. Buckley’s analysis of higher education. For Buckley’s own thoughts see: William F. Buckley, \textit{God and Man at Yale; the Superstitions of Academic Freedom} (Chicago: Regnery, 1951).

\textsuperscript{16} Berea is still technically a Christian institution. However, it is not dogmatic. In fact it has a remarkable socially/religiously pluralistic community.
worked at those institutions. As we shall see, the opportunity for activism was one of the reasons organic scholars were drawn to these institutions in the first place.

Finally, even the best literature on alternative higher education has had a hard time accounting for just what, exactly, alternative higher education “is.” In fact, as I argue later, this search for a determinate concept to subsume these schools under has been part of the problem. The book that instigated the small field of alternative higher education scholarship (and that is perhaps still the most widely read book on alternative higher education) is *The Perpetual Dream: Reform and Experiment in the American College.*\(^{17}\) This book is a monumental work and an excellent example of careful sociological and historical scholarship. It carefully analyzed the experimental undergraduate education movement in the 1960s, and explored its roots in the earlier reforms of the 1920s and 1930s. The authors distinguished among four types of “telic reform,”\(^{18}\) carried out in the early to middle twentieth century: *Neo-Classical, Aesthetic-Expressive,* *Communal-Expressive,* and *Activist-Radical.* They then offered a critique of the successes and failures of these institutions. Further, they suggested how such reform might be implemented more broadly. Their *telic* typology is the closest attempt (to date) at defining alternative higher education. “Telic reform,” or the prefiguring of an ideal education system, is very close to what I mean by *actualized utopia.* Their project however is not only out of date, but it only occasionally mentions the first generation of schools that launched the movement. Given


\(^{18}\) By “telic reform” they mean “… to signify those reforms, that emphasize ends and purposes that are different from, if not hostile to, the goals of the regnant research universities…” in the early to mid-twentieth century. See: Gerald Grant and David Riesman, *The Perpetual Dream: Reform and Experiment in the American College* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 17. I will continue to use the term *telic* throughout this thesis. I however extend these *telic* institutions dialogical relationship beyond “research universities” and into the broader culture (taken as a whole) in which they are situated.
the paucity of historical context, this is entirely reasonable; however, in consequence, the book does not do justice to the spiritual/religious center that inspired the early founders’ broader humanistic goals, and would influence the later schools. More importantly, the book’s limited sociological scope did not adequately explain the broader relationship these schools had (and have) as a process within cultural life; these schools are more than just an alternative version of professionalized higher education. This narrow focus leads the authors, I believe, to dismiss too easily the value of the utopian urge and posturing in these schools. Grand visions seem to be necessary to complete meaningful, albeit actually far more limited than their proponents imagined, change in human life.

To their credit, the next generation of alternative higher education scholars did begin to trace the movement throughout its myriad expressions in American history. For example, Steven R. Colman, building of the work of Grant and Riesman, wrote a dissertation on the American alternative higher education movement in the 1920s and 1930s. He later published a shortened summary of his work in an anthology on alternative higher education. He concluded his chapter of the anthology by noting:

There is no doubt that a number of the students that emerged from these programs continued throughout their lives to seek personal fulfillment through commitment to social change. They have been among those whose championed ideals of creativity, community, and compassion in a society that has exalted competition, status, and acquisition. But in truth, the impact of these progressive institutions on the academy, much less the nation’s political, economic, and cultural landscape, was far less than the founders had hoped. To a large degree, it was a matter of accessibility. An educational model characterized by highly personalized curricula, tutorial classes, and frequent meetings with faculty and advisors proved too expensive for all but the wealthy or must determined students.19

Colman’s analysis is by and large correct. In spite of his good analysis, I believe Colman, like

Grant and Riesman, ultimately is too quick to judge the “limited” success of such alternative institutions. Yes, utopian experiments never quite achieve the broader influence they desire; on the other hand their actualization should not be discounted. As we shall see, their very existence revealed more possibilities in American culture for creativity and human dignity.

Another example of a broader historical study happened in 1991 and 1994 when the philosopher of education L. Jackson Newell (President Emeritus of Deep Springs College) led an innovative course that researched and published on fourteen of these schools. They recognized that “maverick schools:”

…appeared to start with the ideals of visionary founders. For some, the ideal concerned the citizens who would emerge from the learning experience—from Berea, for example, learned and socially conscious Appalachians who could help enlighten their communities; from Prescott, individuals with keen understanding of important human connections with the natural environment. For others, the ideal concerned the learning experience itself—from the highly structured study of ideas and information from classic texts at St. John’s to the interdisciplinary, discussion-focused exploration of contemporary issues at Evergreen. Whatever the source or aim of the ideal, it is noteworthy that the beginnings of each college described in this volume (with the possible exception of College of the Atlantic) owed much to personal visions of social justice activated by uncommon energy and determination.”

Although these case studies are amongst the most interesting accounts of these schools currently available, it is not clear that Newell or his students found a clear narrative connecting these communities across American history save that attempt to actualize an ideal, which is true of any community (to a degree).

They did certainly find common themes, or dimensions, across these communities. Joy Kliewer would continue exploring these dimensions in her own research. Also building off the work of Grant and Riesman, Kliewer’s detailed study of the successes and failures of the alternative higher education movement during the nineteen-sixties, called The Innovative

Campus: Nurturing the Distinctive Learning Environment, discussed the difficulty the literature around these schools has had with finding a clear definition for itself. She narrowed her study to the nineteen-sixties generation of schools and settled on the term “innovative.” She defined this term (in the restricted historical period she was interested in) as “…any significant departure from traditional practices in American higher education.” She further argued for “…five dimensions that ‘mark out the territory’ of innovative institutions of higher education…” These five dimensions were “interdisciplinary teaching and learning, student-centered education, egalitarianism, experiential learning, and an institutional focus on teaching rather than research and/or publication.” Her study of how such institutions developed and survived the sixties and seventies is clear and concise, but it does not explain why these institutions have existed throughout American history. Thus, although these parameters indicate consistent dimensions, they do not explain why these dimensions are consistent, beyond some historically particular contingencies, across the middle to late twentieth century. Also, her dimension of “a privileging of teaching instead of research” downplays the way in which these schools do play a role in the project of knowledge—as though reorganizing the educational process were not a part of what we mean by the project of knowledge. This thesis is at least partially an extension of the important work started by Kliwer. At the end of the book she suggested that further research could be done to make:

…a scholarly comparison of the experiences of the six distinctive campuses in this study with those of the older experimental colleges of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries (e.g., Antioch College, Reed College, Deep Springs College) could yield important insights. What are the lessons to be learned about the history and transformation of innovation from the older and progressive-era innovative campuses, and how do these results compare and contrast with findings of the current investigation? These are

22 Ibid., xviii.
23 Ibid., xviii-xix.
important questions for future researchers.\textsuperscript{24}

In this thesis I hope to contribute by beginning such an endeavor, while also adding a much-needed philosophical analysis of what unifies the aims of these schools, and their place within American culture. This study will be able to look only at the earliest years of the colleges that are broadly understood to be the foreparents of the later institutions. Thus, this project will also be narrow in scope. I hope by offering a preliminary framework, that might be augmented by extending the breadth and depth of the historical and geographical empirical data in future research, I will also help these schools have a better story of themselves and their place within America.\textsuperscript{25} In the next chapter I lay out the foundations of a philosophical framework in order to elucidate the relationship these communities have to the broader culture in which they are situated.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 230.
\textsuperscript{25} In the future I hope to expand this thesis through at least the nineteen-fifties, and perhaps, ultimately, into the present.
The philosophical framework of this thesis draws from Ernst Cassirer’s cultural theory. Before launching into this construct, a few qualifications are necessary. By creating a theoretical lens through which to analyze the role of actualized utopia in American culture, I am not claiming to exhaust the myriad ways in which to analyze human life and its works. I use a Cassireran lens precisely because he thought the idea that human culture was exhaustibly analyzable by means of a theoretical construct was convoluted. Like Cassirer, I want to explore the variety of ways humans have expressed, represented, and signified, themselves and their world. It is humans’ enacting the world, (one aspect of what the idealists term Geist) that is of particular importance to this project. The story or the way one makes sense of the trends in human activity is what I mean by the term “culture.”26 I thereby sidestep at least some of Readings’ concerns with the term. I use the term to account for any methodologically driven attempt at framing human life and its works. By culture, I do not just mean a particular type of Western idealist understanding of self and society. My Western identity and privilege certainly colors my story, but in no way invalidates, in my view, this lens as a theoretical model of self and society. As a situated historical singularity my framework helps me respond adequately to

my own situation. A “framework” is a helpful model of the world, but that does not give it any ontological superiority; its job is to do work. Like a model of a building, my model is made for a purpose: to describe adequately and place appropriately the utopian community of higher learning in American culture. If these schools are to continue, and I believe they should, a framework may help them better work with other, less idealistic, communities, and to understand better the lessons of the past, and what these schools could be in the future.

With that said, what does a Cassireren orientation offer this project that is particularly useful? Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945) was one of the founders of what we now think of today as “cultural theory.” This may come as a surprise to the outside observer. His early career focused largely on theorizing about the developments in theoretical physics and the history of science. A systematic theoretician who synthetized the works of Kant and Hegel, with a bent toward theoretical physics, at first would seem to be unlikely to provide a useful framework to understand broader human culture. It may come as a surprise then that his book An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture, which developed, and made available to a broader audience in English, the work he did earlier in his rigorous four volume The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, begins with the statement: “That self-knowledge is the highest aim of philosophical inquiry appears to be generally acknowledged.” Why would someone who spent his early career studying theoretical physics make such a claim? Would he not want to say that the goal of philosophical inquiry has been to know the world? On the other hand, why would

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27 There is some debate as to whether the essays and notes that make up “Volume 4” The Metaphysics of Symbolic Forms was ever meant to be included in the series, or whether The Logic of the Cultural Sciences was meant to conclude the series. For more see: Ernst Cassirer and Donald P. Verene, The Logic of the Cultural Sciences: Five Studies, trans. Steve G. Lofts (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), xiii-xxii. Also see, Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms-The Metaphysics of Symbolic Forms, ed. John Michael Krois and Donald Phillipe Verene, trans. John Michael Krois, vol. 4 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), ix-xxvi.

a cultural theorist make this latter claim? Did he really think something akin to contemplation is the center of human philosophical exploration? Several decades after An Essay On Man was published, Michel Foucault would make this claim in a different way, a way that illuminates what Cassirer sought.

When History of Sexuality Part 2: The Use of Pleasure was published in 1984, Foucault already knew he was dying of AIDS. A need to explain and rethink his own projects became necessary. In one of his most famous passages, he described his earlier works as “...a philosophical exercise. The object was to learn to what extent the effort to think one’s own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently.”

Foucault’s career can be interpreted as a continued attempt to see how possible it was to think and know oneself anew. In one of his last completed works “What is Enlightenment?” he further explored the task of self knowledge, especially drawing on what it means to be “enlightened.” He, like Cassirer, thought Kant offered a fruitful way to think about human activity. Further, Foucault recognized self-knowledge was a process of growth and was not static.

Like Foucault, when Cassirer says self-knowledge is the highest aim of philosophy, he was not saying that there is an exhaustive way, through contemplation or otherwise, to know oneself. Rather through his taking up of the idealist tradition, he was pointing to the fact that our

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31. There is evidence to suggest that Cassirer, or at least Cassirer’s Kant, may have influenced Foucault’s thought. Foucault clearly had a nominal acquaintance with Cassirer because in The Order of Things he almost exclusively quotes Kant from the Critical Cassirer edition of Kant’s Logic. Further research needs to be done to ascertain the full extent of Cassirer’s influence. For more see: Michel Foucault, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences, Vintage Books ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), 343.
human understanding of who and what we are, and how that relates to reality, schematizes or symbolizes that reality. Cassirer was not interested in abstract, theoretical physics just to know the “really-real” world, but was amazed by how and why humans were able to complete such activities in the first place. He was interested in how humans became capable of high-level physics, among their varied undertakings. Although Cassirer was a Kantian at heart, and deeply admired Hegel, he wished to expand the parameters, both historically and paradigmatically, of the project of critique beyond Kant and idealist phenomenology beyond Hegel. Like Foucault, he wanted to know both how we came to understand ourselves as beings who could understand the mysteries of themselves (and thus think differently), and also what the parameters (in Foucault’s case primarily historical) of such a project were.

Cassirer recognized that by attempting such a project he was not somehow exhausting what could be said about the parameters and possibilities of human life. Rather, he hoped that by finding commonalities among the inexhaustible varieties of human activity, the unity or commonality of the human process might be seen. In his own words: “If the philosophy of culture succeeds in apprehending and elucidating such basic principles, it will have fulfilled, in a new sense, its task of demonstrating the unity of the spirit as opposed to the multiplicity of its manifestations—for the clearest evidence of this unity is precisely that the diversity of the products of the human spirit does not impair the unity of its productive process, but rather sustains and confirms it.”

For Cassirer, human culture is the process of human life and its ever-renewing projects. We share in the process of inquiry although our experiences and ameliorations are as various as are individual persons and cultures across the world. Actualized utopian schooling in America has had myriad expressions, but perhaps, as Cassirer suggests,

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there are trends in those expressions that illuminate unity or commonality in this human activity. His analysis of culture is quite complex; he after all devoted most of his middle and later career to it. A thorough analysis of his full system is not possible here, nor would be it helpful for this project. What I say here, and what is critical for making sense of the “story of utopia” in America, is that one of the most critical tools at our human disposal—indeed it might be said that it is one of the most important developments in our consciousness—is the use and manipulation of symbols. Without them, there is no “self” to think anew. For Cassirer the very parameters of subjecthood and objecthood rely on the development of what he called the “symbolic forms of human culture.”

The Development and Progression of the Symbolic Forms

There are many ways to explore Cassirer’s account of the development and progress of human activity. For example, his *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* could be considered a fourth Kantian critique; in this case of imagination or, as Cassirer says “culture.” For Cassirer, it is a turning point in human consciousness when we can live and imagine beyond the sensual world in which we expressively act. In other words, to imagine something that is not in our immediate expressive interactions in the world is to *do* something unique. Once this imaginative step is made, there is no going back to a purely expressive life:

Man cannot escape his own achievement. He cannot but adopt the conditions of his own life. No longer in a merely physical universe, man lives in a symbolic universe. Language, myth, art, and religion are parts of this universe. They are the varied threads which weave the symbolic net, the tangled web of human experiences. All human progress in thought and experience refines upon and strengthens this net. No longer can man confront reality immediately; he cannot see it, as it were, face to face. Physical reality seems to recede in proportion, as man’s symbolic activity advances. Instead of dealing with the things themselves man is in a sense constantly conversing with himself. He has so enveloped himself in linguistic forms, in artistic images, in mythical symbols, or religious rites that he cannot see or know anything except by the interposition of this artificial medium. His situation is the same in the theoretical as the practical sphere.\(^{33}\)

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\(^{33}\) Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*, 27.
This imaginative achievement, this fall from innocence, is not to be regretted; we would not be who we are without this cumulative concretization of our expressive life. Without it we would not have the flexible symbols that have made our culture, nor would be able to “turn back” and reflect and critique our situation. Also in the Kantian vein, Cassirer’s cultural theory might be seen as a multicultural and historical expression of the parameters of consciousness that Kant laid out in his systematic philosophy. Kant’s account of the parameters of human thought constituted the parameters of a Western male in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. He did not explain how those parameters came to be, nor their flexibility and diversity across cultures. Kant’s philosophy emphasizes the unity of *Geist*. It is not that Cassirer rejected the unity of *Geist*, nor that he thought that there were no general limits on human thought, in fact he thought quite the opposite. Rather, by fleshing out the historical and temporal dimensions of such a project, as the critique of culture, he hoped to enrich and pluralize critical philosophy and idealistic phenomenology. He weaved a story of how we gained our subjectivity, and by that very process, began to recognize something “other.” It is the story of how, particularly in the West, subjects and objects became split.

Finally, it is helpful to think of Cassirer’s philosophy of culture as a pluralizing of Hegelian phenomenology. This interpretation helps one understand what Cassirer means by “a symbolic form of human culture.” Like Hegel, Cassirer wanted to describe the trend(s) of *Geist* as it progresses dialectically through time. However unlike Hegel, there is no singular form of the progression of *Geist*. Through a Cassireran lens, Hegel’s *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, can be seen as the paradigmatic rational/scientific progression of *Geist*. Hegel’s mistake was to assume this progression was the only exhaustive way to understand oneself and the world. Cassirer also thought that Hegel’s subsumption of nature and immediate experience under “absolute spirit”
was a mistake. Such subsumption is only possible if one over privileges a scientistic horizon of meaning. Cassirer on the other hand thought that there were certain formalizations of imaginative abstraction, and modes of symbolization, divorced in varying degrees from our expressive experience, that make sense of all reality in a myriad of different ways. These symbolic forms have their own proper objects of knowledge. There is a genealogical development of these forms, but that does not mean any particular form is (in all ways) superior to another; such reductionism is part of the imperiousness of the symbolic forms of human culture—each one of them can dominate all horizons of meaning. Any given symbolic form can describe everything, and thus one can assume it is the only, or at least the most important, way to make sense of reality. But each really has only a limited claim on the form that Geist takes.

These forms are also unique, in that each progresses an object of knowledge that can be known in no other way—thus, they are all individual expressions of, and perspectives on, reality. Some of them are more pliable and progressive, while others are more stable and conservative. Reducing all of our expressions, representations, and significations, into one form, is thus foolhardy. In An Essay on Man, Cassirer argues that myth, religion, and language are generally more conservative symbolic forms, while art and science are generally more progressive, (history lies somewhere in between.) The relationship among these different paradigmatic lenses, and their degrees of progressiveness, play a critical role in understanding the place of actualized utopias in the American context. The following sections clarify these paradigms, and help us begin to unpack what Cassirer means by “progressive” and “conservative” Symbolic forms.

The Most Conservative Symbolic Forms

Cassirer’s story of human culture begins with one of the most expressive, and paradoxically, the most conservative, symbolic forms: myth. Myth is one of the most difficult of
all the paradigmatic interpretations of reality to describe because it is “refractory to a merely logical analysis…”34 and, “myth appears at first sight to be mere chaos—a shapeless mass of incoherent ideas.”35 What did Cassirer mean by “mythic thought?” What makes this a symbolic form of thought and why is it so difficult to describe?

In The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms Volume 2, Mythical Thought, Cassirer synthesized an astonishing amount of historical and anthropological data to attempt to draw some conclusions about the genealogical roots of symbolic thought. Together with language, myth is one of the earliest life-worlds of human thought. For Cassirer:

The world of myth is a dramatic world—a world of actions, of forces, of conflicting powers. In every phenomenon of nature it sees the collision of these powers. Mythical perception is always impregnated with these emotional qualities. Whatever is seen or felt is surrounded by a special atmosphere—an atmosphere of joy or grief, anguish, of excitement, of exultation or depression. Here we cannot speak of ‘things’ as dead or indifferent stuff. All objects are benignant or malignant, friendly or inimical, familiar or uncanny, alluring and fascinating or repellent and threatening.36 In many ways, the world of myth is poetic. While Cassirer recognized that myth and poetry share historical roots, he also made clear that unlike art, myth relies on its object being “real” in some sense. “Without the belief in the reality of its object, myth would lose its ground.”37 Unlike art, where whether or not something is “real” is not important, or at least secondary, myth relies on a world in which the immediate interrelations of things are “real” and potent.

Nor is the mythic limited to being static or purely expressive. What makes myth different from the other symbolic forms is that its expressive relations take on particular symbolic structures. There is a word for snake that certain experiences satisfy or do not satisfy, but that word has power even when the experiences are not being had. Even in our abstract post-mythic

34 Ibid., 79.
35 Ibid., 79.
36 Ibid., 84.
37 Ibid., 83.
language, uttering the word “snake” can “conjure” the beast itself. The “true word” for snake is directly connected to the snake. Its power is in its very relation. Cassirer is not alone in philosophizing the “power of the word” in this sense.

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault describes such a paradigm. He calls it a “logic of similitude” (in the tradition of Petrus Ramus). Interestingly, Foucault found this paradigmatic approach, not in “primitive” societies, but in the early European renaissance:

Up to the end of the sixteenth century, resemblance played a constructive role in the knowledge of western culture. It was resemblance that largely guided exegesis and the interpretation of texts; it was resemblance that organized the play of symbols, made possible knowledge of things visible and invisible, and controlled the art of representing them. The universe was folded in upon itself: the earth echoing the sky, faces seeing themselves reflected in the stars, and plants holding within their stems the secrets that were of use to man. Painting imitated space. And representation—whether in the service of pleasure or of knowledge—was posited as a form of repetition: the theatre of life or the mirror of nature, that was the claim made by all language, its manner of declaring its existence of formulating its right of speech.38

Although Foucault’s interest was in the late development of Western culture, it by no means runs counter to Cassirer’s understanding of mythic consciousness. For Cassirer it is a mistake to conflate temporal/historical development with any simplistic notion of progress. The scientific paradigm does not rid us of a supposedly “false” mythic paradigm:

Rather, every form through which consciousness passes seems to belong in some way to its enduring heritage. The surpassing of a particular form is made possible not by the vanishing, the total destruction, of this form but by its preservation within the continuity of consciousness as a whole; for what constitutes the unity and totality of the human spirit is precisely that it has no absolute past; it gathers up into itself what has passed and preserves it as present. “The life of the actual spirit,” writes Hegel in this connection, “is a cycle of stages which on the one hand still subsist side by side and only on the other

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38 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, 17. It is important to recall that the original French title for *The Order of Things* was *Les Mots et Les Choses* (Words and Things). Foucault makes very plain that he is interested in how humanity in the West has understood the play of symbols and things. The book is one of the clearest points of convergence between Foucault and Cassirer.
hand appear as past. The features which spirit seems to have left behind it are also present in its depths.”

This passage clarifies not only the historical reasons why mythic consciousness appeared to dominate Renaissance thought, in Foucault’s description, but also reveals the advantage of Cassirer’s polydimensional pluralism. Cassirer can account for myth’s reappearance in later periods of human culture. He saw a genealogical heritage that led to a variety of different paradigmatic approaches to reality, but also recognized that none of them is superior to the others, and none of them can entirely rid itself of the others. It would be preposterous to think that language and myth have utterly separate histories and progressions. On the other hand, both can make sense of reality as a whole on the basis of the tools they provide. At first, it might seem strange to say science or mathematics have not ridded themselves of mythic consciousness, but if one knows the history of the Pythagoreans’ mystical understanding of mathematics, or even some of the advances made in quantum theory that rely on a relational logic, one realizes a specter lives in the shadows of their forms.

Religion is the offspring of mythic consciousness. Although mythic interrelation is a fairly seamless and stable paradigm, there are always problems with any complete expression of the world. In the case of mythic consciousness, pregnant within it is a slow developing sense of I and thou, of I and God, and, of I and the world. This relationship, under certain conditions, begins to fracture the stable and reliable relations contained in mythic consciousness. Cassirer points to number of anthropological works during his lifetime that hypothesized that a sense of selfhood is not the first step in human development. Rather, there is a sense of possession by momentary demons, or Gods, that have a much more active sense of “I” and proto-personality.

than any vessel does. It is this feeling of ecstatic possession that increasingly led to a sense of individuality, even if nominal and radically different from Western sensibilities.\textsuperscript{40} The experience of “I,” “the God,” and the “non-God,” led to the beginning of a sense of a difference between the world as humans experience it and another world. Eventually this led to a variety of clefts among the worlds of gods, demons, and ourselves; between sacred and profane; between one way of being and another. “An aesthetics of existence,” thus gets an ethical universalization in the development of mythic consciousness. Religion for Cassirer is different from myth because the former no longer simply stresses the intuitive, mythic world. Religion also stresses separations between stable god(s) and us, and between the ultimate ethical rules that universally ground reality, and between our experience and our actions.

Language follows a similar trend of splitting subjects and objects. It also has a stable life world. “In language we objectify our sense perceptions. In the very act of linguistic expression our perceptions assume a new form.”\textsuperscript{41} Our naming of objects, for example, formalizes those objects.

Myth, religion, and language initiate people into they conservative dimensions of reality but for different reasons. Myth objectifies a stable, felt world of life, while religion has a universalizable ethical framework, and language allows for a stable communication of knowledge, including knowledge of how to communicate. There are progressive aspects to all of these forms, but they are generally more conservative than other symbolic forms by the very way they attempt to make sense of the world. Their symbolic activity is aligned towards symbolic stabilization, not symbolic revitalization. In the life of a community these forms are critical to

what Leonard Waks, in Deweyan spirit, calls “education as initiation.” Myth, religion, and language create stable paradigms into which the younger generations of a culture can enter, then understand, and then carry out, the practices of their communities. As we shall see, actualized utopian communities of higher learning in America have conservative processes and frameworks to initiate people into a coherent ethical, relational, communicable, polydimensional world, which has stable (one might say recalcitrant) boundaries and parameters. But how do these conservative forms in community life allow for change? The answer lies in the more progressive symbolic forms of culture that we now examine.

**The Moderate Symbolic Forms**

Cassirer believed that all symbolic forms (usually) are in a healthy equipoise between their conservative and progressive aspects. Although he never made explicit claims about history’s progressiveness as a symbolic form, I argue that history’s fulcrum is roughly between these two different “poles.” In this section, I hope to clarify histories moderate dynamics. History is also, like the other symbolic forms, a process of knowing oneself and the world. In the historical horizon of meaning there is a particular recognition that: “In order to know myself I cannot endeavor to go beyond myself, to leap, as it were, over my own shadow. I must choose the opposite approach.” To think oneself differently, one cannot simply stand outside of oneself. The idea that we can stand outside of historical circumstances and look on them “objectively” is, in a certain respect, an impossible task. In light of this, Cassirer went on to say that:

> In history man constantly returns to himself; he attempts to recollect and actualize the whole of his past experience. But the historical self is not a mere individual self. It is anthropomorphic but it is not egocentric. Stated in the form of a paradox, we may say that

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43 Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*, 211.
history strives after an “objective anthropomorphism.” By making us cognizant of the polymorphism of human existence it frees us from the freaks and prejudices of a special and single moment. It is this enrichment and enlargement, not the effacement, of the self, of our knowing and feeling ego, which is the aim of historical knowledge.\textsuperscript{44}

Although all history is guided by one’s present moment in life (i.e., lived history), the more one knows of the past and its diversity, the more one is freed from the contingent experiences of one’s present reality, and the more one is enlarged and enriched. The more I learn about the diversity of alternative models of higher learning the United States, the more I am free of the prejudice that “x” defining characteristic defines all of these communities. The more I realize that race, gender, class, government, and a myriad of other seemingly stable categories, are not static objects, the more I can move beyond my damaging and reductive judgments about human life and come to a more holistic understanding of the plurality of expressions and activities that have led to me as a being. Through history, my sense of “me” becomes saturated, and more forces of the past I recognize as part of myself.

Such a process of historical self-growth has a balanced progressivism and conservatism. As figures like Emerson and Nietzsche made clear throughout their careers, one can drown oneself in the historical past in such a way that creativity is stifled. We can live in a habituated and mechanical world of historical memory. That certainly happened in Emerson’s and Nietzsche’s respective experiences with nineteenth century theology and philology. On the other hand, as is often too easily forgotten, Emerson and Nietzsche recognized that the past can and must be used to create a new present and future. Cassirer also stressed this aspect of the historical horizon:

In order to possess the world of culture we must incessantly reconquer it by historical recollection. But recollection does not mean merely the act of reproduction. It is a new intellectual synthesis—a constructive act. In this reconstruction the human mind moves in the opposite direction from that of the original process. All works of culture originate in

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 211-212.
an act of solidification and stabilization. Man could not communicate his thoughts and feelings, and he could not, accordingly, live in a social world, if he had not the special gift of objectifying his thoughts, of giving them a solid and permanent shape. Behind these fixed and static shapes, these petrified works of human culture, history detects the original dynamic impulses. It is the gift of great historians to reduce all the mere facts to their fieri, all products to processes, all static things or institutions to their creative energies.45

History tells us how the “things” culture stabilized (its products and works), came to be, and thus helps us recognize the dynamic process of human culture. Behind and within our products there is the vital process of Geist. Brilliant historical synthesizers help us recreate a dynamic vital life world. They help us enliven the past for the present and future:

It is this ‘palingenesis,’ this rebirth of the past, which marks and distinguishes the great historian. Friedrich Schlegel called the historian einen rückwärts gekehrten Propheten, a retrospective prophet. There is also a prophecy of the past, a revelation of its hidden life. History cannot predict the events to come; it can only interpret the past. But human life is an organism in which all elements imply and explain each other. Consequently a new understanding of the past gives us at the same time a new prospect of the future, which in turn becomes an impulse to intellectual and social life. For this double view of the world in prospect and in retrospect the historian must select his point of departure. He cannot find it except in his own time. He cannot go beyond the conditions of his present experience. Historical knowledge is the answer to definite questions, an answer which must be given by the past; but the questions themselves are put and dictated by the present—by our present intellectual interests and our present moral and social needs.46

The historical process is distinctly creative, although it relies on a recollection in which we can quite easily drown. The past does not necessarily dictate the present, but our historical memory does guide, prefigure, and when we reflect, predict and envision, a future. In each of us, the past as history is a steadily building wave that is constantly spilling over-itselt into the “could be,” and ebbing away from the “might have been.”

Berea and Antioch in particular, out of all alternative communities of higher learning that have manifested in the United States, have understood how the retelling of their past is important to their prophetic telic nature as utopias. Given that they are the oldest actualized utopias of

45 Ibid., 204-205.
46 Ibid., 197.
higher learning currently operating, this memory makes a great deal of sense. They recognize history as a pivotal and agency creating process. Telling a particular story about the past allows us to think ourselves anew. It allows us to reflect on what “could-have-been,” “might-have-been,” and what “could be.” History frees us from static notions about how the world must be. History can certainly lead to the over-determination of the human condition, but, at its best, it does the opposite; it helps us realize the irreducible possibility, that of freedom. The diversity of the past helps us recognize the possibilities that were not acted-upon, and the possibilities that might be acted-upon, in the future. History is but one aspect of the process of agency creation that actualized utopias cultivate through conservative, and thus stabilizing, institutions. The conservative forces in these institutions are myth, religion, and in a sense, language. They create a meaningful identity and life-world. These stabilizing forces allowed Antioch and Berea to be telically historical in their orientation, without loosing themselves in the flux of an unstable ever-changing cultural situation.

The Most Progressive Symbolic Forms

Cassirer thought art, like history, tells us a great deal about our human nature. He even went so far as to claim:

Art and history are the most powerful instruments of our inquiry into human nature. What would we know of man without these two sources of information? We should be dependent on the data of our personal life, which can give us only a subjective view and which at best are but the scattered fragments of the broken mirror of humanity… In the great works of history and art we begin to see, behind this mask of the conventional, the features of the real, individual man. In order to find him we must go to the great historians or to the great poets—to the tragic writers like Euripides or Shakespeare, to comic writers like Cervantes, Molière, or Laurence Sterne, or to our modern novelists like Dickens or Thackeray, Balzac or Flaubert, Gogol or Dostoievski. Poetry is not a mere imitation of nature; history is not a narration of dead facts and events. History as well as poetry is an organon of our self-knowledge, an indispensable instrument for building up our human universe.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 228.}
In spite of their connections, there are some striking differences between history and art. Unlike history, art, along with science, has a far more progressive orientation. Science imagines a complete system of laws and rules, and attempts to figure out how the whole system interacts together; then augments that system through the results of empirical inquiry. Science also pulls away from all the nuance and color of life in order to make clear and distinct formalizations. Its aim is to complete its picture, and to cast aside strategies that no longer seem helpful. Science is not interested in stabilization for its own sake. If a model does not work, it should not be kept. Certainly science has a conservative aspect, in that the more successful and interrelated its facts are to other facts, the more unwilling it is to give them up. The object of science however is to move beyond a fact, or even a system, if they no longer are helpful in the pursuit of its complete picture. Art, on the other hand, generally functions in the opposite way. Its object is worked out by cultivating the nuances of life. Some artists may have a whole work finished before they have the parts, but the artistic object of knowledge is still not a complete abstraction that is then augmented by experience. It is an enlivened, nuanced play of the flux, revealing all the richness of human life. Cassirer further distinguished art from science (and language) because:

[Art]…is not an imitation of reality but a discovery of reality. We do not however, discover nature through art in the same sense in which the scientist uses the term “nature.” Language and science are the two main processes by which we ascertain and determine our concepts of the external world. We must classify our sense perceptions and bring them under general notions and general rules in order to give them an objective meaning. Such classification is the result of a persistent effort toward simplification. The work of art in like manner implies such an act of condensation and concentration…In this respect beauty as well may be described in terms of the same classical formula; they are “a unity in the manifold.” But in the two cases there is a difference of stress. Language and science are abbreviation of reality; art is an intensification of reality. Language and science depend upon one and the same process of abstraction; art may be described as a continuous process of concretion. In our scientific description of a given object we begin with a great number of observations, which at first sight are only a loose conglomerate of detached facts. But the farther we proceed the more these individual phenomena tend to assume a definite shape and become a systematic whole. What science is searching for is
some central features of a given object from which all its particular qualities may be derived.\textsuperscript{48}

Science must pick and choose certain features of reality in order to systematize reality in a universalizable way. There is no such imperative placed upon art. Its symbolic life concretizes, and moves towards the vital, instead of the abstract and formal. Cassirer deeply admired art because of its creative potential. It may come as a surprise that the scientistic Cassirer not only highly valued the artistic symbolic form, but also argued, in line with Kant, that genius is an artistic practice and not a scientific one.

Beauty is unique and incomparable, it is the work of the genius… “genius” says Kant in his \textit{Critique of Judgment}, “is the innate mental disposition (\textit{ingenium}) through which Nature gives the rule to Art.” It is “a talent for producing that for which no definite rule can be given; it is not a mere aptitude for what can be learnt by a rule. Hence originality must be its property.” This form of originality is the prerogative and distinction of art; it cannot be extended to other fields of human activity. [Kant says] “Nature by the medium of genius does not prescribe rules to Science, but to Art; and to it only in so far as it is to be beautiful Art.” We may speak of Newton as a scientific genius; but in this case we speak only metaphorically. “Thus we can readily learn all that Newton has set fourth in his immortal work on the principles of Natural Philosophy, however great a head was required to discover it; but we cannot learn to write spirited poetry, however express may be the precepts of the art and however excellent its models.”\textsuperscript{49}

Originality is not the main goal of scientific practice. Rules and parameters still make up and stabilize science, despite its constant progressive augmentation by experimental inquiry, theoretical insight, and its occasional radical reorganization. The only rule art (in its broadest sense) has been “given” through nature (by the “medium” of genius) is to be beautiful, or in other words, to be thick, qualitative, and dynamic (for us to \textit{feel} a “purposiveness without a purpose”). Science as a symbolic form does not have the capacity for such intensely creative activity.

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Ibid.}, 158-159.
\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Ibid.}, 251. For original citations see: \textit{Critique of Judgment}, §§43-50.
It is not surprising that American alternative communities of higher learning have been centers for artists, and new artistic movements, throughout American history. Whether it is Billy Ed Wheeler and Homer Ledford at Berea, or Coretta Scott King and Leonard Nimoy at Antioch, or Joseph Albers, John Cage, and Buckminster Fuller, at Black Mountain, the telic nature of these schools, grounded in a conservative counter-cultural “conservative” identity, is the perfect hotbed for progressive symbolic forms; especially art. As we shall see, it is the “cult of genius” as a nineteenth-century American (and European) symbol, coupled with the Association Movement, which opened up a point in culture for these schools. Bearing in mind how Kant and Cassirer saw genius as an artistic endeavor, these schools, as institutions for the democratic cultivation of genius, at heart, were (and are) naturally inclined to manifest artistic expression.

These schools initiate their members into a polydimensional life-world. They strive to cultivate a sort of community of genius (a sort of “social” genius), or at the very least active historical, artistic, and scientific agents, who grow and adapt in an ever changing world, while having the stabilizing forces of myth, religion, and language to give them a healthy sense of self, community, and world.

**Conclusion**

*Utopia, Genius, and the Symbolic Forms*

This Cassireran framework has provided an outline of the characteristics of the *actualized utopian* communities of higher learning in America. First, it has helped explain why some of these institutions that have fairly conservative structures, and that have outlasted their formative years, still recognize themselves as *actualized utopias*. Although they participate in an education of initiation; stabilizing the world via conservative symbolic forms, they intend to create agency-

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50 Antioch is also (surprisingly) the alma mater of many famous scientists and anthropologist, most notably, Clifford Geertz. In general, these institutions are not known for cultivating scientists.
enriched persons, as opposed to those who will continue the world just as they were given it. They cultivate an education of growth and renewal in a nurturing conservative environment. Second, these schools enact their histories in a way that does not drown them in the past, but recast their stories in each generation to make sure new students use the agency-creating past to revitalize a sense of the changeable world and think themselves anew. Third and finally, these schools use art, and science to a lesser degree, to progress and create new forms of thought and practice. The progressive edge is not rid of its conservative institutional forces; to the contrary, it is those forces that allow them to pursue certain dimensions of knowledge and to affect the culture more broadly. They cultivate an artistic community of genius by actualizing countercultural artistic communities. They embody the type of genius that can be made potent through community life.

These schools are situated to use conservative symbolic forms to cultivate active agents. They are localized centers of human activity. They are intensive nexuses of cultural life. They are interested in the myriad forms of human activity and manipulate and create new symbols to renew and revitalize culture. Some of these manipulations, these illuminations of what human activity could look like, are so far beyond the static “world” (that most people take for granted), that they seem impossible to actualize. Attempting to create a desegregated, depatriarchalized, egalitarian, and free community of higher learning in Kentucky on the eve of the Civil War was about as impossible a dream as one can imagine; Berea should not have been possible. This is what makes these communities unique and important: Their very ability to actualize impossible dreams. Cassirer summed up such a thought in a simple, clear, and profound way: “The great mission of the utopia is to make room for the possible as opposed to a passive acquiescence in

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51 Though, it is fair to say, that these schools do not have the capabilities to carry out large-scale scientific projects.
the present actual state of affairs. It is symbolic thought which overcomes the natural inertia of man and endows him with a new ability, the ability constantly to reshape his human universe.”

This statement is true to the experience of alternative communities of higher learning in America.

Other questions emerge, now that the framework has been elucidated. How did these communities come into existence? Why did these schools actualize some possibilities, while others failed? In the next section, I begin a philosophical anthropology and cultural phenomenology of these schools (through a genetic study), while further clarifying the Cassireran framework that made up this chapter. The earliest versions of these communities in America came into existence because of a mix of cultural forces. However unlike American research universities, they would come into existence at the margins of a new wave of transcendentalist, associationist, Whiggish/republican progressivism, and abolitionist fervor. No figure will serve us better to understand this milieu than the sage of Concord, Ralph Waldo Emerson. His oration, The American Scholar, will help us understand how German Idealism, amongst other forces such as the Association Movement, guided the forefathers of the actualized utopian movement of higher learning in America.

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52 Ernst Cassirer, An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture, 68.
CHAPTER 2:
THE HIGHER LEARNING IN AMERICA

The American Scholar
The Cult of Genius, the Advancement of Knowledge, and Utopia

Antioch College, Berea College, and the utopian higher education movement that would follow in their footsteps, were made possible by a particular historical situation. In mid-nineteenth century America, a cult of genius, and a very particular understanding of the advancement of knowledge (as interpreted by transcendentalists, associationists, Whig/republican progressives, and abolitionists), coupled with the Association Movement’s utopian experiments, opened the door for a particular type of actualized utopian college in America. These communities enacted the idealistic conception of the project of knowledge through a refinement and further institutionalization of previous utopian experiments, and by organizing themselves intentionally as institutions of higher learning. The larger culture of America labeled these communities as “counter-cultural.” They were communities of “genius” in a Victorian sense of that word. Although one may not have approved of their activities, one could at least recognize the role these communities played in cultural development. This place within American cultural life would prove critical for the survival of these schools through many convulsive periods in American history.

The term genius, as we understand it today, has a long history in the West. Carl Pletsch, in Young Nietzsche: Becoming a Genius, traced some of the origins of the concept of genius, and described the way Nietzsche played with this important symbol of nineteenth-century life. In particular, Pletsch traced genius’ emergence to the Enlightenment:

Even as radical writers prepared the way for democratic revolution, they were also setting the stage for the nineteenth century’s romantic heroes, and its cult of genius. All across
Europe and in America commoners were taking the place of the privileged orders. Bourgeois intellectuals created new roles for themselves as they declared their independence from clerical careers and noble patrons, and claimed the right to reform society according to their own lights. They presented themselves as representatives of the middle classes generally, and even called themselves the “party of humanity.” But soon the idea emerged that they constituted an aristocracy of intellect. That would become one of the bases of the theory of genius.  

This “intellectual aristocracy” felt a new sense of freedom, uniqueness, and individuality. No longer was one simply drowned in the universe or just a small cog in a greater whole. They often felt as if the individual triumphed over the gods and triumphed over a deadening past. In literature and philosophy the singular individual reigned supreme. “Eighteenth-century writers created (or recreated) autobiography, the novel, and biography, genres that permitted the public to think about great individuals in entirely new ways. Thinking in terms of genius was one of the results.”

Geniuses were supposed to be people deeply imbedded in cultural life, and were supposed to have a unique role in the advancement knowledge. Schopenhauer, building upon the work of Kant, put it the following way:

*Talent* is able to achieve what is beyond other people’s capacity to achieve, yet not to achieve what is beyond their capacity of apprehension; therefore it at once finds its appreciators. The achievement of *genius*, on the other hand, transcends not only others’ capacity of achievement, but also their capacity of apprehension; therefore they do not become immediately aware of it. Talent is like the marksman who hits a target which others cannot reach; genius is like the marksman who hits a target…which others cannot even see.

As Pletsch makes very clear, the larger Western culture of the nineteenth century took up Schopenhauer’s distinction between the talented individual who does something better than everyone else, and is therefore *appreciated*, and the genius no one *appreciates* because such extraordinary persons want to actualize something beyond the larger culture’s apprehension. A

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54 Carl Pletsch, *Young Nietzsche: Becoming a Genius*, 3.
genius finds or creates something new in the world of symbolic activity, as opposed to advancing one form of knowledge. Schopenhauer recognized himself as someone who fell into this critical (but never appreciated) category. To have such Sybilian insight was considered a mysterious, magical, and perhaps innate gift. Nietzsche on the other hand eventually recognized genius as a certain self-stylization; as a symbolic activity, and one that somebody could enact and utilize to great effect. In other words, according to Plestch, after a disillusionment with several replacement father figures, Nietzsche self-stylized as a genius not because he believed, in any simplistic sense, in innate capacity, but because such an enactment had real world power. It is this self-stylized, unpopular, but cultural recognized position that American colleges would use to great effect as well.

As I discussed in the introduction, the idealists from Kant through the more culture-oriented Schelling, Fichte, and (Wilhelm) Von Humboldt, imagined the project of knowledge as a process of creating the self-reflective agents who could think themselves and culture anew. In a proto-Cassireran vein, by questioning what one was, one began to unravel one’s relation in the context of culture and the world. True learning for the idealists of this period created intelligent ethical agents who then advanced knowledge and culture. Genius and knowledge in America were uniquely tied to the idea of making new and better republican citizens. Before the German style university entered America, transcendentalists, associationists, Whigs/republicans, and abolitionists were dreaming and creating, on the margins of culture, institutions of Bildung. The dream of utopia, of genius, of creativity, and of a new world, was also deeply tied to the American Association Movement in the 1840’s.

The Association Movement was made up of a range of utopian socialist projects, for example John Humphry’s Oneida and George Ripley’s Brook Farm. The movement had its
origins in nineteenth century Christian perfectionism, an idealization of the American and French
revolutions, and the split in Congregational Puritanism between “Orthodoxy” and Unitarianism.
The Unitarians in particular stressed the possibility of the regeneration of society, while the
Orthodoxy was interested in the renewal and revitalization of the soul.\textsuperscript{56} The actualized utopian
college was a mix of the idealistic theory of the advancement of knowledge, with the institutional
structures and goals of earlier (and contemporaneous) communal experiments. Of course one
must bear in mind that college life at this time was very different from today.

Early European and American colleges existed somewhere between what we now think
of as high school, and the undergraduate college. Commonly boys were sent to college at sixteen
years old, and sometimes as young as thirteen. Nevertheless, it was clear this was a project for
adulthood; of becoming mature beings that could better know the world. In America, before the
Civil War, these colleges were financially, pedagogically, and socially dysfunctional. Little was
learned, although a great deal of violence and property damage by students was incurred. More
importantly, these institutions did not speak to middle class values, and did not yet offer the type
of professionalism the new middle class sought.\textsuperscript{57} It is this type of college (Middle Harvard for
example, e.g. 1783-1869) in which Ralph Waldo Emerson was brought up in and which he
responded to in his famous 1837 oration, \textit{The American Scholar}.

\textsuperscript{56} For more on the Association Movement and its relation to Unitarianism and transcendentalism see:
Robert D. Richardson, \textit{Henry Thoreau: A Life of the Mind} (Berkeley: University of California Press,
1986), 100-109.

\textsuperscript{57} For more on college life in the nineteenth century see Burton J. Bledstein, “The Old-Time College” in
\textit{The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America},
203-247.
An Education by Books, by Nature, and by Action

I do not focus on Emerson’s famous oration because it had a direct historical influence on Antioch and Berea (though there certainly are some connections). Rather, I turn to it because one of Emerson’s skills as an author and speaker was to clarify the national milieu before it was recognized more broadly. Despite Oliver Wendell Holmes proclamation that the speech was “America’s intellectual declaration of independence,” what Emerson cleverly articulated was not just a vision of the American mind freed from the fetters of Europe. Richardson has noted that most of the earlier Phi Beta Kappa addresses of the era had already well articulated the putative need for America’s intellectual independence from Europe: “…[S]peaker after speaker at Harvard had issued ritual warnings about listening too long to the courtly muses of Europe and ritual prophecies that our day of dependence, or long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, was drawing to a close. Perhaps none of the previous warnings or prophecies had been so forcefully put, but the general subject was so common that it had become a standard undergraduate theme topic.” Richardson goes on to describe what Emerson illuminated in the cultural milieu of the late 1830s: “He was not so much interested in separating America from its European past as he was in separating the individual from his incapacitating education, most of which happened to be European.” Emerson understood the unique sense of genius and individuality that prevailed the idealist and romantic thought of the nineteenth century. For

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58 Horace Mann was actually present at the event, as I will discuss later.
60 *Ibid.*, 263.
62 The theory of genius was not exactly a central part of Emerson’s philosophy, but he expressed, in a representative way, the idea as it was being used in the late 1830’s. For examples of his use of the term, see “History” and “Circles” in Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Complete Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Containing All of His Inspiring Essays, Lectures, Poems, Addresses, Studies, Biographical Sketches and Miscellaneous Works* (New York: W.H. Wise &, 1929), 125-138 and 216-223.
Emerson, in “The American Scholar,” genius was the creative vital force running through the evolution of life. Genius could manifest in any individual if that individual trusted themselves, and, with conviction, expressed their unique visions of the world. Emerson understood the deep yearning for a counter-cultural genius identity in America, but pluralized and democratized it. He also recognized genius and individuality as critical aspects of the project of knowledge. It was a theory of knowledge built on the theories of Rousseau, Kant, (Wilhelm) Von Humboldt, Schelling, Fichte, Coleridge, Carlyle, Goethe, and the many other figures of the idealist and Romantic Movement.

Emerson’s vision deeply influenced young people of the nineteenth century who were struggling to find their place within a rapidly developing middle-class culture. He also spoke to their frustration with a higher education system that failed both their and the larger society’s needs:

Emerson justified the dissatisfaction of youth with the “American system of education” and its incongruity with the occupational world. He articulated the subconscious fears of youth about its own lack of worth as he touched upon the emotional sources of human feelings of inadequacy. Emerson laid out an ideology that established young manhood as the critical period of genesis of the maturing mind, a period when the success or failure of a developing life hung in the balance. In sum, Emerson made young men think about themselves; as [Charles J.] Woodbury phrased it, “he first taught us to think, and who can forget the opener of that door?”

It is no exaggeration to say that a whole generation of university presidents, statesmen, lawyers, judges, and community-organizers, were profoundly shaped by Emerson’s articulation of their world and their lives.

Emerson was the Plato of America; he understood, perhaps better than anyone of his generation, how to engage peoples’ desires and how to orient them on their own personal quests.

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64 For more see Ibid., 259-268.
for meaning. The duty of being a Socratic guide was deeply imbedded in the imperatives of his ontology. Emerson’s transcendental conviction was that each human being is a manifestation of a great over-soul, and as such has the power to bring out some bright, new, and fresh piece of knowledge that reconstructs the truth in the light of the present. He too believed in the idealist project of knowledge, though, he was more dynamic and process-oriented than most of his European counterparts. He also believed in social transformation, like his associationist contemporaries, however, he rejected that institutions can significantly change without a corresponding (self-directed) depth of personal growth within the actors of those institutions.

“The American Scholar” expresses Emerson’s belief in the holistic advancement of culture and its institutions through self-reliant persons.

In “The American Scholar,” Emerson used a Rousseauian neologism by arguing that each human being is a scholar who learns by nature, by books, and by action. By nature, Emerson meant both to “know oneself and to know the world,” By self-reflection one learns something about the world, and by understanding the world, one learns something about oneself. In this account, he foreshadowed what Dewey would call “transactionalism,” i.e., the transactional way in which humans constitute and are constituted by their environments. Emerson’s understanding of nature played an important role in the history of alternative communities of higher learning. These schools put serious thought into how secluded, and how deeply embedded in nature (as wilderness), one needed to be in order to have robust growth as a learner.  

65 Perhaps the best example of such an attitude is Deep Springs College, isolated in the middle of the Southwestern desert, to allow future leaders of the world a period of meditation and reflection; in all these

65 The echoes of Thoreau are also obvious here. For more see: Robert D. Richardson, Henry Thoreau: A Life of the Mind, 224-233. Also, see Douglas R. Anderson, "Wilderness as Political Act," The Personalist Forum 14, no. 1 (1998). It is also worth mentioning that Thoreau was in the audience for Emerson’s Phi Beta Kappa address.
schools there was some sense that a relationship with nature “as the wild” was critical to the development of active cultural agents.

*By books,* Emerson meant the elements of knowledge that give one the power to find truth in “the past.” Emerson distinguished between *glorifying* books as “the past” in such a way that they are “hagiographies” and are not alive to the situation one finds oneself in, and *using* books as representative of “the past” to find and create answers to the questions of the present. Like Cassirer and August von Schlegel, Emerson recognized that the past, and books in general, allow one to be a *retrospective prophet.* Books can free one to act more independently in the present, and help frame a future that *might be.* It is largely against the stultifying, banking-model, and agency-depleting nineteenth century college education *by books* that these *actualized utopian* communities of higher learning defined themselves.

*By action,* Emerson meant praxis in the world. Action both tests validity and helps one find new truths. This testing demonstrates the second democratic aspect of Emerson’s account of higher learning: Learning in the world with others assists the further development of knowledge. If scholars live in ivory towers they cannot test whether they have meaningful truth. Also, and more importantly, to live and work with others helps one *think* in a holistically balanced way. Antioch would take this call to *live in the world* seriously. Horace Mann made clear in his addresses about Antioch that such moral/social activity *leads* to truth. Both Emerson and Mann thought that *social,* *moral,* and *practical* activity in the world creates good scholars. It is not that just that “good people” will handle knowledge responsibly, but that *true knowledge* is possible only through active, socially engaged, and ethical agents. Horace Mann would even go say far as to say in his (final) Baccalaureate Address that you should “…[b]e ashamed to die until you have
won some victory for humanity,” which would become Antioch’s school motto. Specialized knowledge at Antioch was (and is still) always in service of, and strengthened by, making the world a better place.

This is not to say that Emerson meant “scholar” in a narrow sense of the word, nor that later schools saw their knowledge project as primarily an academic one. Emerson saw interacting with others in the world as a scholar, in many forms and ways, as fostering the greatest likelihood for genius to develop. Such genius may or may not be embodied in one person. It is the process of creating and finding truth anew as knowledge progresses and moves beyond the past. An individual or a community can manifest such genius. Genius can manifest in a variety of ways inside and outside of the academy.

On the other hand, in order to be a scholar, as Emerson also made clear, one must assiduously study rarified and specialized knowledge. These are the elements that we build upon to find the truth of our present. Such knowledge is the “indispensible office” of a college or university education. However:

…they can only highly serve us, when they aim not to drill, but to create; when they gather from far every ray of various genius to their hospitable halls, and, by the concentrated fires, set the hearts of their youth on flame. Thought and knowledge are natures in which apparatus and pretension avail nothing. Gowns, and pecuniary foundations, though of towns of gold, can never countervail the least sentence or syllable of wit. Forget this, and our American colleges will recede in their public importance, whilst they grow richer every year.67

Emerson’s vision of the scholar both articulated and redefined the social-construction of genius in nineteenth century America. In order to draw forth the creative potential of genius, alternative communities of higher learning needed conservative institutional forces to create people brave

67 Ralph Waldo Emerson, The Complete Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Containing All of His Inspiring Essays, Lectures, Poems, Addresses, Studies, Biographical Sketches and Miscellaneous Works, 29.
enough, self-reliant enough, and self-conscious enough, to envision and express what no one else saw. The capacity for genius lies in all of us because we are all unique expressions of existence. Emerson revealed a culture of Idealism, Romanticism, Associationism, and middle-class anxiety, which, originating in an Enlightenment sense of a new and strong individualism, offered prospects for genius in a republican system. This national zeitgeist would make room for communities that otherwise would not have been possible. Colleges (building of the work of associationists) in this period postured themselves as communities of genius. Although individual geniuses did appear at these institutions, it was the institutions themselves that were “genius” in the relevant sense. Most students at Antioch or Berea, especially in their formative years, were not remarkable; however as a community they became something far beyond what they were alone. The ethos of Antioch and Berea did not spread throughout the United States rapidly, indeed really not at all, and their larger influence, such as it is, is sometimes hard to detect on the macro-scale. Despite this, the very actualization of their respective visions was a manifestation of a recognized construct of genius, and such actualization infiltrated Americans’ larger understanding of what was possible. Unfortunately, the recognition of what is genuinely possible can lead down dark paths. It is these paths that must be explored in order to defend utopia from its darker shadow, the cult.

Symbols, Domination, and Change
The Dangers Pregnant within the Progression of Culture

After being introduced to the problem of defining and placing these alternatives schools within American culture, I have proposed an abstract framework to help ameliorate the difficulties we have encountered. Descending to empirical experience, by exploring the historical and intellectual milieu in which the first generation of these communities developed, helped us to

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68 For more on utopianism as it manifested in the nineteenth century, see Footnote 7 and Footnote 56.
refine not only an historical understanding of what allowed these schools to come into existence, but also helped strengthen the proposed framework. It is no coincidence that dreams of utopia and the American college came together. These communities imagined a target no one else saw, and actualized such a dream on a small scale. These schools were institutions of learning, in the particular sense of creating agents who furthered knowledge (in a broad and organic way). I do not mean that these schools created the professionals who only wrote in journals that two or three people ever read (though some did that as well). Rather, these schools created the abolitionists, the radicals, the community organizers, the artists, the poets, the philosophers, and the occasional scientists, who had the support system (the conservative stable life-world) to create “works” people may or may not have recognized and that may or may not have succeeded.

It is often forgotten that the ideas of learning and utopia have gone hand in hand throughout Western history. Plato’s Republic was (in many ways) a community of higher learning, albeit, conveying an elitist vision of learning. Certainly it was utopian in the sense of being beyond anything people in post-oligarchy democratic Athens could possibly imagine. Nevertheless Plato’s Republic is unnerving. In many utopias, there is a darker shadow. An inevitable question emerges at this point: What separates the actualized vision of utopian communities from the actualized vision of a cult, or even worse, nightmare nation-states like those run by the Khmer Rouge or the Nazis? These communities could also be said to “…make room for the possible as opposed to a passive acquiescence in the present actual state of affairs…”69 There is no question such communities make room for something that has not yet come to be and that they allow humanity to “reshape their human universe.” In order to address this question, we must exaggerate the differences between “the cult” and “the utopia.” Only through a study of stark, abstracted differences will the grey nuance of experience be clarified.

69 See Footnote 52.
No utopia can entirely rid itself of cultish tendencies, but hopefully, through analysis, something might be said about how to resist that pole in telic projects.

As I argued in the introduction, while these actualized utopian communities often live long beyond their pre-figurative years, paradoxically their practices largely stay the same. A resistance to the perceived modern culture, and a vision of a world that offers more opportunities for life and dignity, has made these communities places that cultivate persons with a sense of agency. These communities create a sense of active consciousness; they create people who believe the world is changeable. An open humanistic and personalistic theodicy is what distinguishes these schools from a cult of domination, or an organization bent on a utopia that depersonalizes and dehumanizes the opportunities of others in service of a singular vision. My distinction is not “hard and fast,” and the poles of the distinction should and must be held in tension in order to resist cultish tendencies imbedded in any theodicy. It would be foolish to deny that many a utopian vision has fallen dangerously close to, or in to, a fascistic world. Cassirer, again, is a helpful companion in our investigation.

After the horrors of the Second World War, Ernst Cassirer began to explore the dangers pregnant within civilization. After several of his friends requested that he respond to the current crises of culture, he wrote The Myth of the State. In The Myth of the State Cassirer followed the genealogy of Western political thought, the ways in which it underestimated myth’s power to remerge, and how myth could be used as a technique of domination. In the modern world, myth can again flatten the symbol and its object into one image, in this case in service of dominating other beings. These political myths are dangerous and must be understood and resisted. It was the idealists and romantics who unknowingly released this monster in “political myth,” at the same time that they helped marginal utopias emerge in America.
To make the distinction between utopias and cults of domination more explicit, we now turn to an example. This case is pertinent because, like utopian colleges in nineteenth century America, it also is a hallmark of the intersection of German Idealism, Romanticism, and the cult of genius. I speak of Richard Wagner and his cult of personality. Unfortunately, the borders between the cult of genius, and the cult of personality were (and are) rather thin. Wagner is a perfect example of all that can go wrong by enacting a prefigurative vision through mythic politics. He had a vision of a different world, but his institutional framework to bring it around was not focused on supporting people in their own projects. Quite the opposite, if they did not bend to his will, to his vision, they were labeled betrayers to the cause. He systematically depersonalized and dehumanized his friends and allies in service of, what he thought, was the right vision of the future. This vision left no room for play between idea and actuality. For Wagner, all was flattened into one, unified narrow truth, “his truth.” His vision, long term, would have not allowed humanity to constantly reshape their human universe, because his will, his universe, was the right one. Wagner respected only his symbolic horizon. Although Wagner had a devoted following, he did not create a stable community. Nevertheless, his cult was a significant social force and one that had dangerous attitudes. His relationship with Nietzsche is particularly helpful to understand what was so troubling about Wagner’s cult of personality. Their relationship is complex and much has been written on the subject. My point here will not be to give a detailed historical account of the relationship, but rather to point to the cult of domination Wagner built for himself.

Wagner saw all those near and dear to him as support or vessels for his dreams:

70 Although he envisioned something beyond what almost anyone could imagine, and did create some of the greatest music in the Western tradition, his vision was limiting, instead of the enriching, human potential. He wanted to quell and bend all human expression to a single idea of culture.
Wagner was a genius whose creative ambitions were matched only by the great sacrifices that he expected from his followers. The women in his life were to provide motherly attention and sympathy for his troubles, real and imagined. He treated his two wives, Minna and Cosima, rather callously, but he required absolute devotion (and much patience) from them; their attentions formed an emotional matrix prerequisite to his creative life but not, in Cosima’s case at least, directly involved in it. From the younger married women he loved—Mathilde von Wesendonck, and Judith Mendes-Gautier, for example—he apparently desired solace and admiration more than sex, although he was by no means averse to that. He sometimes needed the anguish of being in love—particularly, it seems, the impossible love for a married woman—to sustain his creativity. Wagner expected the young men in his life to give more tangible signs of their devotion.71

He made his male protégés be heralds of his project. Their projects, if they were worthy enough, would actualize his vision across the world. In the late 1860’s, and through the mid 1870’s, Nietzsche became just such a disciple. Apart from The Birth of Tragedy, Wagner was critical of most of Nietzsche’s other works, save the ones that Wagner asked him to complete. Whether it was the Tragic Age of the Greeks, in 1873,72 or The Uses and Disadvantages of History in 1874,73 or really any work that was not somehow directly related to Wagner, Wagner would dismiss as limited or prosaic. Even worse, Wagner would send Nietzsche and his other protégés out to attack his enemies via the written word. For example, he coerced Nietzsche into writing a cruel and vicious attack on David Strauss.74 Wagner also did not tolerate expressions of creativity by anyone but himself; in fact other artistic expressions enraged him. Once the relationship between Wagner and Nietzsche began to fall apart, Nietzsche began to test Wagner’s dominating personality:

According to one account, he placed the red-bound Triumphlied [a work of Brahms’s] on Wagner’s piano and waited to see the master’s reaction. Wagner flew into a rage, as anyone might have predicted. Nietzsche himself, according to this account, maintained a calm and dignified silence.75

72 See: Ibid., 164.
73 See: Ibid., 172.
74 See: Ibid., 164-165.
75 Ibid., 176.
There is much more to this relationship, but what Wagner did on a small scale with Nietzsche was true of how he treated humanity around him, especially as he gained power and influence. After the August 1876 grand opening of the full Ring Cycle at Bayreuth, Wagner’s power spread and his cult of personality, his cult of domination, would haunt Germany for generations to come. In particular: “Wagner had made no secret of his German patriotism and anti-Semitism. But these were easy to overlook, until Wagner was finally ensconced in Bayreuth amid throngs of his nationalistic supporters. Then he expressed his views even more stridently, and his statements were amplified by his followers.”76 His message, his willed transcendent culture, spoke to an emerging nationalism that had originated in an anxiety over the scattered German identity. His intentions aside, this mythic/artistic vision, would play right into National Socialism’s hand by collapsing “thing” and “symbol” and attempting to silence all the other myriad trends of human expression.

The American actualized utopian communities of higher learning also shared a vision of a world to come, one-that, should a certain individual or group want it, could have stifled dissent and other visions. There is a dangerous grey area between envisioning a brighter future, and using that vision to squelch all other possibilities. Wagner is a particularly exaggerated case of this attitude and its dangers, but its more complicated and likelier version is just as problematic. When does an alternative vision depersonalize and limit the possibilities of others? This is not always so easy to tease out. Horace Mann, as the visionary “founder” of Antioch’s utopianism, certainly could be dominating and even manipulative. Be that as it may, it is clear, and we shall see, that Antioch and Berea wanted, at least in some sense, a vision of the future that respected, and wished to cultivate, the myriad ways humans live and express themselves, instead of bending

76 Ibid., 202.
all of humanity to an exact, singular vision of what life should be. They wished to open up possibilities for human life and dignity, and not to simply limit them in service of a vision. They left room for play between the idea and the actual. Their vision was of an open community that could think itself anew, not a community that was a final vision of the world. They understood that the world as an ever-changing and growing story, one whose end is perhaps permanently beyond humanity as a life form. *Actualized utopias* are analogous to “white magic;” a way of asking others to share in something that increases the possibilities for life and dignity, and does not, like “black magic;” force all it meets to bend to its own purposes and will. There is also room for magic in modern life, but a playful mythic white magic in open relation to other symbolic activity.⁷⁷

**Conclusion**

*Actualized Utopian Communities of Higher Learning*

Colleges like Antioch, Berea, and those that came after, were (and in some cases still are) intense nexus points of cultural activity in America. They created a stable life-world to support active consciousness, or at least a certain type of agency that is necessary for creative knowledge projects. They also manifested “communities of genius.” Myth, religion, and common linguistic social/cultural identity stabilized the world of these colleges, history helped them tell a meaningful story that enlivened the problems of the present and freed them from mistaking contingency for necessity, and the artistic and occasionally scientific forms of life were cultivated by the stable actualization of such a utopia; artists were drawn to these centers because the creation and manipulation of symbols within a culture was intensely taking place and gave

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⁷⁷ When I speak of “magic” I am thinking of magic as one manifestation of “myth” as a symbolic form. In particular, I believe, despite the dangers of myth that Cassirer posed in *The Myth of the State*, “magic” and “myth” do have an important place in modern life. For a well-written and fun analysis of the relationship between myth and magic in Cassireran philosophy see: Randall Auxier, "Magic Pages and Mythic Plants," in *Led Zeppelin and Philosophy All Will Be Revealed*, ed. Scott Calef (Chicago: Open Court, 2009).
them the opportunity to “open us up to the universe of living forms,” as Cassirer has put it.\(^\text{78}\)

These schools are thus microcosms of renewing cultural activity in America, ones that have, as we shall see, cultivated a particular type of person. The American synthesis of the utopia and higher education comes as no surprise then; it was articulating and refining the techniques for renewal already imbedded in previous utopian experiments.

Yet, so far, I have offered little discussion any of these institutions themselves. This thesis must delve in to a few of the plentiful actual stories of their founding, their first years, and the teachers and students who lived and worked there. The gaps and weaknesses of my framework can then be acknowledged and refined. I have already discussed why America began the utopian movement in higher education, but I have yet to discuss the first generation of these schools in detail. The strengths and weaknesses of Antioch and Berea ought to be studied closely. At the very end of the thesis, my framework will have the detail and coloring necessary for it to be full understood and usable. Also, I will briefly gave an account of what this philosophical and historical story tells us about the possibilities for these surviving communities in the next thirty to forty years.

I can already suggest some implications for the present at this stage. These schools need to be in healthy dialectical relationship with the larger culture in which they are situated, while at the same time they need to be constructs that a broader world can recognize. It is a very delicate process and it is no wonder that these schools often end in failure. In the case of Antioch, it faced (and still faces) many financial and cultural crises, and even did collapse for a while. The fact that Berea made it through the Civil War is a marvel. These foreparents of the actualized utopian school movement in America, who are still around today, are particularly important for insights into how to survive the contingencies that such a position in culture entails.

\(^{78}\) See: Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, 37.
PART 2: UTOPIA

CHAPTER 3:

ANTIOCH COLLEGE

Founding Philosophy
Colleges, Sectarianism, and Utopia

Actualized Utopias are rarely healthy institutions, especially in their early years. It is often the case that they are dysfunctional and financially insolvent. They often start on shaky ground with domineering, demanding, and impractical founders. However, because of a strong founding vision, that leaves enough room for possibility beyond it, these communities become telic\(^\text{79}\) \(^\text{79}\) in nature. The first generation of colleges that became telic nexuses of American cultural life were founded on religious principles about who should be educated, and how they should be nurtured. At the beginning of the nineteenth century there was hope that the world might be perfectible. Naively, many Americans thought they could actualize the ideal society on a national scale. They recognized that risk was involved, but also were convinced a new age of peace and prosperity could be achieved. This hope, as arrogant and as anthropocentric it was, should not be discounted. Real meaningful change did happen. Movements for reforms in education, medical treatment, the social safety net, and racial/economic justice, were beginning at this time. All these (largely middle class) reforms were mixed with violence, injustice, and the deployments of power in new forms. On the other hand, the reforms did make a practical difference in alleviating

\(^{79}\text{For more on the term telic see Footnote 18. On first encounter with an actualized utopia, one often feels a “relation” similar to what Kant calls “purposeless purposiveness.” These schools are in fact purpose driven, but on first encounter we meet a certain formal quality that is “likable” in a similar way as to what we find when we reflect on something beautiful (in the Kantian sense). You feel the guiding telic hand pervade the community life, even if you cannot pinpoint what the telic aim(s) is/are for that community. For more on “purposeless purposiveness” see: Ernst Cassirer, Kant's Life and Thought (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 312-313.}
human suffering and were eventually implemented on scales hitherto unimaginable. The foundations for what would become the largest system of common schools, colleges, and universities in the history of the world were laid during this era.

In this section I explore the foreparents of American alternative higher education with a philosophical eye. What is it like to be in these nexus points in American culture? Why do the formative years of these institutions matter? When (while recognizing their historical circumstances) should we critique these schools for falling short of their ideals? What can be learned for future attempts at *actualized utopia*?

Antioch College is perhaps the best-known college of alternative higher education in the United States. It has built its reputation on creating radical social-justice activists. Antioch largely gained its reputation as a school for progressives and radicals well after the early twentieth century reforms of President Arthur Morgan, and really only gained public attention after the Second World War. So why discuss the early years of this institution? There is more to the story of Antioch College than might first be assumed. The early rough and tumble days of Antioch oriented and intensified it as a center of American *telic* cultural activity. Its early years are hard for a modern audience to understand. They were years of strict rules and of high religious moral standards. Early Antioch also faced problems that higher education today still struggles with; for example, ill educated and underprepared first year students. To move beyond our modern historical prejudices we must imagine ourselves into the life-world of early Antioch; piece by piece I will attempt to give a vision of what this world was like, and why it should not be dismissed.

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The *Christian Connection*, an organization founded by an American sect of Protestantism, that only went by simply the title “Christians,” founded Antioch on the ashes of the previous Owenite utopian experiment in Yellow Springs, Ohio.\(^1\) Originally the *Christian Connection* had planned to open the school somewhere in the American Northeast (New York State was a favored option), but upon receiving a generous offer of land to open up the college in Yellow Springs, they decided to plant their college in the Midwest.

Antioch was one of many schools to open up in the Western frontier at this time. Once people from the northeastern colonies, along with newer European immigrants, yet again invaded the land of the Native peoples of America and pushed them further west (while committing unconscionable acts of violence), a Western style exploitative wealth began to increase in the newly conquered territories. Communities in Ohio, Illinois, and Kentucky, were eager to develop and become cultural and economic players on the North American continent and beyond. As the original colonies seemed to be decaying, what we now think of as the Midwest was ever growing. There was even speculation that the United States capitol would move away from the east and into the western frontier.\(^2\)

The “Christians” that opened Antioch were a Protestant sect that was “a revolt against extreme formalism in religion and left each member free to interpret the Bible according to his own experience and conscience.”\(^3\) They were more progressive than many of their counterparts on issues of women’s rights and racial equality. Despite this progressivism, Antioch would never

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\(^1\) Jonathan Messerli, *Horace Mann: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1972), 541. Owenism was a philosophical utopian movement founded by Robert Owen. It had ties to the Union Movement and was cooperative and quite radical.

\(^2\) There were also practical reasons for such thinking, as the United States capitol had been burned down within historical memory (during the “War of 1812”). For example, Columbus, Kentucky thought it had a chance of becoming the United States capitol. For more see: Robert M. Rennick, *Kentucky Place Names* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1984).

\(^3\) Joy Elmer Morgan, *Horace Mann at Antioch*, 66.
have been a particularly interesting school if they had not offered the position of president to the famous statesman and educator Horace Mann.

Mann was a man of stern character, high moral standards, and a deep and abiding elitist conservatism. His views were unusual and complex. Although he was deeply committed to the cause of ending slavery, he found abolitionists too “radical,” and still held the common liberal racist prejudices of his day. He was a phrenologist before the pseudo-science took a sinister Social-Darwinist turn. He was unsure of how far interracial coupling and living should go. Despite being a non-sectarian, he was a devoted Christian and firmly believed Christianity was a demonstrably superior religion. He was an egalitarian insofar as he believed every human to have the same rights, however this was all the more reason to “educate the masses” who could all to easily ruin Anglo-Saxon morality and the “democratic system” he cherished. He thought all schools should be co-educational, although he also believed that there are “real” differences between the genders (Women interestingly being the “superior” gender).

By and large, he is remembered today as the founder of public education in the United States. For Mann, education was a means of enculturating children into proper Anglo-Saxon values. Starting in Massachusetts, he simultaneously helped promote and open “common schools” and “normal schools,” or what today are called teachers colleges, via his position as the first secretary of the Massachusetts State Board of Education. This double-pronged strategy rapidly spread throughout the United States. He quickly became a famous figure and interacted with some of the foremost intellectuals of his day.

Mann (1796-1859) and Emerson (1803-1882) were contemporaries. More than that, they regularly were in contact with each other in both their private and public lives. They were men of extremely different temperaments but each, in his way, was a “representative man” of the era in
which he lived. Understanding the relationship between Emersonian transcendentalism and Mannian progressivism will help us understand the philosophy implemented in Antioch’s early years. Although certainly not a transcendentalist himself, Mann was a close friend with many of leading figures in the transcendentalist movement (especially Elizabeth Peabody, a close confident, and his sister-in-law), and he largely agreed with the movement’s more tangible tenets. German idealism, mixed with Mann’s own grab bag of moral-sense theory, empiricism, and Christian theology, helped utopianize Antioch. 84

Horace Mann was at the Phi Beta Kappa annual meeting when Emerson gave the oration “The American Scholar.” This was the first speech by Emerson that really drew Mann’s attention. Jonathan Messerli, in his biography of Mann, describes this moment:

Mann had heard Emerson before, largely at the prompting of Elizabeth Peabody. He could subscribe to the philosopher’s individual statements, but found Emerson’s total transcendental framework much too ethereal and abstract. Admitting to too hasty a judgment, Mann now listened with growing fascination to this small man with the hawk nose and a serene countenance delivering one caveat after another to the smug and self-satisfied élite who had gathered once again for their annual ritual of self-aggrandizement in Harvard Yard. 85

Mann was pleased with the direct attack on the elite Unitarian Harvard intelligentsia, and their lackadaisical attitude toward moral standards and to active reform movements. Mann thought the substance of the speech itself was very good, although he thought that this would further isolate and radicalize Emerson. 86 Despite his respect for Emerson, Mann regularly complained about his abstractness, impracticality, and often, his controversy. 87 In private, they regularly interacted, whether it was Emerson asking Mann to give the current edition of The Dial to Thomas Carlyle

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84 I grant that this is a “weird” combination and does not seem utopian. On the other hand, only utopians could hold these traditions together at the same time. Charles Fourier is another nineteenth century example of a figure with such a “weird” utopian philosophy.
86 See: Jonathan Messerli, Horace Mann: A Biography, 266.
87 See: Ibid., 336, 421.
when he went to Europe, or whether it was Mann accepting an invitation to stay with the Emersons at their house in Concord.\textsuperscript{88}

Emerson had a thoughtful and complex view of Mann. He saw Mann as a great reformer, but he recognized that all great reformers, by necessity, have hubris: “Take egoism out, and you would castrate the benefactors, Luther, Mirabeau, Napoleon, John Adams, Andrew Jackson…and our newer servants—Greeley, Theodore Parker, Ward Beecher, Horace Mann, Garrison—would lose their vigor.”\textsuperscript{89} He also would write on how he was concerned that Mann’s public education system would become a lifeless, bureaucratic nightmare.\textsuperscript{90}

Despite their differences, Mann and Emerson had remarkably similar life trajectories. Both had wives who died young. Both also went into severe depressions after their wives deaths, and then made drastic career changes in light of their suffering. Both were strong advocates for the ending of slavery, and both became increasingly disillusioned with the politics of their time. Both were Western triumphalists, and still (to a degree) racists and misogynists. In spite of their shortcomings, both should be recognized for their positive influence on American life. In practice, their visions of cultural life, and the role colleges played within it, were surprisingly similar. Mann used a variety of philosophical sources, in a limited and practically oriented way, to guide Antioch College. It is to his eclectic philosophy I now turn to in order to explain the way in which a milieu that included German Idealism, as filtered through transcendentalism, informed Mann’s thoughts on education. These are the thoughts that were implemented at Antioch.

\textsuperscript{88} See: \textit{Ibid.}, 383, 278.
\textsuperscript{89} See: \textit{Ibid.}, 339. To read the original letters Messerli quotes from, see: Bliss Perry, ed., \textit{The Heart of Emerson’s Journals} (New York, 1958), 298.
\textsuperscript{90} See: \textit{Ibid}, 347-348.
The best sources for Mann’s philosophy of higher education are in his “Dedicatory and Inaugural Address” at Antioch in 1853, his Baccalaureate addresses from 1857-1859, and two speeches on Antioch he gave at a convention of “Christians:” “Demands of the Age on Colleges,” and “Relation of Colleges to Community.” In these speeches he regularly reaffirmed the College’s mission, as articulated in the catalogue that was consented to by the faculty, and based on principles of the “Christians.” They were:

First by fostering co-education, the school would attempt to elevate the entire human race rather than just half of it. As far as possible, it also would teach and require good health habits. A third objective would be the achievement of excellence as measured by intrinsic merits rather than by competition and emulation. And lastly, the school would stress sound ethical and moral principles rather than attempt an indoctrination in religious dogma.  

These principles, on first inspection, seem to be only high standards to create well-educated moral citizens, and have nothing to do with a utopian project of knowledge. Yet, Mann’s speeches tell a more complex story. Mann firmly believed that universal and eternal laws guided the universe. The laws of physics and the laws of morality were of the same order for him. Humanity’s duty then is to have “…a knowledge of the laws of God, and an obedience to them.” In order to obey these laws, no matter your creed, religion, nation or background, you must inquire into them. Our inquiry into truth does not mean we can ever reach perfect knowledge. Truth “…is not progressive though finite beings may be forever progressive in acquiring truth.”

Mann acknowledged that there are pre-determined limits on acquiring this truth. However, he thought that it was our duty and destiny to perfect all that is within our jurisdiction. God is all knowing and all good but Mann found it absurd to assume we would start out the same

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92 Horace Mann, “Dedicatory and Inaugural Address,” in *Horace Mann at Antioch*, 236.
93 Ibid., 218.
way. We only sin in the Platonic sense; by our ignorance (both moral and intellectual), but this ignorance is also what allows us to grow and come to our full glory. Thus, he retorts to the question “why would a perfectly good God make humanity finite?” by saying: “…at whatever degree along the ascending scale man might be launched into being, he would, at that point, feel an apparent necessity of having been started at a higher point, until nothing could satisfy his demands but to have been created with the infinite perfections of a God.”

Unless we are gods ourselves, we will always be searching for perfectibility. No matter what our stage of learning maybe, we will always want more. It is silly to ask why God would make us finite and fallible, because if God made us more we would already be her/his equal.

A college then has a duty to create agents who can inquire into truth. Mann made clear that it is only moral agents who can know in the fullest and most vital sense:

I affirm, then, with the logical emphasis and positiveness of demonstration, that no man can look upon any kind of knowledge, however common or however abstruse it may be—whether the multiplication table or the problem of the asymptote—in the full majesty of its proportions, or in the belled sanctities of its ministrations, unless he receive it into a virtuous and reverent heart…Vice and immorality, then, and the promptings of an irreligious heart, stand in direct antagonism to all true progress in knowledge; and under their influence whatever knowledge may be acquired is shorn of its divinest beauties.

Knowledge and morality can never truly be separated. For Mann, the progress of knowledge relies on well-educated individuals. Our very nature calls us to this task. A college has the task of creating ethical agents because its students will go into the greater community and will advance knowledge and culture:

Is not that relation, then, most intimate between colleges and the community? From college halls, graduates bring forth infection or healing and scatter through the ranks of society. Emphatically, then, they ought to be free from all those vices which infest and scandalize the community, and they ought to be living samples of all those virtues which will turn our theoretical Christianity into a practical one.

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94 Horace Mann, “Baccalaureate Address of 1859” in Horace Mann at Antioch, 368.
95 Horace Mann, “Demands of the Age on Colleges” in Horace Mann at Antioch, 289.
96 Horace Mann, “Relation of the Colleges to Community” in Horace Mann at Antioch, 545.
He deemed this task so important that he gave the president and faculty of Antioch the dispensation to refuse to teach and graduate “immoral” students. Mann thought there was nothing worse than brilliant and immoral persons.

To further rid the world of vice, Mann’s “practical Christians” need to be healthy, in the fullest sense of the word. If the next generations of scholars and citizens are going to make the world better, Mann thought they needed the bodies to support them: “Now think for a moment what mankind would gain were they relieved from early decrepitude and from the weakness and bondage of earlier bodily ailments. What elasticity would be given to muscle, what vision to mind, what pinions to genius!” He wanted to create a new society of strong and robust persons.

Mann thought that such genius could bring in a new age of perfectibility and could rid humanity of the infirmity and violence of past ages. It was the moral scholar who would be responsible for this perfection: “As we survey the present condition of the world, and look forward to the wellbeing of posterity, we find problems to be solved which virtue alone can never solve, which piety alone can never solve, but for which only knowledge, talent, genius—that is, intellect—can furnish the solution.” Further, it is never clear where genius will manifest. A genius of one generation can have children that have none of her/his skills. Mann thought everyone should be educated since we can never know where genius might manifest. He had a democratic conception of the cultivation of genius. He thought people of his time had underappreciated all the untapped potential within the whole community of humanity: “Ah!

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97 These rules about morality would be extended and elaborated. Mann would also help institutionalize them across most of the Ohio college and university system. See “Report on the ‘Code of Honor,’ Falsely so Called” in Horace Mann at Antioch, 518-531
98 Horace Mann, “Dedicatory and Inaugural Address” in Horace Mann at Antioch, 214.
99 Ibid., 230.
Nowhere else has there been such waste and loss of treasure as in the waste and loss of human faculties.”¹⁰⁰ Mann saw it as a sin that humanity had ignored and ill-treated such latent possibility. Cultivating genius is then the duty of all people of good religious (and scientific) faith.

Mann thought religion and science are two complementary parts of the project of knowledge. As he concluded his speech on the “Demands of the Age on Colleges” he said: “Let science and religion then come together; let them be united in holy banns to be separated nevermore; and may Antioch College perform her part of this glorious work.”¹⁰¹ Mann believed Christianity should be experimentally changeable in the way that science is. Only an obsession with “the preservation of old mummies literary or psychological”¹⁰² had made religion (and colleges) an enemy of science. True Christianity for Mann was not dogma, so much as truth being revealed through moral inquiry. Although Mann would be a demanding and controlling president, it was his openness to whatever the future might hold, even beyond his views of religious and scientific life, that gave Antioch’s philosophy enough latitude to become an actualized utopia. Mann allowed room for “symbol” and its “object” to play.¹⁰³

Further, Mann recognized that a college was a nexus of human activity. He did not think of a college as a narrow educative, and professionalizing facility. As he put it, a college’s highest function was “to act more or less upon all human interests and relations.”¹⁰⁴ For Mann, as for the transcendentalists, the idealists, and for many others in the mid-nineteenth century, a college was more than just an institution of moral education, or an institution of knowledge. It was a place

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 228.
¹⁰¹ Horace Mann, “Demands of the Age on Colleges,“ in Horace Mann at Antioch, 318.
¹⁰² Ibid., 271.
¹⁰³ In order to escape the cultish tendencies that Cassirer warned against and that I have previously discussed in Chapter 2.
¹⁰⁴ Horace Mann, “Dedicatory and Inaugural Address,” in Horace Mann at Antioch, 198.
where human interest and relations (human activity) was being carried out for the growth of humankind. These “interest and relations” were aimed at the moral and intellectual progress of culture through the use and manipulation of new symbols. Humanity also therefore needed to actualize the potential of these symbols. In Mann’s more platonic terms: “We need the minds and therefore we must rear the minds which can push forward this frontier of knowledge so as to bring these truths with all their benefactions from the further to the hither side of the line, from the barren possibility of being enjoyed into actual, realized enjoyment.”

His famous closing words to his “1859 Baccalaureate Address,” can now be looked on with new meaning:

So, in the infinitely nobler battle in which you are engaged against error and wrong, if ever repulsed or stricken down, may you always be solaced and cheered by the exulting cry of triumph over some abuse in church or state, some vice or folly in society, some false opinion or cruelty or guilt which you have overcome! And I beseech you to treasure up in your hearts these my parting words: Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity.

Justice, knowledge, truth, beauty, morality, and religion, are all the same project of God, given human perfectibility. Mann was demanding more from his students than to become social-justice activists. He was giving them an imperative. He believed all finite beings should ameliorate the world in which they find themselves in order to perfect it. For Mann, it is human imperfection that demands humanity to do what it can to perfect the world. It is through this ameliorative process that evil will be eliminated from the world.

In what ways and degrees the transcendentalists and idealists influenced him is a hard, and ultimately unanswerable, question. What is important to understand is that Mann expressed

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105 Ibid., 220.
106 This speech (in a way) was really his “closing words.” Preparing for the graduate celebrations and the speech, exhausted him, and perhaps lead to the sickness that would kill him shortly thereafter. The final line of the speech would become Antioch’s school motto.
in practice what many neo-Kantian German idealists claimed about the advancement of culture.\footnote{Unlike North America, the discussion of organic cultural development continued broadly in Germany well into the twentieth century (though it also has disappeared from modern discourses). Cassirer himself explored the organic conception of the advancement of knowledge in the cultural sciences (and their ever-advancing object) late in his career. For more see: Ernst Cassirer and Donald P. Verene, The Logic of the Cultural Sciences: Five Studies, trans. Steve G. Lofts (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).} These claims about the relation of active persons to culture, were embedded in the discourses of mid-nineteenth century America. He also shared with Emerson and the transcendentalists a conviction that education was about vital life activity; that knowledge was in service of making a new and better world. Antioch was going to be more than a moral institution. It would be an intense nexus in the cultural life of the United States.

\textbf{The Structure of the School}

\textit{The Program}

The first years of Antioch College were chaotic. The university facilities were ill conceived, the faculty was not prepared for the undereducated student body, and the preparatory school quickly became flooded. The harsh Ohio winter and the muddy summers exasperated the Mann family, and put great hardships on the students. Often the sanitation standards in the kitchen were abominable and because the other facilities were not yet fully in shape, everyone often ate, taught, and worked in the dining hall. This led Mann famously to say, “[i]n fine, if Adam and Eve had been brought into this world as prematurely as we were brought on to the premises of Antioch College, they must have been created about Wednesday night!”\footnote{Horace Mann, “Demands of the Age on Colleges “ in Horace Mann at Antioch, 271} Worst of all was the poorly handled finances of the college.

Antioch College had financed its endowment “by the sale of scholarships, at one hundred (100) dollars each, entitling the holder to keep one scholar in school continually, free of tuition
charges." These scholarships were “awarded” as a quasi-stock certificate in the college. Problems began to emerge when far more students utilized the scholarships than expected, and then people did not give the promised money. This, plus the fact that the “Christians” were increasingly displeased with the school’s non-sectarian ideology, and that a few faculty, with self-serving interests, to make sure Mann was summarily dismissed, attacked the school’s problems in publications, nearly destroyed Antioch. The school even went bankrupt during Mann’s brief tenure there. Without Mann’s Unitarian friends coming to the rescue, Antioch would have surely perished. Antioch was not the only college in the Midwest facing such difficulties. The sectarian rush to flood the Midwest with colleges by the various denominations, mixed with the hope that most towns in the Midwest would grow dramatically in size, often lead to disaster. Denominations were over ambitious with their resources and most Midwest towns did not grow as rapidly as their citizens had hoped. Despite the precariousness of Antioch’s survival, an experimental program did develop.

Mann prepared an experimental catalogue for his students:

Prospective students should expect a curriculum which would include Latin, Greek, mathematics, English, history, philosophy, and natural science, all required subjects. In English there would be less emphasis on literature and more on composition skills and public speaking. In natural science there would be considerable physiology. But this was not to be the lock-step sequence of courses found in most colleges at the time. Antioch would begin with an elective system, enabling students to choose from courses in history, art, and methods of teaching. In addition, modern languages could be substituted for advanced Greek. And finally, students would find a faculty at Antioch which would lecture and teach rather than hold recitations.

Mann’s elective system was likely the first in the country and would prefigure Elliot’s reforms at Harvard by more than a generation. The focus on quality teaching was also particular to Antioch.

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110 Historical Sketch of Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Greene County, O (Yellow Springs, Ohio: Antiochana: Antioch College Archives), 1847.
112 Ibid., 543.
Mann was not alone at Antioch in his focus on pedagogy. Teaching was one of the main points of pride of the whole early faculty.

The first faculty of the college was small and largely pro-temperance:

…President Mann, who was professor of Political Economy, Intellectual and Moral Philosophy, Constitutional Law, and Natural Theology; Reverend W.H. Doherty, who was professor of Rhetoric, Logic, and Belles Lettres; Ira W. Allen, Professor of Mathematics, Astronomy, and Civil Engineering, who was absent in Europe the first year and who was later to become disaffected and to cause trouble; reverend Thomas Holmes, professor of Greek Language and Literature; C.F. Pennell, nephew of Horace Mann and professor of Latin Language and Literature; Miss Rebecca M. Pennell, Mann’s niece, professor of Physical Geography and Drawing, Natural History, Civil History, and Didactics; and Reverend A.L. McKinney, principal of the preparatory school. The list also contained places for a professor of Chemistry, and Theory and Practice of Agriculture; a professor of Mineralogy and Geology, and a professor of Modern Languages, which were to be provided for later. During Professor Allen’s absence his work was carried by Miss Julia A. Hitchcock, afterwards Mrs. Fay.¹¹³

Not only was Rebecca Pennell probably the first full time female professor in the United States, but also on Mann’s insistence, she was put on equal (and sometimes greater) pay in comparison with the male faculty (also likely for the first time in American history).¹¹⁴

The actual day to day schedule of an Antioch student was extremely demanding:

Divisions of Time for the fore-part of the day are the same for both sexes, and for the winter and summer.
At 6 o’clock……….. Morning Bell
At 6:45……………..Breakfast
At 7:45……………..Chapel Exercises
From 8 to 11………..Study or Recitation
From 11 to 11:30…..Exercise
From 11:30-1:30…..Study or Recitation
At 1:30……………..Dinner

For the after-part of the day, for the ladies, during the entire year:

From 2 to 4 o’clock…Exercise
From 4 to 6………..Study
At 6:30……………..Supper

From 7:30 until retiring…Study

For gentlemen during winter:

From 2 to 4 o’clock…Exercise
From 4 to 6………..Study
At 6:30………………Supper
From 7:30 until retiring…Study

During Summer:

From 2 to 3 o’clock…Exercise
From 3 to 5………….Study
From 5 to 6:30……….Exercise
From 7:30 until retiring...Studying\textsuperscript{115}

An Antioch student’s course load was spread throughout what we would now think of as the liberal arts and education/pedagogy. For example, a sophomore load during the early years included:

FIRST TERM. M\textit{ensuration, Surveying and Navigation}. Latin- Horace’s Art of poetry. \textit{Rhetoric and Belles Lettres}. \textit{Elective-} Didactics or Theory and Art of Teaching; Potter and Emerson’s School and School-Masters, Page’s Theory and Practice of Teaching.

SECOND TERM. \textit{Analytical Geometry}- Loomis’s. \textit{Latin-} Cicero, DeSenectute and DeAmicitia. \textit{Greek-} Longinus on the Sublime. \textit{Elective-} Halam’s Middle Ages, and Bancroft’s United States.

THIRD TERM. Differential and Integral Calculus, or the Acts of the Apostles and Epistles of the Greek Testament, at the option of the student. \textit{Latin-} Germania and Agricola of Tacitus (Tyler’s edition preferred), and one play of Plautus or Terence. \textit{French-} Pronunciation, Grammar, and Translation. \textit{Elective-} Didactics, or the Theory and Art of Teaching continued.\textsuperscript{116}

Clearly, students at Antioch had a rigorous and demanding schedule. Although the course topics were fairly typical for the era, they were taught using thoughtful and innovative pedagogical

\textsuperscript{115} Joy Elmer Morgan, \textit{Horace Mann at Antioch}, 72.

\textsuperscript{116} \textit{Historical Sketch of Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Greene County, O.} Due to the condition of the original copy of this book, some page numbers could not be located.
methods. These were far more interesting classrooms, especially for the era, than first meets the eye. Messerli summarizes the pedagogy of early Antioch as follows:

Thus it could be said that the college was an amalgam of the best intellectual endeavors of Harvard and Yale, the athletic drill of West Point, and the social conscience of a normal school. Then, too the teaching was to be different. Rarely would students memorize for recitation, still a basic procedure in most colleges at the time. Instead, the emphasis was on teaching and lecturing. For the rest of the faculty, Mann set a model of a more individualized instruction, first introducing a subject in general terms, then soliciting specific interests from students, and finally launching them on their own study projects, the results of which they reported back to the class at a later time. He also expanded the walls of the classroom, urging his biology instructor to use the glen below the campus as an outdoor laboratory and taking pride in Austin Craig’s efforts to visit jails and hospitals as part of the course in political science. The high point of each day, Mann hoped would be the chapel exercises and he gave great care to his sermons, considering the other demands on his time.\footnote{Jonathan Messerli, \textit{Horace Mann: A Biography}, 557-558.}

Mann recognized that what he was doing was an experiment of great importance. He was, after all, creating the agents of culture for the next age. “And this would be its hallmark for the next century. ‘We are trying a great experiment,’ Mann wrote to Henry Banard, ‘and it shall not fail through any deficiency or lukewarmedness on my part.’”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 558. See original letter: Mann to Henry Banard, July 12, 1855, Barnard MSS:NYU. For those interested, Messerli’s Footnote 558 is particularly helpful.}

Mann’s moral standards were demanding and uncompromising. He would expel students for poor behavior and only admit them again if they had shown proper “humility.” He was famous for his ability to make students who broke the rules feel as if they disappointed a beloved parent whose approval they desperately wanted; he saw this approach as a necessary pedagogical device. These early years were demanding then, and precarious, and by no means perfect. Antioch was however implementing an experimental curriculum with new theories of teaching and learning primarily concerned with making \textit{agents} for the advancement of culture. Students confirmed both their admiration for Mann and, to some degree, their admiration for the program they were in.
Our investigation (thus far) has explored the structure of Antioch during its early years. It still remains to be seen whether early Antioch cultivated persons with active agency and whether Antioch as a community advanced culture through the manipulation and creation of symbols. The foundation of Antioch’s *telic* vision was its mission to educate the *whole* of humanity. The perspective of women was an untapped source of genius for the perfection of humankind. Although Antioch’s literature and constitution never made it explicit, the *whole* of humanity, for Mann at least, also included people of color. On the other hand, Mann’s broad and inclusive definition of humanity at Antioch did not escape anti-black racism and gender-normative misogyny. In fact, imbedded within its goals were problematic normative claims about gender and race. In spite of Antioch’s limitations, the commitment to a better world, and one that would have different values because it was more perfect, would allow for the actualization of utopia. In particular, it has primarily been students throughout Antioch’s life, who were the ones to actualize the more open utopian vision embedded in early Antioch’s philosophy. Before we delve into anecdotal accounts from the first generation of students, a closer inspection of the “education of women,” and the “education of people of color,” is necessary.

Mann, when speaking to “Christians,” students, and parents, was aware he was going to have to convince his audience of the value of co-education. What make his speeches so clever is his ability to give an honest account of his vision *while* recognizing and speaking to his particular audiences’ sensibilities. There are two arguments Mann regularly made for the necessary co-education of men and women.

The first was that co-education allowed students to find an acceptable wife or husband, under formal panoptic supervision. They would learn the difference between superficial fancies
and moral love. He also thought that, under supervision and strict guidance, co-education would perfect the habits of both genders:

That innate regard which each sex has for the other sex, over and above what it has for the same good qualities in its own—the difference between friendship and love—is too precious and too powerful an agency to be thrown away in the education of either. I believe it to be an agency which God meant we should make use of to promote the refinement, the progress, and the elevation of them both. I believe it may be made to supersede many of our present coarse and crude instruments of discipline—the goads and bludgeons of punishment which are now employed to rouse young men from the stupefaction of idleness or beat them back from the gateways of sin.¹¹⁹

Second, he wished to perfect both genders in their own respective ways. The last thing he wanted was co-education to confuse the differences between them. Admixtures of different gender qualities and skills in the different sexes he deemed contemptible:

My friends, is there aught that demands a larger amount of the grace of patience than to hearken with equanimity to the doctrine of an admixture or commixture of the sexes in regard to natural tendencies and adaptions, in regard to dress, occupation, aspiration, and perfection in each? And if there be any spectacle more provocative of contempt than that of a man striving to be an amateur woman, is it not of a woman striving to be an amateur man? As he may emasculate himself of all virile energy without putting on one womanly charm, so she may cast away all her gentleness and delicacy without gaining one manly token of strength.¹²⁰

For Mann, as for Emerson and others of his era, the suffrage of women was to perfect womanhood and counterbalance manhood.¹²¹ On the other hand, it is hard to tell how much stress Mann laid on these differences, and how much he was trying to convince “Christians” and conservative Midwestern parents of his educational endeavor. He was certainly ambivalent throughout his lifetime on the issue. At the end of the very same speech he gives some hints as to the subtext of his agenda: “But hardly less than an apotheosis, should I deem the honor of assisting to develop the excelling faculties of woman in her natural superiority over man and in

¹¹⁹ Horace Mann, “Dedictory and Inaugural Address” in Horace Mann at Antioch, 261.
¹²⁰ Horace Mann, “Relation of Colleges to Community” in Horace Mann at Antioch, 560.
¹²¹ In Emerson’s case, Margaret Fuller and his wife Lydian helped him develop more nuanced views on gender. See: Robert D. Richardson, Emerson: The Mind on Fire, 532-534.
making achievement follow aspiration. But does any strife exist on the subject? I say, let it be composed after the true, Baconian, experimental method. Give men and women the fullest, worthiest, completest education, together, and leave the event in the hands of Divine Providence.\textsuperscript{122} As in his other speeches, Mann makes clear the “superiority” of women as a gender. In “man” there is violence, intemperance, tobacco use, profanity use, war-mongering, and hatred. In “woman” he saw humanity’s better qualities. Further, as to the possibilities of co-education and the nature of the relation of men and women, Mann was, long term, willing to allow for change through the process of experimentation. Morals will become better through inquiry and so the nature of gender will become clearer. Mann thus left the door open, if only a crack, for more fluidity in gender identity than he himself could ever possibly admit. As we shall see, the students had already in these early days stepped beyond the narrow parameters articulated for gender in Mann’s speeches. The school also kept its word about co-education. From 1853-1859 there were women regularly attending and graduating from the undergraduate program. Although men were always in the majority (by a ratio of about two to one), there were consistently between 1-15 female students in each respective grade during the very early years.\textsuperscript{123}

The case of students of color was more complicated. Any rules on the subject were mysteriously missing from the laws and regulations of the school. Likely this was because “[s]eparate schooling for Negroes and whites was required by an 1853 state law…”\textsuperscript{124} By having no explicit rules on the subject, Mann was able to bring students of color into the school without getting into controversial legal waters. Even when those with some power in the

\textsuperscript{122} Horace Mann, “Relation of Colleges to Community” in \textit{Horace Mann at Antioch}, 564.
\textsuperscript{123} For more see Enrollment lists from 1853-1859 in \textit{Historical Sketch of Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Greene County, O.} Also see, Joy Elmer Morgan, \textit{Horace Mann at Antioch}, 71.
\textsuperscript{124} Peter Ackerberg and Michaela Paasche, "The Negro Community of Yellow Springs," \textit{Antioch College: Record} (Yellow Springs), December 8, 1961.
community openly challenged him, he stood firm by his decision to allow students of color into the preparatory school and the undergraduate program:

Early in the College history, some students from a colored family presented themselves and were received. Great excitement was aroused at once, and the President of the Trustees sent Mr. Mann a note, forbidding him to receive them. His answer was, that he would never consent to be connected with an institution from which any person of requisite qualifications was excluded on grounds of color, sex, physical deformity, or anything for which each person was not morally responsible. In this he was sustained by his colleagues. This position Antioch has always maintained, though, both before and during the war, it was done at large sacrifice. While a few students left the school, and others stayed away on account of it, firmness rendered the internal commotion superficial and temporary. Except Oberlin, Antioch was a pioneer in this principle, and its proximity to the borderline of slavery made it cost the more to stand by it.125

Such decisions made an impact in the greater Yellow Springs community. Through the influence of the school, Yellow Springs would become a relatively safe place in the Midwest for African-Americans to live during the late nineteenth century. These prefigurative tremors were felt in other parts of the country and inspired others to commit to the cause of abolition. For example, we can consider Moncure Daniel Conway’s decision to take advantage of the chaos caused by the Civil War in order to “free” his father’s slaves, and bring them to Yellow Springs in 1862:

It was at Harvard Divinity School that young Conway was impressed with the strength of the abolitionist argument and came to change his views on slavery. Previously, he had maintained the Negro was not human. His new, out-spoken anti-slavery earned his dismissal from a Washington Unitarian church where he was pastor. Conway’s interests and experiments were reflected in his editorship of the Dial, a magazine devoted to literary and philosophical discussion, and the Commonweal, an abolitionist journal. He travelled widely and reported the Franco-Prussian War for the New York World. The elder Conway’s plantation had been over-run by the advancing Union army, leaving his slaves bewildered and helpless. The young Conway determined to settle the slaves in Yellow Springs. He had been impressed with Horace Mann’s educational experiment—a college which declared itself an institution “where neither sex, color, nor creed shall ever bar young people from an education.”126

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125 Historical Sketch of Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Greene County 0, 686. Berea also was an early pioneer, and carried out the most robust integrated program of the three schools. In fact, integrated education would by one of its primary telic aims.

The full story of Conway’s adventure to Yellow Springs is fascinating and deserves its own study. It includes a plea to Lincoln for protection during the journey, which was received with sympathetic ears, though no help was given.\textsuperscript{127} When they finally arrived,

…white villagers made special efforts to ensure their welfare. Jobs were quickly obtained and land parcelled out. Dunmore Gwynn and family were revisited by Conway in 1872. In his autobiography he described their house and furnishings as plentiful and of good quality. “Dunmore had a good, five well-kept acres, poultry and pigs; he and his were the colored gentry of the region,” Conway wrote. At the college, student feelings were liberal. Director of Antiochiana Bessie Totten recalls the story of the… [Hunster] sisters who attended the school in the 1870’s. They were well accepted by students and active in college life, including the college choir. When the group was scheduled for a public performance, a handful of villagers protested. The white members of the choir stood with the…[mixed race] girls. They refused to sing without them.\textsuperscript{128}

Throughout Antioch’s history, it has been common for students to take the lead against racism. It certainly would be true of Antioch’s involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, and in the case of the regular small actions completed in the local community.\textsuperscript{129}

As in the case of gender, Mann made many ambivalent claims about the differences between the races. In spite of his complicated and problematic views, some people of color did attend Antioch in its early years. Between 1856-1931 there were at least 18 students of color who went to Antioch. It is not clear how many stayed and for how long, and it took many years for Antioch to have its first black graduate, Alfred Hampton, class of 1888.\textsuperscript{130} Although there is no way to know for certain, it is also possible there was purposefully vague and conspicuous record keeping of black students to protect Antioch from attack; whether this position on diversity was intentional or not, Antioch’s vague guidelines on race seem to have allowed it the free space to (at least partially) integrate.

\textsuperscript{127} For more see: \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{128} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{129} For more see: \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{130} \textit{Historical Sketch of Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Greene County, O.} Interestingly, there was a transfer student of color from Oberlin who went to Antioch from 1862-1864.
As I have already noted, Antioch students, especially on issues of race and gender, have largely been ahead of its faculty. I turn to student journals and letters to explore further the life-world of early Antioch. The written legacy of students and faculty reveals how strongly early Antioch affected them and how deeply committed they were to the mission of the school.

Adelaide Shepard’s (a member of the first graduating class in 1857) letters to Mary Richardson (class of 1859) are instructive in characterizing the life of a female student in the early days of Antioch. Adelaide (Ada) was a particularly interesting character:

Ada became a teacher herself, and was for a few years an instructor in languages at her alma mater, along with the man she married in 1862, fellow 1857 graduate Henry Clay Badger, known as Clay. She hailed from Dorchester, Massachusetts, and from the time she arrived in Yellow Springs, Horace and Mary Mann took a particularly keen interest in her welfare. Such was their regard for her that following graduation they got her a job as governess for the children of Mary’s sister Sophia and her husband, the author Nathaniel Hawthorne. Ada accompanied the Hawthornes to Europe as Nathaniel had received a diplomatic appointment as US consul to England from his old schoolmate from Bowdoin College, President Franklin Pierce, for whom he had written a stirring if not entirely factual campaign biography.\footnote{Scott Sanders and Adelaide Shepard, "Ada Shepard to Mary Richardson," in Songs from the Stacks (Yellow Springs, Ohio: Antioch College, 2013).}

Her life is truly remarkable and she was ahead of her time in many ways. Her suicide (committed in fear of insanity) was all the more tragic given her intellectual gifts. Her life, as is true of many early graduates of Antioch, deserves closer attention and study.\footnote{For more information her remarkable life see: Robert Lincoln. Straker, “Ada Shepard and Henry Badger” in Horace Mann and Others: Chapters from the History of Antioch College. With a Preface and an Introduction to the Antiochiana Collection in the Olive Kettering Library (Yellow Springs, OH: Antioch Press, 1963), 43-55.} Whitelaw Reid (a future editor and owner of the New York Tribune, and a later dignitary in France and England) was at the commencement of Ada’s graduating class. “Ada appeared third on the program, reading her essay, ‘All Success Proves Partial Failure,’ and thus probably became the first woman graduate
of a coeducational college to read her own essay from the platform on commencement day.”

Reid said of it: “Miss Shepard’s essay was one of unusual beauty, one to which a hasty abstract would necessarily do great injustice. The fair author, thoroughly accomplished in all departments of college lore, is perfectly unassuming and modest in her deportment, and it is not strange that the students of Antioch should express their pride in her intellectual successes, which seem to be more than partial.”

Throughout her life she would regularly receive such compliments. Later as professors at Antioch, both she and Badger were well liked and were very highly regarded.

She kept very close correspondence with her friend Mary Richardson for several years, and they stayed friends for many years afterwards. Ada often wrote to her about, “…how much she misses her many friends from school, mentioning a number of Antioch notables in the process: both the Brown sisters, Oella and Olympia, come up, the latter most famous as the earliest woman in US history to be ordained a minister [or at least one of the earlier well recognized female ministers in America].” In her letters with Mary, Ada discussed everything from her philosophical thoughts on “illuminating the dark corners of history,” to discussing their possible future careers (including but not limited to, preaching, engineering, surgery, and being a professor at a college), to discussing the current situation of Antioch and how they might support the school.

For example Ada suggested to Mary:

“That would be too sedentary an occupation for you. You must have some action in your profession. You want intellectual and bodily activity combined. I believe you would like

134 Ibid., 46.
135 See: Ibid., 52.
137 For general discussions of their lives and work see: Adelaide Shepard to Mary Richardson, January 20, 1859, Antiochiana Archive, Yellow Springs, Ohio. Adelaide Shepard to Mary Richardson, August 17, 1858, Antiochiana Archive, Yellow Springs, Ohio. For a discussion of school life see: Adelaide Shepard to Mary Richardson, August 14, 1858, Antiochiana Archive, Yellow Springs, Ohio. For an example of career discussions see: Adelaide Shepard to Mary Richardson August 8, 185?
to be an engineer. I think it is a noble calling and calculated to call out all the energies of body and of mind. Washington & Fremont were Engineers. In such employments where man deals with nature and immutable laws, there is no perversion of heart or soul as when man deals with man. No jealousies envying, and bickering.  

Not only do such letters show how Ada and Mary envisioned careers that went beyond the confines of what Mann would have been comfortable with, but they also show how seriously they took Mann’s rhetoric and ideas to heart. As Ada suggested, bodily activity and intellectual activity must go hand in hand for a solid career and life. Further, her discussion of immutable laws echoes Mann’s own views. The immutable laws are our higher calling, and careers that search for them are higher than careers on the lowly plane where “man deals with man.”

While with the Hawthornes, Ada regularly taught American expatriate children in whatever city she was currently located. Antioch’s focus on pedagogy served Ada very well. She was in high demand and found:

Americans abroad are eager to secure an American teacher, whenever it is possible. You would be surprised and shocked beyond measure if you could know all that I have learned about the teaching in schools in Europe generally, of course Germany is excepted. Without meaning any particular compliment to myself I do not wonder that people here are anxious to give their children teachers who have some idea of what teaching is.

In the letter to Mary, Ada goes on to discuss her study of German and Italian, and her hope to take up drawing. She finally concludes by admitting that although she enjoyed her teaching and her life very much: “Life is a perpetual hurry for me, even more so, if possible than in my busiest days at Antioch.”

In true Antioch spirit, she took up the cause of education and of industrious life activity.

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138 Adelaide Shepard to Mary Richardson, August 8, 185?, Antiochiana Archive, Yellow Springs, Ohio.
139 Adelaide Shepard to Mary Richardson, December 5, 1858, Antiochiana Archive, Yellow Springs, Ohio.
140 Ibid.
During the trip, Ada often wrote longingly of her time at Antioch. She missed her friends, the demanding and rigorous schedule, and the local debate societies. As with most students of that time, she also wrote very fondly of Horace Mann. Also like many other Antioch students, both before and after her (and many students at other actualized utopias), as she grew older she became increasingly disappointed with the limits of the outside world, especially the limits for women in the mid to late nineteenth century. For example she wrote to Mary in 1860:

I remembered all the belled Sunday nights, when, like lovers, we reposed in each others arms, and told each other one’s hopes and fears, our dreams and our highest aspirations. How rosy the future seemed then! What good we hoped…for ourselves and for others. Oh! The sky is less rosy now. My hopes of doing good are sadly faded. I am gloomily desponding, by any means.

Actualized utopias are unique spots in cultural life, and sadly, especially for those oppressed by their current society, the outside world can prove too much.

Another early female Antiochian expressed similar passions, challenges, and dreams as Ada: Sallie A. Birch. Although, not as worldly as the Northeastern, cultivated Ada, Sallie also expressed in her journal entries her devotion to the school, her admiration for Mann, and her hopes for a life and career beyond her culture’s expectations. She was also far more socially conservative. For example, on January 7th 1859, she wrote about an incident at the female debate society: “Soon after the Society was called to order, several presumptuous young hopefuls of the opposite sex made their appearance. I left without ceremony, perfectly disgusted, bound to have redress in some way, it being entirely against the rules of Antioch to invite in the gentlemen more than two times a term.” She also had a very deep sense of justice and morality. She was regularly horrified by the poor and, occasionally cruel, behavior of some students. On January 9,

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141 For example see Adelaide Shepard to Mary Richardson September 10, 185?, Antiochiana Archive, Yellow Springs, Ohio.
142 Adelaide Shepard to Mary Richardson, January 28, 1860, Antiochiana Archive, Yellow Springs, Ohio.
143 Sallie A. Birch, *Diary of Miss Sallie A. Birch in 1859* (Afterwards Mrs. Walter D. Stillman), Antiochiana Archive, Yellow Springs, Ohio.
1859 she discussed the worst and most horrifying of these incidents: “…Space for the record of a base and evil deed. This was the evening set apart by Joseph Badger to commit one of the most barbarous acts that Antioch ever witnessed. It was this: he took a cat, and bathed—a portion of her body in fluid, and set it on fire. I would ask his insulted conscience, how long it can endure such treatment, before it will take wings and fly away.”\textsuperscript{144} Sadly such antics were not uncommon at Antioch, and (as I have already discussed) were regular occurrences at colleges of the era. Even at the utopian and highly moral Antioch such activities occasionally were carried out. G. Stanley Hall was the victim of a notorious series of incidents in the 1870’s at Antioch, when trying to stop alumni from selling students’ completed essays. On the street he was shot at: “Later, a bullet fired in my direction lodged in the post of the store a safe rod from where I was; another was fired through the window of my room a few nights later; while at a rhetorical evening exercise where I sat on the platform, a bottle of acid was thrown through the window, evidently directed at me but fell short and broke on the edge of the platform, spoiling my clothes and the dresses of some of the girls in the front row.”\textsuperscript{145} Sallie lived in a world where college violence was at a level hard to comprehend today.

A bright spot in Sallie’s life was Horace Mann. Mann makes regular appearances in her journals. She deeply admired him and saw him as a shining light in the dark and uneducated Midwest in which she grew up. After visiting a Methodist revival on January 23, 1859, she wrote: “To go from the sound of Mr. Mann’s voice, to the hideous yelling of a half-ignorant Methodist, it appears, would be very much stepping from the presence of a superior being, to listen to the screeching of the fiends of darkness. Their congregations are made up of

\textsuperscript{144} Sallie A. Birch, \textit{Diary of Miss Sallie A. Birch in 1859}
\textsuperscript{145} For more on the incident and the original citation see: Burton J. Bledstein, \textit{The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America}, 235.
promiscuous assembly, from the pickled tippler, to the senseless non-entity." Her diary entries reveal a devoted student who had an eye for education and morals.

Yet another notable series of journal entries come from Cornelia “Nellie” Van Mater:

Born in 1847, Cornelia “Nellie” Van Mater moved to Yellow Springs when her father, a successful merchant and Christian Church deacon of Greeneville, Ohio, was made a trustee of Antioch College (1861)… Nellie’s journal from 1864 when she was a student is one of the gems of Antiochiana. In her masters thesis The Delicious Sunshine: The Journal of Nellie Van Mater, archivist Tina Ratcliff describes it as “the expression of a feminine culture in transition.” Nellie lived in a time when women gradually shook off the reigns of “domesticity” and began to pursue lives and professions for themselves rather than as an extension of a woman’s traditional role within the household. The cultural fear that this provoked was that women would somehow lose their virtue as they entered the world of men. Nellie experienced these pressures and wrote of them in her journal frequently, usually in a discussion of “purity.” The concept is somewhat elusive, but she seems only concerned with purity as it pertains to herself or other women.

Further, in an entry from her 1864 journal:

…Nellie describes an incident of racial prejudice in her Sunday school [students purposefully sat at a distance from, and ignored, a student of color]. Here she showcases her obsession with purity, her penchant for the dash as a universal punctuation mark, her religiosity, and her intolerance for ignorance. Fanny Hunster, the focus of her entry, was from a local African American family that ran the Union House Hotel in downtown Yellow Springs. The Hunsters boarded Antioch students through the nineteenth century and many of their descendants attended the College. Her sense of injustice and the indignity of racial prejudices echoes the tone of many other early students. Antioch students were just as important as the faculty, including Mann, for making it an actualized utopia.

The motivations of these students is also indicated by how many of them would devote their careers to Antioch, for example Reverend John Burns Weston (another student from the first graduating class in 1857), who would, after graduating, become the principal of the

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146 Sallie A. Birch, *Diary of Miss Sallie A. Birch in 1859*
147 These are the very same Hunsters mentioned in the article on M.D. Conway. For more see: Footnote 128.
preparatory school, and a professor of rhetoric, logic, and Greek. He would even serve three
times as interim precedent.\textsuperscript{149} Although many students did leave Antioch, they kept its vision
and ideals in their hearts. For example Lucy Salisbury who

…came to Antioch College as a new student the year that it opened for classes in 1853,
but her education experienced such frequent interruption, probably due to financial
reasons, that by 1860 she was still in the College’s preparatory program. There she met
Myrick Hascall Doolittle, class of 1862, and the two married upon his graduation. Myrick
would soon take a job with the United States Naval Observatory in Washington DC, then
the most important scientific research facility in the country. In 1863, Lucy joined the
United States Sanitary Commission. The USSC was formed by civilians but made official
by legislation signed by President Abraham Lincoln in 1861 to coordinate the volunteer
efforts of women who wanted to contribute to the Union during the American Civil War.
The Sanitary Commission staffed field hospitals, raised money, provided supplies, and
worked to educate the military and government on matters of health and sanitation.\textsuperscript{150}

Other women from Antioch would also join the Sanitary Commission during the Civil War.

There are many other notable figures from this era such as Thomas Hill (the second
president, following Mann, and a later president of Harvard), and Austin Craig (a professor and
the third president of the college, after Hill).\textsuperscript{151} In later years, the list of notable alumni would
grow at a remarkable rate.

These early students also recognized the negative aspects of the early Antioch
experience; especially relating to Mann as an uncompromising and demanding moralist. Despite
the challenges that faced the school, and often despite Mann himself, Antioch did cultivate
people with agency, who had dreams beyond the narrow confines of the era. Not only did
Antioch succeed at educating thoughtful and engaged female students, but also it opened its
doors to some students of color (albeit in limited numbers). Although life after Antioch was not

\textsuperscript{149} For more see: Scott Sanders and Reverend John Burns Weston, "Reverend John Burns Weston,"
in \textit{Songs from the Stacks} (Yellow Springs, Ohio: Antioch College, 2011).
\textsuperscript{150} Scott Sanders and Jennie W. Scudder, “Lucy Salisbury” in \textit{Songs from the Stacks} (Yellow Springs,
\textsuperscript{151} For more see: Robert Lincoln Straker, \textit{Horace Mann and Others: Chapters from the History of Antioch
College. With a Preface and an Introduction to the Antiochiana Collection in the Olive Kettering Library}.
always a success, the students recognized more possibilities for human life and dignity because of their education at Antioch. Further, Antioch set a precedent for students to stand in solidarity with the oppressed, even when the college faculty and administration bowed to more powerful forces. This early prefiguration would leave its mark on Antioch for generations to come.

**Conclusion**

I have used the early years of Antioch to study actualized utopias in practice. We looked at Antioch’s founding philosophy under Mann, the curriculum, and the experiences of students and faculty. Several conclusions can be drawn from this preliminary survey:

`1. The founding years of an actualized utopia play a critical role in their future orientation.

Often, when one thinks of Antioch today, one thinks of the reforms made by President Arthur Morgan in the twentieth century. However I agree with other researchers on this subject that “[b]oth Mann and Morgan set the stage within which the historical dramas have played. Remaining true to the continuing heritage, the current philosophy of Antioch operates with these parameters established years ago.”¹⁵² Mann’s mission is as ever-present in the blood of Antioch as Morgan’s reforms are. Whether in Antioch’s commitment to social justice and humanity, or its always unstable financial situation,¹⁵³ or its active and rebellious student body, the early days set the direction and aims that have haunted (in a productive way) the school ever since. Utopian institutions can never rid themselves of their history.

To many, it may be a surprising conclusion that actualized utopian institutions have such historical consciousness. As previously discussed, the conservative symbolic life world always guides and grounds these communities’ progressive activity. Mythic stories are deeply embedded

in these institutions. Even today Mann’s legacy is remembered and the stories of the early days are constantly retold. An active historical horizon of meaning helps these schools revitalize their telic orientation. Every time the story of the past is told, the present is revitalized. In history we find the echoes of a mythic past in the way a story can bring to presence its object. These institutions have a need to revitalize their historic missions in a way most schools do not.154 Their early years then are critical to their futures, for better or for worse. These schools need to continue to reflect on their early years in order to remain vital and adaptable.

2. Actualized Utopias are often tragically dysfunctional centers of cultural life.

One might assume that actualized utopias would be idyllic spaces in any given culture. Antioch demonstrates the opposite to be true. These institutions are situated in a very precarious place in the larger culture. Their vision demands much from students and faculty, and coordinating such a mission, nevermind finding people capable of coordinating it, proves incredibly difficult.

3. Life after an actualized utopian community proves challenging.

For those who leave the actualized utopia, whether students or faculty, the outside world proves a complex place. As utopias are telic by and through their community life, individual members, although generally being active and engaged people, find the resistance to change in the broader culture tremendously disillusioning—Ada Shepard’s life is a tragic testament to this aspect of the actualized utopia. Certainly many people after college are disillusioned by the greater world, but it is rare for them to end up taking their life in reaction to this change. In short, many are disillusioned by the acquiescence of culture in the years after their youth, but for those

154 For an example of such historical and mythological renewal in these schools, see Joy Elmer Morgan’s book on Antioch. She spends a great deal of time mythologizing Mann in service of such necessary telic revitalization. See preface to: Joy Elmer Morgan, *Horace Mann at Antioch*, 9-12.
in telic institutions, it is all the more stark to come to terms with, given their particular experiences.

Such limits of the broader culture also explain to some degree why the influences of actualized utopias are limited; their power primarily exists in community life, not in their individual members. Except for those who leave actualized utopias and then create actualized utopias themselves (which happens on occasion), there is no guarantee that students of these institutions will go on and live remarkable lives (though many do). Actualized utopia’s influence is largely made in and through its community life.

3. Actualized Utopias can choose, to a degree, their public presence.

Although Antioch was telic in its relationship to the larger culture in which it was, and is, situated, that fact by no means dictates how visible it makes itself in the broader culture. Initially on issues of race, Antioch seems to have tried to escape broad public scrutiny; however, when push came to shove, Antioch chose in its early days, and largely still does seem to choose, the risk of public attention and anger in order to keep to its vision. Whether or not the administration of Antioch has always kept to the spirit of Antioch’s founding ideas, it seems that by and large the students did hold on to them. As we have seen, this attitude was born in the womb of the early years.

In the next chapter, we will explore how Berea College, although initially starting out as a very publically visible actualized utopia, eventually began to avert attention from itself. President William Goodell Frost would divert Berea away from contentious issues that would upset the public in order to continue and expand Berea’s mission of serving the underprivileged of Appalachia. The similarities and differences between Antioch and Berea will prove a helpful contrast for this inquiry. Antioch’s eventual openness to its demise in service of its vision, and
Berea’s eventual aversion to such risks in order to continue its vision, albeit in diluted form, will play a critical role in the next chapter. An analysis of this healthy tension between ideas and their problematic situation, will give us some tools for future actualized utopian projects; we will understand the risks, and the management of risks, that is involved in a vision that is beyond the norms of the culture in which it is situated.

There is no better way to conclude this chapter than with the words of Henry Clay Badger. In 1890, many years after the suicide of his wife, he gave a speech on “Our Antioch Ideals” at Harvard where he worked. He concluded his speech by saying:

Show me another school in the world whose pupils were gathered from so wide an area, from so many States, which yet had such unity and such purity of life. Show me one that had within its walls so little vice. Show me one where women were held in higher honor. Show me one whose alumni were so largely teachers. Show me one that had, from the dawn of her day, so fair an ideal of home-life, so sweet an ideal of Christ the Lord, or so high an ideal of what scholarship, womanhood, and Christian manhood should be. These ideals, these dreams have walked incarnate here!\(^{155}\)

**CHAPTER 4:**

**BEREA COLLEGE**

**Founding Philosophy**

*Clay and Fee: Constitutional Gradualism and Moral Action*

A utopian community’s *telic* vision is more than the horizon of possibility it offers, it also depends on how the vision is contrasted with the limited situation in which it is embedded. Geography and social context are critical to thinking about any utopian project. Berea College, a radical community of higher learning, interracial education, and the education of the poor in Appalachia, will help us understand why these factors are so important. Although the utopian dreams of Oberlin College largely shaped early Berea, it has been Berea’s utopian mission that has survived, in some ways, while there are only traces of telicity left at Oberlin. In the end, what perhaps made the critical difference was that Oberlin was safely north of the Ohio, while Berea was in the heart of Eastern Kentucky, well into what was the slave-holding American South. The hostilities Berea would face were fierce and violent. These hostilities would have the affect of entrenching the committed, non-violent Christian community built by John Greg Fee, J.A.R. Rogers, and several others.

Before entering into Berea’s story, something must be said about Kentucky at this period. In particular, I would like to draw a comparison between the type of emancipational gradualism supported by figures such as Cassius Marcellus Clay and higher-order non-violent resistance supported by figures such as John Greg Fee. Both Clay and Fee were well read and they recognized the project of *bildung* (the organic advancement of knowledge through persons). Clay however was a Byronic romantic, while Fee was a Christian perfectionist. By briefly investigating Clay’s gradualist emancipationist views, and what, long term, he believed its moral
and epistemic value was, and by doing an even more thorough investigation of Fee’s commitment to Christian life and practice, Berea’s position in Kentucky in its early days will be understood. Berea would not only resist overt slavery, racism, and systemic oppression, but it would also resist emancipational gradualism, through its actualization as a utopian community. In other words, Berea practiced militant non-violent direct action by its very existence as a community. Slaveholders in Kentucky understood such an actualized community as an existential threat, even when it had but a few students. Its very actualization created a tear in their carefully laid hegemonic fabric. Finally, such an analysis will help us demarcate the difference between oppositionalism, and dialectical adherence to actualizing the “beloved community” (in Roycian terms). It was not that Berea saw its utopian mission in a purely negative relation to the broader culture. Rather, the early Bereans believed that only through enacting Christian life, and only through interracial education, would the ignorance and hate of others be subverted. Only through opposition to unjust practices, by the enactment of moral practices, can the larger community be turned toward goodness. Also, there was hope that through the actualization of utopia, gradualists would understand the difference between immoral, violent, militant action and moral, non-violent, militant action.

In nineteenth-century America, emancipational gradualists were not always “mainstream” liberal apologists. To the contrary, gradualists like Clay regularly put their lives on the line for their outspoken emancipationist views. Further, especially in the South, it was men like Clay who went beyond Northern abolitionism to affirm beliefs in the equality of the races, much to the consternation of those in favor of “benevolent” white supremacy. Such positions

156 Such dialectical adherence can also be seen in the American Civil Rights Movement. In fact, Martin Luther King Jr. was influenced by Royce’s thought and used the term “beloved community” himself. For more see Gary Herstein, “The Roycean Roots of the Beloved Community,” The Pluralist 4, no. 2 (2009), doi:10.1353/plu.0.0013. For more on Royce’s ontology and its relation to my thesis, see Footnote 3.
also irked those in the “Colonization Movement” who believed the only viable option was to have freed slaves have their own country in Africa. Unlike Mann, Clay was largely committed to anti-racist emancipation; these largely anti-racist attitudes stemmed from his childhood.

Clay (1810-1903) was born to the upper classes of Kentucky society. He was out-spoken, eloquent, and had little patience with what he deemed insincerity. He was often challenged to and successful in dueling, especially when using his bowie knife and his pistols. He never seemed to take pride in his skills in dueling. Rather, he had a violent temper, and reacted poorly to anything he deemed “unjust” and for those who “insulted” him. He was at heart a romantic. He had a particular love of Byron but read broadly in the romantic tradition and the classics throughout his lifetime.157

Although his father was a slaveholder, Clay very early on would become critical of the slave economy. His attitudes were first shaped by an incident with one of his father’s slaves that would haunt him for the rest of his life. A Mulatto girl name Mary was friends with the young Clay and his sister. Mary defended herself from assault (and likely an attempted rape) by the family overseer, and killed him. Although she was found “not guilty” in the white courts, the custom at the time was to send any “trouble makers” into the “deep South,” to work on the larger cotton plantations, where life was short and cruel. Clay was forever haunted by the event. He wrote (years later) about the event:

Never shall I forget—and through all these years it rests upon the memory as the stamp upon a bright coin—the scene, when Mary was tied by the wrists and sent from home and friends, and the loved features of her native land—the home of her infancy and girlish days—into Southern banishment forever; and yet held guiltless by a jury of; not her “peers,” but her oppressors! Never shall I forget those...faces—the oppressor and the oppressed, rigid with equal agony! She cast an imploring look at me, as if in appeal; but meekly went, without a word, as “sheep to the slaughter.”158

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At Yale, Clay was further galvanized to the fight against slavery. Upon the (likely) influence of his friend Joseph Longworth he started becoming interested in William Loyd Garrison.\textsuperscript{159} Clay described the experience of first hearing Garrison as: “… a ‘new revelation.’” In a lucid and logical speech Garrison treated the ‘Divine Institution,’ as Clay wrote, ‘so as to burn like a branding-iron the most callous hide of the slave-holder and his defenders.’ Garrison’s arguments and sentiments were to him ‘as water to a thirsty wayfarer.’” \textsuperscript{160} Clay eventually became one of the U.S. senators from Kentucky, helped Lincoln win the election, was offered the position of Secretary of War, but declined, and went to Russia as the ambassador for the Union (in order to keep Russia out of the war).

When it came to the question of emancipation Clay believed that gradually freeing the slaves was the best policy, that is, until the American Civil War broke out. He had a firm belief in the American constitution and was convinced that long term, immediate emancipation would lead to long-term racism in the South. After the war, he wrote to Frederick Douglass (with whom he was in correspondence with) about his concerns that Reconstruction was not the right approach for unification:

Whilst it would have been good policy as I think to have executed a few leading rebels promptly—it certainly is bad policy to keep up proscription and irritation after all prospects of [an] oppressive policy [are] past. In this [Massachusetts] Governor [John A.] Andrew—one of the truest and wisest of our friends—agreed with me. I have no fear with you that the fruits of the war are to be lost by a liberal policy towards the South. On the contrary the danger to the Blacks is in…widening… the difference between the Whites and Blacks—the Whites being superior in number and at present in intelligence & wealth in the South…All experience shows that no party can live long in a free country—and I would wish the Blacks to show magnanimity to the rebels—that they might in turn in the day of need receive it.\textsuperscript{161}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., 21.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 21-22.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{161} As cited in: Ibid., 109.}
\end{footnotes}
Clay was concerned that, long-term, Reconstruction would aggravate poor whites into a coalition with the white bourgeois class, and radicalize said coalition in such a way as to continue anti-black power in the South, in a new form. For Clay it was one thing to know the right, and it was another question as to how to help people come to the truth. Change for Clay was gradual and although the abolitionist had moral and epistemic authority, he thought their practices would aggravate, instead of help, in bringing change.

Clay would donate the land allotted to Berea College. He was at first tremendously supportive of Fee and the other founders of Berea:

…Clay had carried on an extended correspondence with John G. Fee, a crusading abolitionist preacher, whose *Antislavery Manual* (1848) had attracted Clay’s attention…[I]n the foothills of the Cumberlands, Clay owned a tract of land known as the “glade.”…Clay gave Fee a ten-acre portion of the “glade” for a homestead, on which the pioneering abolitionist built his house. Fee called the land Berea, after the place in the New Testament where the apostle Paul found the people “open-minded.” Under the date of March 29, 1855, Clay’s diary contains the entry: “Paid John G. Fee $200 in full of contribution to his house.” By the next year, Fee’s church-school that was to become Berea College had made a good start.\(^\text{162}\)

The positive relationship between Fee and Clay was not to last. Berea’s mission of co-education, from the classroom, to the church, even to the possibility of intermarriage, Clay eventually saw as the very type of radicalism that would hamper progress. John Greg Fee on the other hand, saw it as a moral imperative to rid humanity of the sin of slavery and “caste” (he saw racism as creating a new caste system). Further, he saw *moral, non-violent, militant action* (including, but not limited to, the actualization of Berea), as the only practical solution to the situation. His Christian perfectionist vision was close to Mann’s and represented an aspect of the nineteenth century milieu that saw knowledge as organically cultivated through persons. But what did Fee think was wrong with gradualism? Why does gradualism not serve the positive development of culture? The answer to this question reveals much about Fee’s understanding of utopia.

\(^{162}\) *Ibid.*, 75.
Fee (1816-1901) was born in Bracken County Kentucky to a slave-holding family. Like Clay, college deeply informed Fee’s anti-slavery beliefs. At Lane Seminary, the very place where, almost a decade earlier, the “Lane Rebels” had been exiled from the seminary and were invited to work at Oberlin College (where the next generation of students would create the first faculty of Berea), Fee changed his views. His friends John Milton Campbell and James White were responsible for finally convincing him of the evils of slavery:

These Brethren became deeply interested in me as a native of Kentucky and in view of my relation to the slave system, my father being a slaveholder. They pressed upon my conscience the text, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thy self,” and as a practical manifestation of this, “Do unto men as ye would they should do unto you.” I saw that the duty enjoined was fundamental in the religion of Jesus Christ, and that unless I embraced the principle and lived it in honest practice, I would lose my soul.

For a short period afterward, he wrestled with this new theology, and then finally came to a profound decision while praying in his favorite spot for religious meditation:

I saw also that as an honest man I ought to be willing to wear the name which would be a fair exponent of the principle I espoused. This was the name Abolitionist, odious then to the vast majority of people North, and especially South. For a time I struggled between odium on the one hand, and manifest duty on the other. I saw that to embrace the principle and wear the name was to cut myself off from relatives and former friends, and apparently from all prospects of usefulness in the world. I had in the grove near the seminary a place to which I went everyday for prayer, between the hours of eleven and twelve. I saw that to have light and peace from God, I must make the consecration. I said, “Lord, if needs be, make me an Abolitionist.” The surrender was complete. I arose from my knees with the consciousness that I had died to the world and accepted Christ in all the fullness of his character, as I then understood him. Self must be surrendered. The test, the point of surrender, may be one thing to one man, and a different thing to another man; but it must be made, —all given to Christ.

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163 Fee went to Augusta College in Georgia for the first two years of his education, and then went to Miami University (Oxford, Ohio). The latter school would have an interesting role to play in the Civil Rights movement. For more see: Mark Curnutte, "Roots of Freedom Summer Planted at Ohio College," USA Today, October 9, 2014. After Fee went to Miami University, he went to Lane Seminary (in 1842).
From that point on Fee was true to his word about surrendering to the cause of Abolitionism. It is worth mentioning that he did not expect everyone to surrender exactly as he did; one should surrender to Christ and right action in general. Like Mann, universal truth did not prescribe the exact manifestation of said truth in each person. Rather, each person is a unique “Emersonian” vessel of truth. This perspectivism did not mean one could surrender to the cause of slavery, which Fee considered a contradiction of loyalty to fellow humans as prescribed by Jesus, but it did mean there was room for play in the vision of the beloved community for people of good faith. They need not, nor should not, have a formula for Christian life. Fee (and his family) suffered much for such beliefs. Gangs regularly threatened him; his churches were burned down, his vision violently resisted. To such gangs, he refused to swear that he would not preach in said areas, or at least would not refrain from preaching Abolitionism, because he believed one could make such oaths only to God, not to “man.” He practiced non-violent action. He often replied to gangs with statements such as: “You all know I am not a man of violence, —I carry no weapons of defense. If any person is hurt, the guilt and responsibility will be on those who do the ‘hurting.’” Often the gangs did let him go, in fear of what might happen to them should they kill an unarmed white preacher.

After years of making a meager salary preaching in small isolated communities in Kentucky (through the financial support of the American Missionary Association), he took up Clay’s offer and settled in “The Glade,” or what he would later call “Berea.” Early on, he and a friend discussed the possibilities of a college: “About this time Bro. George Candee came; and whilst he and I were chopping wood, then piled up in my yard, we talked up the idea of a more

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166 As before, I borrow Royce’s term, with cognizance of the anachronism.
167 His life is remarkable and his autobiography is a testament to his sincere faith and his prescient antislavery and anti-racist views. For more see: Ibid.
168 Ibid., 98.
extended school—a college—in which to educate not merely in a knowledge of the sciences, so called, but also in the principles of love in religion, and liberty and justice in government; and thus permeate the minds of the youth with these sentiments.” In the years before the Civil War, Fee and several others created a utopian community, which included a small-integrated village, a church, and a school (that they hoped to turn into a college as soon as they could). The relationship with Clay unfortunately was soon to fall apart. During an event at which both Fee and Clay spoke, Fee caught a contradiction in Clay’s argument:

He [Clay] continued by saying, “As long as a law is on the statute book, it is to be respected and obeyed until repealed by the republican majority.” He elaborated his position. When he came to the Fugitive Slave Law he said, “So far as this is concerned, I would not obey it myself; it is contrary to natural right, and I would not degrade my nature by obeying it,”—a manly, and noble utterance. I seized the concession and the opportunity and in my reply said, “My friend, Mr. Clay, has conceded the whole point at issue—that there is a Higher Law.” He now seated in the midst of the congregation, cried out, “The Fugitive Slave Law is unconstitutional.” Yet it was on the statute book and unrepealed by the republican majority; and to be logically in harmony with his previous premises, he would be under obligation to enforce and carry it out.

Besides the embarrassment Clay felt by being “bested” by Fee, this event had revealed a more fundamental schism already underlying their relationship. Fee felt that gradualists like Clay had a muddled position on right action. When it came down to what Clay saw as a practicable policy, versus what he actually felt was right, there was a great deal of inconsistency. In particular, there was an inconsistency about whether one could resist “unjust laws.” For Fee, the contradiction was not a logical fallacy but a moral fallacy; Clay’s position was impossible to practice, as one was supposed to follow both the laws of the republican majority, yet resist what was contrary to one’s nature and sense of decency. Certainly “higher law” and constitutional law do not always

169 Ibid., 95.
170 Ibid., 98-105.
171 Ibid., 104.
conflict, but in the case of slavery Fee felt it did, and the problem was that it also conflicted for Clay. In short, Fee felt Clay had squelched the better part of his character.

About a year and a half after this incident not much had changed. Fee went to another address of Clay’s:

After the address he [Clay] walked with me into the woodland, then before my door, and as we sat down on a log, he remarked, “Fee things look better than I thought they would. I am in heart as much a higher law man as you are, and if we were in Massachusetts we could carry it out; but here we cannot.” I replied, “The utterance of moral truth should not be confined to geographical limits, especially in a national canvass.” 172

Fee went on to reflect and criticize what he saw as Clay’s moral and practical failure:

The reader will allow me to here say, that, in my judgment, this notion of expediency in the non-utterance of moral truth, lest it should seem to hinder success, as exhibited in this remark of Mr. Clay’s, was the great mistake of his life, and that it took from him that moral power that was necessary for success, and did more at that time to hinder his advancement to the highest position which the people of this nation could give, than any other cause. 173

He went on to say that this interlude analyzing Clay was necessary in his autobiography because:

“Mr. Clay at this time was the most conspicuous character in the history of Berea.” 174 Fee then discussed how Clay went out of his way to denounce Fee’s positions. Fee recognized that Clay did this because he seriously thought such outright action at Berea would jeopardize progress.

Fee also mentioned how Clay withdrew his support and power (including protection) from Berea. In his autobiography, Fee explains that Clay objected to the:

…co-education of the “races”—the impartial feature of the school and church at Berea—was well known. He did not believe such a school could be a numerical or a financial success. Also he feared evil results to virtue.

Fee acknowledged this, but went on to defend the school’s position:

We had then no sufficient precedent to guide, and no theory to maintain, save that it is always safe to do right—follow Christ; and we knew He would not turn away anyone

172 Ibid., 126.
173 Ibid., 126.
174 Ibid., 129.
who came seeking knowledge, even if “carved in ebony.” We knew that whilst He is a respecter of character he is not of persons. As his followers, there was to us but the one course to pursue—open the school to all of virtuous habits. Also we believed that the best way to inspire Woman, Colored or White, with virtuous sentiments, and establish in her habits of purity, was not to treat her invidiously—shut her in pens, schools, by herself, but treat her like other women of respectability and thus inspire her with hope and noble resolve, and lift her above the seductive influences of a vicious life. In other words, practice the Golden Rule—“do unto all as you would they should do unto you.” The wisdom of this rule has been verified in the history of the school and church at Berea, and we have occasion to know that Mr. Clay greatly rejoices in this fact. Mr. Clay thought that he was pursuing the wisest course, but he was misled, as many are now, by his notions of expediency.\textsuperscript{175}

Fee, believed that although adhering to the “higher law” is certainly not easy, nor is it always in one’s hands, it is however (long term) not only the right choice, but the practical choice. Fee did not propose violent revolution; nor did he promote the Civil War; instead, he proposed creating spaces of \textit{actualized utopia}. By actualizing the possibility of Berea he revealed that co-education and integrated education could be achieved. It is hard to deny that Berea affected cultural life in Kentucky (especially in its early years), as will become clear in the next section.

\textbf{The Structure of the School}

\textit{The Program}

The structure of the school shifted dramatically during its first few decades. One must keep in mind that in its earliest days in the late 1850’s, the college was nothing but a remarkable small (and ill equipped) school with a very diverse student body. After the closing exercises of the very first term of the school in 1858, Berea started what became a long-standing tradition: to have an exhibition of students. By the time Fee wrote his autobiography in 1891, he noted:

Hundreds now continue to express their surprise at the interest manifested by the people at the commencement exercises of Berea College. Usually from three to five thousand people attend. Two thirds of these are white. The large tabernacle, which seats some two thousand people, will not seat more than half the people who come. Good order generally prevails. The delivery on the platform of essays and orations from colored and white

\textsuperscript{175} \textit{Ibid.}, 130-132. In this case, Fee means “person” in the biblical sense of “outward appearance.” It does not denote “person” as an autonomous agent (most especially a community) of reflective activity, as it is used in the personalist tradition, and as used in this thesis.
students, male and female, is an educational force to the thousands who attend. In all these efforts there was a continuous purpose to establish in interior Kentucky a college for the education of the youth of the land. Adverse circumstances had all the while been threatening to thwart any such effort. These, however, only served to make more apparent the necessity of such an educational agency, and to make strong the purpose of its original projectors.\textsuperscript{176}

Fee underscored that Berea was committed to its social justice mission in an area in which that mission would be resisted. Such resistance is a sign that the greater culture recognizes that what is “actual is possible,” that if Berea was allowed to exist it proved possible the type of integrated life the detractors deemed impossible, both morally and practically so. The school’s vision was not an oppositional stance against the people of Kentucky, but rather a dialectical movement for their liberation, at least as the founders of Berea saw it.

This first semester would not have been the success it was without the teaching and support of John Almanza Rowley Rogers (1828-1906). He was another Oberlin theological graduate who felt a call to a life of service:

\...[I]n 1858 [he] came to work in Berea, under the commission of the American Missionary Association, at a salary of four hundred dollars, walking eighty miles of the distance from Maysville. In a rude school-house, with a single unplastered room, without desks or the most common conveniences, he opened a select school with fifteen pupils. With an energy, enthusiasm, buoyancy, skill and love not wholly his own, he addressed himself to the work. Desks were supplied, maps and charts graced the walls, music and lectures were introduced. The young people were charmed; visitors from many miles away frequented the school, and before the close of the term a hundred names were enrolled. Mrs. Rogers, a charming little woman from Philadelphia, of Quaker parentage, leaving her babe during school hours with a nurse, went to the aid of her husband and added greatly to the enthusiasm.\textsuperscript{177}

Other great teachers such as John G. Hanson, and his wife were soon to come to Berea.\textsuperscript{178} In September 1858 Fee, Hanson, and Rogers (with several other trustees/teachers) drew up a constitution. It was in the following July (1859) that the constitution was ratified. Two pertinent

\begin{footnotes}
\item[176] Ibid., 136.
\item[177] Berea College: An Interesting History (Cincinnati, OH: Elm Street Printing Company, 1883), 12-13.
\item[178] Berea College: An Interesting History, 14.
\end{footnotes}
by-laws were: “This College shall be under an influence strictly Christian, and, as such, opposed to sectarianism, slaveholding, caste, and every other wrong institution or practice…,” and, “The object of this College shall be to furnish the facilities for a thorough education to all persons of good moral character, at the least possible expense to the same, and all the inducements and facilities for manual labor which can reasonably be supplied by the Board of Trustees shall be offered to its students.”

As the tension before the Civil War began to mount, the John Brown Raid came to national attention, and gave Kentuckians the perfect reason to try to destroy the Berea community. After much protest, Bereans fled and the school only reopened after the Civil War, although many in the community kept the spirit of the school alive during the war years by staying together and by facilitating integrated education within the Union army camps. In 1865 the school was finally reopened and Berea received “charter for a College” from Kentucky. And so, the true college began. The first president, E.H Fairchild (president from 1869-89) was a steward of the utopian mission of the school, and helped further cement the fledgling actualized utopian community:

Fairchild’s administration witnessed the development of a curriculum (based largely on that of Oberlin), the beginnings of significant fundraising and endowment, as well as construction of the first substantial buildings, such as the College Chapel, Howard Hall, and the Ladies’ hall, which were symbols of Berea’s strength and purpose in themselves. During Fairchild’s era Berea was a thoroughly co-educational and integrated community with bright prospects.

Although under later presidents the stress of Berea’s mission would change, it was this radical founding that has kept it telic and alive through the last century and a half.

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179 Ibid., 18.
The Lives of Teachers and Students

Under Fairchild not only was the curriculum largely based on Oberlin’s, but most of the faculty was trained there as well. Thus, there were both practical and theoretical connections to Oberlin: “Of the fifteen early teachers Rogers names in his memoirs, at least ten were Oberlin educated. Nine of the fifteen teachers were women, and at least five of these had attended Oberlin.” 181 Those who did not come from Oberlin already were (or quickly became) committed to the project at Berea.

The early college department was small, and Berea was really an aggregate of several institutions. There was much more attention on the “common” and “normal school,” than the college, even well into the 1950s. Berea carried out Mann’s common school movement in the intellectually uncharted territory of Appalachia. Despite the importance of “common” and “normal” education, “higher learning” was considered a critical aspect of what was happening at Berea. The faculty of the college saw themselves as manifesting Berea’s mission through the project of higher learning. The college faculty itself:

…was made up of men with advanced degrees, primarily master’s degrees.182 The teachers in the other departments were almost all women, and this group held their own meetings… In 1883 President Fairchild reported that the “whole number” of teachers who had served Berea College was forty-nine, thirty women and nineteen men. Twenty-seven of these professors and teachers had been educated at Oberlin. It is also significant that two African Americans, Julia Britton and James Hathaway, both served as faculty members during Fairchild’s presidency. Born in Frankfurt, Kentucky, Britton was Berea’s first black teacher, serving as an instructor in instrumental music from 1870 until 1874. Her parents died suddenly within months of each other in 1874, and Julia and her younger brothers and sisters left Berea as the family scattered. Eventually settling in Memphis, Tennessee, she married Charles Hooks and founded the Hooks Cottage School, the Hooks School of Music (where one of her pupils was the famous W.C. Handy). James Hathaway, born in slavery in 1854 in Mt. Sterling, Kentucky, graduated in 1884 with

181 Shannon H. Wilson, Berea College: An Illustrated History, 24-25.
182 It is pertinent to note that Masters degrees were looked at differently in the mid-nineteenth century. In the English system, a Masters was a teaching degree, and a Doctorate was a research degree. Following England, in this period in America the Masters was the highest degree available for those who wanted to teach in an institution of higher education.
honors from Berea’s classical course. Fairchild immediately employed him as a tutor in Latin and mathematics, and Hathaway served Berea for nine years. In these days of Fairchild’s administration, Berea proved that black teachers were as welcome as black students.183

The student body (in all the departments) was diverse as well: “the student body…averaged about 250 during the 1870s and 350 during the 1880s, was roughly 60 percent African American until about 1894. Tuition was low, and rising to only one dollar a month by 1891, and a generous number of scholarships assisted the needy.”184 Angus Burleigh was one of the early students of color at Berea, and his life is truly a remarkable story. Burleigh first met Fee during the Civil War. Later, Fee recruited him to the school. He was

[b]orn aboard ship on the Atlantic Ocean, …[and] was the son of an English sea captain and a slave. He learned to read and, escaping from slavery, joined the Union army at the age of sixteen and enlisted at Camp Nelson. Burleigh recalled Fee’s commitment to interracial education in his memoirs. Responding to Fee’s inquiry as to his plans after the war, Burleigh replied that he might seek an education in Massachusetts. Burleigh vividly remembered Fee’s persuasive declaration. “That is what I am here for,” Fee said, “seeking young men and women to go to Berea and get an education. Also we are making arrangements so that every one will have an opportunity to work his way. You can be useful here in Kentucky.”185

At school Burleigh, although recognized as a bright student, faced many challenges:

Burleigh first enrolled in the primary department in 1866 but moved forward quickly, eventually entering the classical program where his progress slowed. In 1873, after seven years at Berea, the faculty outlined a course of study designed to see Burleigh graduate. A year-and-a-half later, a faculty review again judged Burleigh deficient. To graduate he must complete courses in political economy, botany, evidences of Christianity, modern history, English literature, natural philosophy, pneumatics, electricity, German, and one term each of Latin and Greek. In June 1875, before he could complete his final two terms of German and natural philosophy, Burleigh left school for financial reasons but continued studying independently to eliminate his deficiencies. Finally, in May 1878, upon completing all requirements, Burleigh earned the B.A. degree.186

183 Shannon H. Wilson, Berea College: An Illustrated History, 36-37.
184 Marion B. Lucas, "Berea College in the 1870s and 1880s: Student Life at a Racially Integrated Kentucky College," The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society 98, no. 1 (January 01, 2000): 1, JSTOR.
185 Shannon H. Wilson, Berea College: An Illustrated History, 22-23.
186 Marion B. Lucas, "Berea College in the 1870s and 1880s: Student Life at a Racially Integrated Kentucky College," The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society, 3.
Burleigh also faced social challenges at Berea:

Many students chafed under Berea’s harsh rules. A.A. Burleigh had a reputation for being independent, even peculiar, and not always diligent in his studies, personality characteristics that drew heated criticism from faculty. Having grown up a slave, Burleigh resented authority, especially the “iron rules” to which he, an older student, was subjected. In late 1873 the faculty charged Burleigh with “insolent and disorderly conduct,” which stemmed from his outspoken hostility to the rules, indifference to his studies and to church attendance, and threatening a teacher. In spite of a lame, somewhat insincere defense—Burleigh said that when arguing with professor Henry Chittenden he was merely “drawing his arm back.. [to put] a bit of string in his vest pocket”—the committee, influenced by John G. Fee’s support for Burleigh and a student petition in his behalf, asked only that he sign a rather lengthy confession to a portion of the charges. Burleigh grumbled but the two sides eventually made peace.  

Burleigh’s case was not uncommon. Graduation rates were abysmal during the early years, and it says a great deal about Burleigh that he persevered and graduated at all. On the other hand, there were many students like William E. Barton (also a student of color) who had a much easier time at Berea. Burleigh went on to be a minister and lived a long life. Unlike Burleigh, most students during this period (who graduated) became teachers.

John Bate, another early student of color, is an example of the type of teacher/educator Berea tended to cultivate:

A member of the class of 1881, Bate was born in slavery in Jefferson county Kentucky, in 1854. Emancipated in 1863, Bate moved with his mother, two brothers, and a sister to Louisville, enduring poverty and homelessness when smallpox killed his brothers and disabled his mother so badly that she could no longer work. Bate was caught stealing by a white missionary, given a bath, and then enrolled in school. Among his favorite teachers was Kate Gilbert, who eventually came to Berea as an instructor in the Preparatory Department. Frustrated at Gilbert’s departure but determined to continue his education, Bate worked in a tobacco factory in 1870-71 and enrolled in Berea in 1872.

Bate wrote later on his time at Berea:

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187 Ibid., 17.
188 For example of student’s financial struggles see: Ibid., 6.
189 Ibid., 4.
190 For example, William E. Burton. See: Ibid., 7-8.
191 Shannon H. Wilson, Berea College: An Illustrated History, 39.
The change from a tobacco factory in which men and women, boys and girls of German, Irish, and Negro extraction were employed, and where sin in all its forms was dominant, to that of a Christian Institution was indeed radical, to say the least. It was some weeks before I could adjust myself entirely to this change but the personal kindness and unselfish devotion of the faculty members to the students, and especially to me, soon won my heart and started me cheerfully in my determination to secure a College education if it were possible. It was plainly evident that the men and women of Berea College at that time were making strenuous efforts and noble sacrifices in order to bring a Christian education to the young people living in a neglected section of the state.\textsuperscript{192}

In Danville, Kentucky, Bate made a career by creating, teaching at, and dramatically expanding, a school:

When John Bate retired in 1941, at the age of eighty-five, his log schoolhouse had matured into a substantial building of twenty rooms with a faculty of fifteen teachers and six hundred students. Bate attributed his success to the “band of Christian workers” at Berea “whose examples and teachings were exemplified in the lives and work of ministers, doctors, and teachers who are proud even to this glad hour to call Old Berea their Alma Mater.” Bate’s “seven years of Latin, four years of Greek, and seven years of mathematics” had produced a remarkable educational leader.\textsuperscript{193}

As Bate suggests, the relationship between faculty and students was strong. Relationships between students of different races and genders were also strong, although there was always tension. Students of color and white students worked together, lived together, and played together. Some teachers and administrators even went as far as to “allow” interracial dating, especially Fee and Fairchild; other faculty were more tentative. After heated debates in 1872, the faculty and Board of Trustee’s approved “interracial dating and marriage under certain conditions.”\textsuperscript{194} These conditions were that it was “frowned upon” (largely to appease outside forces) especially when skin color was “markedly different.” Although it is remarkable that interracial dating and marriage was allowed at all, given the circumstances, many faculty, students, and alumni were disappointed by the limited decision that stood in the way of open

\textsuperscript{192} As cited in: \textit{Ibid.}, 39.
\textsuperscript{193} \textit{Ibid.}, 40.
\textsuperscript{194} Marion B. Lucas, "Berea College in the 1870s and 1880s: Student Life at a Racially Integrated Kentucky College," \textit{The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society}, 9
integration in all parts of life. Some faculty even resigned in protest of the decision. Other alumni created a petition for full recognition of interracial coupling.

In 1877, the disillusioned alumni John T. Robinson wrote Fee: “It seems to me—that which men had long prayed and worked for came upon them in a rush when they were not prepared to receive it. The students were getting along too well—fast growing out of former prejudices and seemed to forget that there ever had been such a state of society as existed a few miles below Berea—but the harmony seemed too real for those over them, and as you well remember, the first seed of discord was sown by Professors when we were really too young to comprehend the outrage done us.” Robinson foreshadowed unfortunate events to come. Below the hill where the town of Berea was blossoming, the rest of Kentucky was aware of what was happening and were not pleased. A state law would soon be passed that would explicitly ban interracial education. We can add, philosophically speaking, that Berea’s actualization was once again causing problems, and the handling of the situation by tentative faculty and administrators was disappointing. It was this series of events that caused a strange historical event, one that is ripe with significance: a period during which Antioch and Berea considered consolidating into one larger college. The debate around the fate of Berea had national ripples. A few years after the proposed consolidation failed, Harvard President Charles William Eliot came to Berea to discuss the nature of telic reform in interracial education and what Berea should do next.

The “Day-Law” and the Considered Consolidation of Antioch and Berea

We are nearing the end of my genealogical survey. Before I end the second phase of this thesis, we must take a cursory glance at one last series of events, the early twentieth century exploration of the consolidation of Antioch and Berea, and the general discussion in higher

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195 See: Shannon H. Wilson, Berea College: An Illustrated History, 47.
196 As cited in: Ibid., 47.
education provoked by the “Day Law.” These events happened well after the early years of Antioch and Berea previously explored. However, these events are important because they reaffirm that both Antioch and Berea saw themselves as part of a connected movement, and they help us better understand these institutions’ relationship to American culture in general.

The proposed consolidation happened under Berea president William G. Frost. Frost is an infamous figure in Berea history and his motives are complex. What is important to understand for our purposes is that when Frost took the presidency in 1892, Berea’s financial backers were dying off, and he recognized a repurposed vision had to be made to a new generation of Northeastern funders whose interests had shifted from their parents’ generation. In the spirit of his hero Horace Mann, he envisioned an education to enculturate those in poverty. He reconstructed Berea’s mission around the poor of Appalachia whose ancestors were largely early Anglo-Saxon veterans of the American Revolutionary War. The narrative of a “lost noble American lineage,” would well serve the financial purposes of the school. However, the narrative made the earlier generation, like Fee, become deeply concerned that the school would lose its historic utopian mission. They were right to be concerned, but the “blow fell” not from Frost’s hand; it came from the outside. In 1904, Kentucky banned interracial education under the Day Law (named after the Kentucky state legislator Breathitt Countian Carl Day): a law with direct aim at Berea. Berea took the case to the United States Supreme Court (Berea College V. Commonwealth of Kentucky, 1908) but lost the case.

197 The Social-Darwinistic turn was on the horizon, and a focus on class-issues emerged in relation to a racist scientism. Although neither “race” nor “poverty” would escape this scientism, it was far easier to promote philanthropy for the white poor than for integrated education during this period. For more see: John S. Haller, Outcasts from Evolution: Scientific Attitudes of Racial Inferiority, 1859-1900 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971).
Earlier, in 1904, a possible solution to the problem (also) came from outside Berea. There was a possibility of consolidating Antioch and Berea: “John Bryan a wealthy farmer, living near Yellow Springs having wide renown as the owner of the largest farm in the world, has offered to lend assistance in effecting the consolidation, and has been in consultation with President Frost of Berea, as well as President Hooper of Antioch.”\textsuperscript{198} Although the consolidation never came to fruition, it did create national ripples.

A year before the Supreme Court case would be decided, a meeting was set up to discuss how Berea should respond to the situation, especially should the Supreme Court uphold Kentucky’s right to segregate education (and Berea in particular) according to race. Charles William Eliot, president of Harvard and a nationally recognized public intellectual, came to the meeting: “President Eliot was one the speakers at a meeting called in the interest of Berea College, Eastern Kentucky. Addresses were also delivered by William G. Frost, the president of the college: Bishop Lawrence, Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, the Rev. Charles F. Dole, president of the Twentieth Century Club: the Rev. John K. Dennison of the Central Congregational Church and Prof. Albert Bushnell Hart.”\textsuperscript{199} At the meeting, Frost expressed his determination to stand firm by the interracial mission of Berea as long as he could. Eliot on the other hand revealed his liberal middle-class Northeastern anti-black racism when he said: “If more than half the students in Harvard College were Negros, perhaps we should think of separating the majority from the minority. There are now twenty, perhaps thirty Negro students at Harvard, but they are absolutely lost in the mass of the five thousand whites, and they have no influence of any sort for

\textsuperscript{198} "Antioch and Berea Colleges: Maybe Consolidated at the Former at Yellow Springs, TO ADMIT ALL RACES, On Equal Terms—Latter School Must Leave Kentucky Because of Co-education of Races," \textit{Herald} (Dayton, OH), February 2, 1904.

\textsuperscript{199} "Eliot Is in Favor of Separation of Negro: Would Advocate It at Harvard If Numbers Were Sufficiently Large, Bishop Lawrence Says Hub Attitude Changes, Colored Men Here Shut Out of Trade, Hotels and Even Sunday Schools, Meeting Is Called in the Interest of Berea, President Frost Says They Hope Still to Overcome Difficulties," \textit{The Boston Herald}, February 15, 1907.
Eliot thought that Berea was a very different case, since it had a majority black student body. He thought Berea’s existence could threaten the established social order, or at least he felt it necessary to express such a view publically in order to protect Harvard’s image. Eliot’s attitudes were indicative of late nineteenth and early twentieth century middle-class values. He reveals just how entrenched racist attitudes were at the time. These middle class values are the very ones that would underlie the rabid expansion of American higher education in the twentieth century.

Berea stayed segregated until the nineteen-fifties and never recovered the robust black student body it had in its early years. It however has never completely lost its idea of integrated education and life. Since the nineteen-sixties, this vital aspect of Berea’s mission has been revitalized and it makes up part of what Berea call its “Great Commitments.” As with Antioch, the early ideals had an irrevocable influence on Berea’s telic orientation, even if some of these ideals lay in dormancy for a period. During this period of dormancy, Berea continued its telic mission of the education and cultivation of the underprivileged of Appalachia, in service of the advancement of a better world. Frost’s decision, as painful and problematic as it was, was not made in vain; Berea would likely not be here today if he had chosen to do otherwise, for better or worse.

Frost decided that it was necessary for the survival of the school that it escape the scrutiny of adverse public attention, and that it support people of color in other ways. Antioch

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200 Ibid.
201 This was not all due to the Day Law. As African-American families steadily moved North in the mid-twentieth century, the demographics of Appalachia changed dramatically.
202 For more on the “Great Commitments,” and the revitalization of this part of Berea’s historic mission see: Shannon H. Wilson, Berea College: An Illustrated History, 161-178.
203 Berea supported several separate African-American institutions throughout this period. They also attempted to promote integrated educational opportunities in Appalachia, though success was varied. For more on this period see: Ibid., 97-159.
on the other hand was already becoming an institution that was willing to be “front and center” of the developments of culture. By the end of the Second World War Antioch had established its commitment to public visibility (often to the bemoaning of administrators), by promoting itself as a center of progressive (and occasionally radical) activity.

Conclusion

I have used the early years of Antioch and Berea to study the creation of actualized utopias in practice. In this chapter, I looked at Berea’s founding philosophy under Fee, the curriculum, and the experiences of students and faculty. Several conclusions can be drawn from this preliminary survey:

1. Actualized Utopia’s rely on a dialectical movement toward a broader and fuller “humanity.”

   Utopias’ putative “counter-cultural practices” are finally revealed not as pure opposition (a definition by negation), but by a negated mediating term pushing toward a broader and fuller personalistic vision of human potential. Telic institutions work most successfully were the gap between possibility and actuality feels most stark. Actualized utopias also develop in calmer periods of history; however, they still fundamentally rely on actualizing what the broader culture has not, or cannot yet, actualize(d). Berea has continued to be a telic community because of how resistant Kentucky was to it. Sometimes a relation of polarity with the actual state of affairs leads to forward movement.

2. Actualized Utopias initially resist gradualist practices.

   Actualized utopias resist gradualism not only because such practices are often not oriented properly toward their ideas and ideals, but also because gradualism at certain moments is not practicable. It is hard, if not impossible, to start an actualized utopia with gradualist practices. On the other hand, rapid change often seems detrimental to facilitating long-term
change in a culture. Actualized utopias, although starting out with an “illuminating flash,” continue with a smaller more controlled guiding light as the year’s progress. As Berea demonstrated, only through strong telicity did meaningful change happen. Only by being uncompromising did Berea create real change (albeit limited) in Kentucky. Later it did compromise some of its values, in service of hopes for gradual change, but that compromise was not severe enough to unmold its telic orientation.

3. Actualized Utopias are institutionalizations of the revitalizing and creative forces in a culture.

Utopias rely on a dialectical movement, as mentioned in Conclusion One. They are a manifestation of a cultural overflow in relation to recalcitrant conservative forces. Berea came into existence in relation to the recalcitrance of Kentucky to a changing world, in particular to a widening recognition of persons in the world. Kentucky’s resistance to change allowed Berea the space to create change. Once this valve of energy was released, Berea’s orientation was molded toward the renewing aspects of culture. Antioch and Berea to this day still see themselves as utopian institutions. Their utopian orientation pushes them ever onwards toward their ideas and ideals.

It is now time to leave behind the beginnings of this genealogical study in order to return to my theoretical framework with new insight. In the next section we will find that the framework does provide a helpful way to tell the story of these schools (a story I have only started in this thesis). This story however has deeper ramifications worth investigating: what are the epistemic, ontological, ethical, and aesthetic aspects of actualized utopias; and what implications do those aspects suggest for actualized utopian projects in the decades to come?

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204 In Berea’s case, this utopian commitment is most clearly seen in the current faculty and administrators.
CONCLUSION

**Toward a Comprehensive Philosophy of Utopia**
*Methodology: Cultural Genealogy (Radical Empiricism and Geisteswissenschaften)*

In this thesis I have constructed an explanatory framework to help demarcate American alternative higher education, from higher education (and the broader culture) in general. Further, I am examining the particular manifestation of life as *Geist*, or self-conscious symbolic life activity, and a particular late development of it at that. As Whitehead might put it, I am interested in the “higher thresholds” of the “higher phases of experience.” In order to follow concepts that are never determinate, that illuminate aspects of the intensive experience and expression of *Geist*, I have chosen to engage and build upon Cassirer’s method for both philosophy and *Geisteswissenschaften*, or cultural/humanistic sciences (in the German sense). In addition, I have structured this thesis in the tradition of Dewey’s denotative method. I explored “a problematic situation” (in Deweyan terminology), and then proposed a Cassireran-inspired framework. I then refined that framework through historical and biographical experiences. Dewey meant for theory to be deployed as a tool to ameliorate *current* problems we meet in experience, and then to refine the theory through further experience. I believe problems of framing and defining cultural processes can be “tested” through historical and cultural research, both that *has been done* and that *is in process*.

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But how can one navigate and have theory modified by historical and sociological data? Cassirer offers an approach that helps answer this question. In *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences*, Cassirer offers the beginnings of a sophisticated theory of cultural science that develops its own particular concepts. Although these concepts are symbolic, they do not reduce life activity to pure “inert material.” Rather, material, psychological, and historical data are used (through hermeneutical technique) to create process-oriented concepts that are not reducible to mathematically determinate, spatialized objects. S.G. Lofts in the introduction to his translation of Cassirer’s *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences*, summarizes the dynamic way in which Cassirer understood cultural concepts:

In the case of the sciences of culture, however, the concept can never subsume the particular under the universal “in the same way.” The particular possesses a certain “indeterminateness” that cannot be overcome. Burckhardt has provided us with a concept of the “Renaissance man,” but no one individual answers to all the properties of this concept. If we turn to consider the particulars of a culture, “we will perceive them to be not only thoroughly different, but even opposed. What we assert of them is just this, that, this opposition notwithstanding, and indeed perhaps just through it, they stand in a certain ideal connection to one another; that each in its own way cooperates in the construction of what we call the ‘spirit’ of the Renaissance or the culture of the Renaissance.” The concepts of culture thus represent a “unity of direction,” a “common task” and not a “unity of being.” They “characterize” but do not “determine” the particular that they subsume under the universal. The aim of the sciences of culture is to establish the structure and form of this common task and activity.\(^\text{207}\)

Cultural concepts, like all concepts, do require a universal, or a grounding from which to interpret data; however they do not become *determinate* like a concept in physics. In physics the individual circumstance should always be subsumed under the universal. Such objects are “pinned down” as a certain sort of “thing.” A cultural concept however, *characterizes* its object. These concepts are not in search of “things,” but teleological, purposive processes. In other words, to universalize in a cultural concept is to illuminate the aims and movement of processes.

\(^{207}\) S.G. Lofts, “Introduction” in *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences: Five Studies*, xxxvi. In this introduction, Lofts directly cites his translation of this text without citations.
We are in search of a unifying description of movement, to find the ideal target that guides the activity of culture, as opposed to a classificatory rule to define a mechanically determined “thing.” Cultural concepts articulate processes, and do not seek to explain inner being as some sort of epiphenomenal detritus.

We can modify the character of cultural concepts through historical and cultural data, but do not determine them. We learn how better to illuminate the relation and movement of the aims of processes we are interested in for the purposes of this inquiry. The question is how much explanatory power a concept like actualized utopia has in characterizing the “facts” of history and culture. Only on the condition that one returns to a close study of history and culture is it possible to learn how one’s concepts need to be modified and reconstructed; how we need to adjust and fix our “sights” to find and illuminate the “target” and movement of these processes. Of course, it would be a “fallacy of misplaced concreteness (philosopher’s fallacy)” to assume that anyone can grasp the fullness of actualized utopian communities of higher learning under any concept (although I believe I adequately account for the utopian experience), but that is all the more reason to turn to the thick experiences that made up these institutions. Only through those experiences can something be said about what, in a concept, should be reconstructed and where a concept hits general explanatory limits.

This methodological framework is thus an extension of Cassirer’s own cultural phenomenology. It is important to remember that Cassirer uses “‘phenomenology’ in the sense

I use “adequacy” in the Whiteheadian sense. That is “the scheme should have developed all those generic notions adequate for the expression of any possible interconnection of things.” Alfred North Whitehead, Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology, xii. By this I take Whitehead to mean that within any inquiry the “generic notions,” our general claims, can account for any of the relations within our system or framework (in principle). My theory of actualized utopia ought to be able adequately to account for anything within these communities. I am not saying that another inquiry could not illuminate other aspects of these communities. All I am suggesting is that I have a framework within which I am confident that I can account for the problematic-situation in which I am interested; whether there are other aspects yet to be “fleshed out” I leave for later inquiries.
Hegel uses it in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* and not in the ‘modern’ (Husserlian) sense. Cassirer identifies his approach with Hegel’s view that phenomenology is the basis of all philosophical knowledge and it must encompass all cultural forms.\(^{209}\) Although I would not go as far as to claim that “phenomenology is the basis of all philosophical knowledge,” I follow suit in using cultural phenomenology as a way of following the trends of *Geist* broadly and not as an attempt to return to the intuitional given.

Also (in general), I follow both Dewey and Cassirer in seeing philosophy as a second order project that critiques and synthesizes the thought of other sciences and disciplines.\(^{210}\) As for my own project, I moved beyond the territory of philosophy when I did a cultural analysis of early Antioch and Berea. One might ask why I attempted to bridge two different territories, one philosophical and one within cultural science. Did I not attempt too much in one project?

The answer is particular to my project. On the one hand, it has been mostly historians and sociologists, or other scholars working within those frames of study, who have done the research available on alternative higher education. Although the cultural scientists have done an excellent job of following the trajectory of these schools, their empirical studies are too narrowly empirical; they do not have the tools to account for how certain structuring(s) of our thinking incline us to take “the given” in narrow and reductive ways. Individual schools of alternative higher education have been treated as processes of *Geist*. The problem lies in the fact that the concept of alternative higher education, under whatever definition has been chosen, has been too determinative. The research has preoccupied itself (mostly) with trying to find a “what” instead


of a “why.” Researchers have for the most part recognized the limitation of such concepts; hence the plethora of definitions and schemas to account for these schools; all of which seem to fall short of their explanatory aims. But actualized utopias are not “things,” as we have seen, but processes set in the midst of other overlapping and nesting cultural processes. Thus, a philosophical lens in the tradition of Cassirer and Dewey is needed to help weave a story of these schools and create more fluid and helpful concepts for this field of study.

On the other hand, philosophers like Cassirer and Dewey are interested in broader questions of what is “warrantedly assertable” about human cultural activity. They rarely narrowed in on particular moments and circumstances in a culture, and if they did, it was most often done to give examples of their broader points about human culture. In our case, to account for actualized utopia is to speak of tangible institutionalizations of the project of knowledge. Actualized utopias are a rare phenomenon that are the exception, rather then the rule, of Geist, and therefore must be discussed in the narrow particular. The philosophies of Dewey and Cassirer are helpful for this project, but my interests here are far more particular than theirs, in fact my interests cross the boundary into cultural science.

My project is set between a rock and hard place; between philosophy and cultural science. I have attempted to develop a method particular to these questions surrounding alternative higher education, questions that find themselves in an aporia between philosophy and cultural science. I have created a genetic, cultural phenomenology; a “cultural genealogy.” I approached a unique problem that the culture sciences have been unable to solve, and have used a radically empirical philosophical system to characterize it, and I then returned to the genetic origin of this site of discourse and traced its early threads in order to refine that system. The

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211 I am not saying I am the first philosopher to be in such a predicament. I am drawn both to Cassirer and Foucault for their ability to find a path through such a non-traditional woods.
genealogical study could, and should, be taken much further. The study needs to be taken into the present. I leave that for later work.

There is enough preliminary data to draw some conclusions. I must return to broader philosophical abstraction to see if we can now characterize actualized utopia (and in particular utopian higher learning) as a process within human culture. To begin this effort we again go to the work of Cassirer. We describe two poles in culture: its conservative and renewing poles. In order to move forward in significant ways, to have a true dialectical movement, telic posturing is required. Actualized utopias, as we shall see, are not only intense nexuses of cultural life, but are an institutionalization of the renewing aspects of culture.

_Telicity and Time: Utopia as a Vital Renewing Cultural Force (Epistemology and Ontology)_

Cassirer characterizes culture as having conservative forces and renewing forces. As discussed in Chapter One, myth and language as symbolic forms are generally more conservative, while art and science as symbolic forms are more progressive or renewing (history as a symbolic form is somewhere in between). I discussed earlier how actualized utopias are intense nexuses (nesting) points of all such cultural activity, both conservative and progressive, although, as we shall see, all these activities are in service of the renewing aspects of culture. I now need to explain in detail what Cassirer means by “renewing” and “conservative” for human culture that is in and constituted by process. More than any other question, the question of how Geist, the energies of spirit, forms thoughts and produces products lies at the center of Cassirer’s philosophy. The answer lies in the “will to formation” that is the drive of Geist’s activity:

The philosophy of symbolic forms has sought from the beginning to establish the path that leads through the concrete productions of [G]eist. By taking this path, the philosophy of symbolic forms finds that it meets with [G]eist everywhere as not the “Will to Power,” but as the “Will to Formation.” It is not the naked domination of the world, but its formation that language, art, knowledge, and religion are struggling with. In all of them we can, of course, find a phase in which they seem bound as if by magic to the guidance
of emotion and the drive of need and will. The “symbolic forms” are used like powers and means of magic to give man the “omnipotence of the will,” and they confirm this omnipotence to man again.\textsuperscript{212}

The symbolic forms however go beyond this “means-ends” relationship: “They [the symbolic forms of culture] must wrestle free of the means-ends relationship in order to arrive at their own purpose—the unity and completeness of their form—which is itself no longer merely purposive, but which appears as a ‘purposiveness without purpose.’”\textsuperscript{213} They are ever in-search of a completeness (\textit{Vollkommenheit}) of worldview instead of fulfilling purely instrumental desire. Neither Cassirer nor I\textsuperscript{214} would deny that the symbolic forms are the \textit{tools} of humanity; rather they become \textit{tools} beyond basic necessity and the confines of our narrow desires. They help us envision the world more fully by living and moving beyond us. This will-to-formation is an ever-developing process; any complete (\textit{vollkommen}) attempt at fulfilling the “picture” becomes static.

To \textit{form} at first is vital, but upon formation there is a product of human cultural life. The products of culture often become conservative structures and no longer the dynamic creations of \textit{Geist} itself. There is a certain strain of conservatism in human life that is an attention (easily overdone) on the formative abstractness that \textit{Geist}, in the present, trails behind itself in its products. The beauty (purposeless purposiveness) of human culture is (at its best) that the conservative products of culture never completely drown the vital creative aspect of \textit{Geist}. For Cassirer, genius, the creative force of \textit{Geist}, finds a dynamic synthesis of feeling and form: “In every field it is the truly productive and, in the highest sense, creative minds that have most strongly felt this correlativeity and cooperation. As far as language is concerned, there are among

\textsuperscript{212} Ernst Cassirer, \textit{The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms-The Metaphysics of Symbolic Forms}, 28.
\textsuperscript{213} \textit{Ibid.}, 28. A direct reference to, and clever repurposing of, Kant’s theory of the reflective judgment of the beautiful as “purposiveness without purpose.” See Footnote 79.
\textsuperscript{214} Nor Kant.
the great creators of language of course perhaps none who did not at times feel the given world of linguistic forms as a limitation and bond, who would not have complained, as Goethe did, that he had to ruin both life and art in this ‘poorest stuff.’”\footnote{Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms-The Metaphysics of Symbolic Forms, 17.} To be creative is to soften the rigid layer of formalization and find suppleness and life anew.

Although geniuses often feel they failed in their task, as the finished product never contains all the possibilities of the artists’ (in the broad Kantian and Cassireren sense) reflective intuition,\footnote{It is important to remember that (as I discussed earlier) by “art/artist/artistic” I mean a certain horizon of meaning, in which all humans can (and do) participate. I follow Cassirer and Kant in seeing genius as an artistic modality. This does not mean however that a scientist or mathematician does not utilize to great affect such a life-world. To the contrary, many insights come from the interaction between art as a symbolic form of culture, and the other symbolic forms of human culture.} we the “audience” see something different: “Where he sees too little, we are overwhelmed by too much: where he felt an inner inadequacy, we stand before an impression of an inexhaustible plenitude we believe we will never be able to fully appropriate…And with this we also realize why the truly great works of culture never confront us as something essentially stiff and solidified that restricts and hinders the free movement of the spirit in this rigidity. Their content exists for us only by virtue of the fact that is continually taken possession of anew and as a result always created anew.”\footnote{Ernst Cassirer, The Logic of the Cultural Sciences: Five Studies, 111.} The great works of culture, keep their vital aspect by always being taken by us and revitalized by us through their ability to be “repossessed.” The vital repossession of the products of culture is not a non-symbolic activity; it is a type of symbolic activity:

\begin{quote}
It is only by such dynamic comparisons, not in static images, that it is possible to describe form as form-that-is-becoming…. Just as Scholastic metaphysics coined the concepts of \textit{natura naturata} and \textit{natura naturans}, so the philosophy of symbolic forms must distinguish between \textit{forma formans} and \textit{forma formata}. The interplay between both is what constitutes the swing of the pendulum of intellectual life itself. The \textit{forma formans} that becomes \textit{forma formata}, which it must become for the sake of its own self-preservation without ever becoming reduced to it, retains the power to regain itself from
\end{quote}
it, to be born again as forma formans—this is what is distinctive of the development of 
 [G]eist and culture.\textsuperscript{218}

\textit{Actualized Utopias} are sites of the rebirth of forma formans by and through forma formata. From 
the beginning I have used the word “actual” with this very sense in mind. I do not mean by 
“actual” anything save a dynamic, symbolic product of culture. \textit{Actualized utopias} are great 
“works” of culture for the illumination and revitalization (dynamic accretion of value) of certain 
immanent and imminent possibilities. To be able to support the creativity of others, the 
institution must be more than its individual actors or even the culture that surrounds it. Although 
Cassirer focuses on the pure form of the renewing process, his analysis applies to its 
institutionalization, which is to say its collective historical instantiation, in utopia: “Here again 
the thing created does not simply stand \textit{vis-à-vis} or over against the creative process; on the 
contrary, new life continually pours into these ‘molded forms,’ preserving them and ‘preventing 
their rigidification.’”\textsuperscript{219} \textit{Actualized utopias} are a historical institutionalization of the renewal of 
culture. Whether they have one telic achievement in mind, or many, is secondary to how they go 
about actualizing that goal. Their actualization of that goal on a small scale allows vital symbolic 
activity to return to its telic mold and to be revitalized. These institutions are molded in a telic 
direction, and that orientation is not easily shifted. It follows that all \textit{actualized utopias} are (in a 
sense) institutions of higher learning. They are interested in the “accretion of value” in the 
“higher phases of experience”\textsuperscript{220} as it is manifested in the revitalization of culture. Put simply, 
they are institutions for the extension and transformation of symbolic activity (in particular, the 
field of knowledge).

\textsuperscript{218} Ernst Cassirer, \textit{The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms}-\textit{The Metaphysics of Symbolic Forms}, 19. 
\textsuperscript{219} Ernst Cassirer, \textit{The Logic of the Cultural Sciences: Five Studies}, 113. 
\textsuperscript{220} For more on “the accretion of value in the higher phases of experience.” See Footnote 205.
In the mid-nineteenth century some Americans began to recognize and articulate the epistemological and ontological aspects of utopia (like the Greeks had long ago), and therefore, they further refined and reconstructed the institutionalization of the utopian drive. The project of knowledge became all the more reaffirmed in the mission of actualized utopia. In Europe, the idealists had attempted to articulate the vital, renewing aspect of culture (as Bildung or formation/growth itself) in its most general form, as instituted in the grand project of the university. Unfortunately, the university proved too large and too indebted to the forma formata of the aspiring German nation-state, to actualize the ideal institutions of Germany’s foremost philosophers. The actualized utopia certainly has its own limits, but by its very institutionalization, it always strives for an illumination and revitalization of the immanently and imminently possible, while the university is continually driven back into merely repetitive symbolic activity and into the present and past state of affairs. The risk of such actualized utopias, of course, is immense, and they usually do not survive for very long.

What happens when utopian institutions fail and are forgotten in the annals of time? Were they truly pointless? Did it matter if Black Mountain College existed? Cassirer’s answer to this question, as it pertains to all the products of culture, has particular importance for the actualized utopia and its relation to the advancement of knowledge:

There are certainly also countless things in the domain of cultural goods that disappear, that are forever lost to mankind. For even these goods have a material side that renders them vulnerable. The fire in the library at Alexandria destroyed many things that would have been of the greatest value for our knowledge of antiquity; and most of Leonardo’s

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221 Cassirer’s best labors in the first half of his career were devoted to understanding the project of creating the object of knowledge in order to know it, and also if and how this might be both the success and pathology of the West. Although the first three volumes are currently not available in English, the fourth and final volume (finished at a later date than the first three) has fortunately been translated for our benefit. See: Ernst Cassirer, The Problem of Knowledge: Philosophy, Science, and History since Hegel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950). I see the “project of knowledge” (advancement of knowledge) as the manifestation(s), in any given period, of the “problem of knowledge.”
paintings are lost to us because the colors in which they were painted have not proven to be durable. But even in these cases the individual work remains tied to the whole as if by invisible threads. If it no longer exists in its particular form, it nevertheless has exerted its effects, which have intervened in one way or another in the development of culture and have perhaps determined its course decisively at one point or another.\textsuperscript{222}

The very actualization of these schools, even for a short while, has an irrevocable, and often unforeseen, impact on the broader culture, on the accretion of value in “the higher phases of experience.” Most often, they open up more possibilities in a human culture than were previously recognized. They look forward and not only “see a target no one else sees,” but also “help illuminate the possibility of that target.” This is a sort of social genius. Their very actualization is a recognition of what is truly possible. Such recognition has ethical (and aesthetic) implications too, as I will discuss in the next section.

Renewing the Horizons of Human Culture: Dynamic Dialectical Progress and the Beloved Community (Ethics and Aesthetics)

As we discussed in the chapter on Berea (Chapter 4), it is necessary for actualized utopias to have a dialectical movement to complete their goal of opening up more opportunity for human life and dignity, and to escape the sort of oppositionalism caused by flattening the symbol and its object in service of some singular vision. Often such an adherence to dialectical movement gives rise to a sort of “counter-cultural aesthetic.” In this section, I attempt to elaborate further the difference between cultish static oppositionalism, or what Hegel called “bad infinities,”\textsuperscript{223} and dynamic dialectical movement that recognizes the other as another person. I also further elaborate the aesthetic/ethical horizon offered by such a dialectical movement.

Imbedded in the ethical aspects of dialectical movement, in service and in search of the other, is the question of what are the best techniques for the transformation and improvement of

\textsuperscript{222} Ernst Cassirer, \textit{The Logic of the Cultural Sciences: Five Studies}, 127.

a society. Within their situated context, both Mann and Fee saw the actualization of a certain _telic_ ethical community life as a better tactic than the mere gradual amelioration of unethical life, because the former offers a rupturing and engaging reflection on what is possible. As I already noted, _actualized utopias_ are a sort of artistic motif manifested as community. These communities’ actualization is a “painting” that reveals new dimensions to life and culture previously thought only on the very distant horizons of possibility, or not even understood _as_ a possibility. If these communities can be actualized, so must there be other possibilities _not yet_ recognized but that are already immanent and imminent within the culture, and that have _yet_ to be actualized.

As we have already noted, for Fee, gradualism was often another sort of oppositionalism. Unlike Richard Wagner, who used a mythic flattening of subject and object in order to give his singular vision of a better world, gradualists sometimes seem to take the opposite but (often equally static) approach. These gradualists recognize their counter-parts to be wrong, they even go so far as to recognize that their counter-parts are also a part of the future and need to be slowly integrated into it; however, at the end of the day, they do not believe that their counter-parts are redeemable at the present moment. Although most of the time there seems to be much in favor of this approach, at certain genuine tipping points in a culture, gradualists ultimately reaffirm the status quo instead of recognizing and supporting the dynamic trajectory a culture could, or at least _ought to_, take. The period up to the American Civil War is an example of such a tipping point. Clay’s gradualism merely reaffirmed the “bad-infinity” of refusing to recognize African slaves as persons, instead of moving toward genuine social change. Clay was too misanthropic to believe that those against emancipation could be redeemed, but such misanthropism can be as static as the domination of others.
In the case of actualized utopias in general, once the telic orientation has been concretized through their very existence, these institutions often allow for ameliorist compromises, as long as they are in service of protecting and maintaining the original, vital, telic orientation. For many of these institutions, these compromises are a never-ending point of contention, and I acknowledge that such equilibrium is difficult to manage. Again, it is no surprise that very few of these communities survive. To maintain the dialectical movement toward the good, without falling into mere gradualism, or into domination, is one of the chief challenges of utopian community life.

This is not to say all cultural movement is dialectical. On the other hand, it would be hard to deny that genuine points of profound change in a culture do have a dialectical aspect. To play with radical possibility is to accept what is dialectical with the actual “state of affairs.” To recognize the tension the “could be” or “ought to be” has with the “now” is to recognize a difference between “you” and what many in the current culture recognize as “the state of affairs.” It is important to remember, however, that for dialectical movement to be truly expansive, it ought not bend others in service of some utopian horizon of possibility. Rather, people should be shown how to recognize such possibilities for themselves. We must have faith that such recognition is possible. We ought to recognize the dignity of those “other” persons, whose horizon is invisible to us. We should have a dynamic vision between the present state of affairs and what “could be,” but can do nothing but offer the vista. We cannot demand of others that they adhere to our vision, unless we turn to the cult yet again. The price is that those who reflectively intuit the movement, and who may be oppressed by the current state of affairs, will be in a cruel position; Ada Shepard at Antioch is not alone in her suffering.\footnote{224}

\footnote{224 I discussed Ada Shepard earlier in the Antioch section (Chapter 3) of this thesis. See Footnotes 131-142.}
To achieve this “could be,” without falling into a cult, a respect for persons, for *Geist* as it is manifested in individuals and communities, ought to be acknowledged. Also, those who are oppressed most by a culture, should not only be supported in the process of becoming active-agents, but also should be better prepared for a world that will likely not recognize them. Certainly we should hold accountable those who refuse to give such recognition, but at the same time we should prepare the offspring of *actualized utopias* for the shape and contours of the broader culture. The aims of the vision of the *actualized utopia* should have “the beloved community” in sight. The utopian vision should keep to the humanization and expansion of the recognition of possibilities, beyond its own vision, as the long-term goal. Without this approach, utopias will always incline to their shadow, to domination, to the violent side of renewal, to change as dominion instead of change as freedom.

**Possibilities for Utopian Higher Learning Communities in the Next Forty Years**  
*The Semi-Autonomous University College, the Private College, and the Monastery*

In this final section I discuss the possibilities for actualizing a utopia in the present and future. I limit myself to envisioning projects for the next thirty to forty years. Yet again, although there is much more genetic ground to traverse in future work, I will explore some preliminary ideas given our preliminary study.

We live in a very different era than the one that cultivated the first generation of *actualized American higher learning utopias*. There is no longer as much hope, at least among intellectuals, that the world is changeable—that we *could* perfect ourselves. It is likely that the American empire is in a period of decline. We do not seem to have found a way to renew the vital aspect of cultural life. With this dark cloud upon the American mind, what are the possible *possibilities* for utopia? Given what we have gleaned through this study, I see at least three possible models available. One that could respond to the immediate situation, *the semi-***
autonomous utopian university college; another for development in the near future (the next ten to twenty years), the private utopian college; and one that is long term, the most needed model, the utopian monastery.

Given our immediate situation, the semi-autonomous university college seems the most viable option and the one that can do the most “work.” It is no longer as easy to open up a stand-alone college as it was a generation ago. The amount needed indebts the school to funders who may or may not have the best of intentions. To a degree, this indebtedness to funders has always been a challenge in higher education. However, today, the per capita amount needed to start a school is much larger, which means one has all the more people to convince of the project. Schools that try alternative funding models put themselves in jeopardy of facing a broader culture that is apathetic at best, and has animosity toward such projects at worst. Further, the world of late-capitalism is not hospitable to experiments that do not have immediate tangible outcomes. The actualized utopia struggles ever harder against the ever-stronger cultural forces in modern America. Given the rise of honors colleges, a possible avenue for the utopian college might be tried. Honors colleges are looked upon fondly by the current age of narrow minded administrators, as they bring in students with high GPAs (which help increase the school’s U.S. News and World Reports/Princeton Review ranking), require less oversight as students are self-motivated, and despite the labor intensive attention to students, cost little in the overall budget compared to what they bring in. These utopian honors colleges would gain the benefit of broader institutional support and protection. Currently, these colleges have had little guidance by the intellectual community. Long-term deployment should be sought in these spaces.

In the middle to long term however, these utopian communities will still fall prey to the quantitative biopower politics of education in America. These communities still will be highly
vulnerable to the challenges facing universities in modern America. A private college, developed with new mechanisms of funding, if it could be orchestrated, would have some advantages in the “medium view.” Some possible support mechanisms would be a restructuring of residential life that allows (with more ease) distance-learning opportunities for students when they need it. Also, as most citizens of America will have little job security in the foreseeable future, and will have many different careers during their lifetimes, one could have a school that offers far more opportunities for higher learning at any age. One could dissociate the current age brackets associated with colleges. The private utopian college would take extremely careful long term planning in order to have any chance of success.

Beyond the mere practical questions lies a deeper philosophical one: What does it mean to be telic in our age? Although there is no one-way to be telic, I can say something about how one might respond to the Zeitgeist of America today. As I already suggested, the American empire is probably in decline. Whatever development continues in American culture, it will likely not look as it has in the past. It is also very likely that human civilization may be in a broader decline. We may advance in knowledge for a few hundred years, but the current trajectory does not bode well for renewal. Given the trajectory of culture, perhaps the actualized utopias to come should not offer a vision of human perfectibility, so much as of fallibility and loss. How do you change a culture, in decline, for the better?

In such a frame of mind we now approach a final possible model, for the long-term. That is a utopian monastery of higher learning. Typically monasteries institutionalize the most conservative forces of a culture, the religious and mythic symbolic forms. They preserve, in a

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225 Recent research has sought to describe this modern relationship to work as a whole “class” of society. For an example of such literature see: Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011).
secluded community, knowledge and a life different from the current world. There is another direction a monastery could take, and many times has taken. What if a monastery’s seclusion was aimed at the betterment of the world? What if it was a place kept for humanistic knowledge, in service of the world, that, while acknowledging the world cannot be perfect (in the millennial sense), might make the world less cruel and more humane. What if we taught our children that we lost the battle to revitalize our culture, and that they will suffer massive environmental and economic consequences because of it, but in spite of the lost battle, they might still be able to change a world we put in decline? We ought to turn to the secluded community of memory, where the memory of the world as it “has been” could be used to remind people of what “could be.” Such a monastery could be a safe haven for those wandering souls in search of a community that is more than their own potential genius. These monasteries would actualize a possibility for humane corners of the world in what will very likely be an in-humane world. This vision is far from our current moment, and because of this distance, should be “hazy.” The details are not quite on the horizon. Yet they should be pondered. Actualized utopia in a world of suffering is where we search. Like Plotinus, we take whom we can in, and help illuminate possibilities, in full recognition of a destabilizing (and transforming) civilization.
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UTOPIA AND HUMAN CULTURE: ALTERNATIVE COMMUNITIES OF HIGHER LEARNING IN AMERICA

Major Professor: Randal E. Auxier

Publications:

