



UNITED
STATES
MILITARY
ACADEMY

WEST POINT, NEW YORK

The Eleventh
Sol Feinstone Lecture

on

THE
MEANING OF FREEDOM

by

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8 November 1983

The United States Military Academy is pleased to sponsor an annual lecture series on the Meaning of Freedom. It is significant that this lecture program has been made possible by the generosity of the late Mr. Sol Feinstone, a dedicated American patriot whose commitment to the ideals of the American Revolution led him to devote many years of effort, as well as considerable personal resources, to the collection of important letters, manuscripts, and books dealing with our heritage of freedom. His donation of these items to libraries and educational institutions insures that the message which they proclaim will be preserved and transmitted to future generations of Americans.

Mr. Feinstone's abiding faith in a brotherhood of free nations of men has found further expression in several lecture series which he has endowed in order to permit prominent Americans to interpret The Meaning of Freedom.

The U. S. Corps of Cadets and the staff and faculty of the Military Academy are pleased to recognize the generosity and loyalty of this great American for providing a living endowment in the defense of freedom.

THE MEANING OF FREEDOM*

General Scott, distinguished guests, men and women of the Academy:

I thank you very, very much. It is an honor to be here this evening. And it is humbling, as always, to be at an institution so much more ancient than my own (for the University of Chicago has not yet celebrated its hundredth birthday.) You are in fact — although you may not realize it looking at me — about twice as old as we are. Of course we do share, through our Gothic architecture and its symbolism, attachment to an antiquity far deeper and older than our chronological ages.

We share also — the Academy and the University — an attachment to tradition and a concern that tradition be preserved, and indeed even invented. It is said that during the University of Chicago's first year the suggestion was made that any person desiring to establish a tradition should present the same in writing; after lying on the table for two weeks, it could be established by a two-thirds vote. We now regard the traditions derived from that era as having existed from the beginnings of time. I'm sure you have similar ones. At the same time, we know that even our traditions change. With the increased achievement of genuine diversity and educational opportunity, I hope that new traditions have been established that will soon seem almost as old as time.

The theme of the Feinstone Lecture is truly awesome. Still more ancient in power and resonance, it is timeless in its significance for human life and social purpose. At the same time, over the course of history, the interpretation and understanding of the meaning of freedom have undergone variations, debate, and changes of emphasis as historical need and circumstance have shaped its crucial questions.

I should like to talk this evening about higher education and the meaning of freedom in its institutions — in short, about academic freedom — and about the contribution of higher education to human freedom and its possibilities considered more broadly. These two topics are related, indeed inseparable. They speak to one of the important ways in which we can give enduring reality to the meaning of freedom in its widest sense.

I shall argue that the concept of academic freedom is not at all academic, that it is one of the freedoms to be cherished and thoughtfully defended in our society. Like all important freedoms, it is not always comfortable, and it is never automatic. Its cases and defenses are

*The eleventh Sol Feinstone Lecture on "The Meaning of Freedom," presented at the United States Military Academy on November 8, 1983. Text is an edited version of the address. Copyright 1984 by Hanna H. Gray.

always complex. But its sustenance is central to realizing the values and benefits of knowledge and education in our society; central, indeed, to the health of our society and the vital freedom of its citizens.

That may seem a large claim. Academic freedom has never been easy to define. It has often been thought simply identical with the right of free speech and therefore, when asserted as different and as specific to academic institutions, as a kind of special privilege sought in the interest of a special group to protect the security of a special class of people. Moreover, it is often thought that the system of academic tenure and its connection to the concept of academic freedom give confirmation of that. And it is sometimes asserted that assaults on academic freedom might once have been a danger (for example, in the early 1950's) but that we are well beyond that now.

To understand why academic freedom matters, we have to begin with why universities matter. Under that term I include other kinds of institutions which aim at providing higher education as well; universities are likely, however, to participate most fully in the missions of research and scholarship and in education both undergraduate and graduate or professional.

While the particular goals and characters of individual universities will differ, they are — and no one should forget that they are — *special purpose* institutions. That purpose is very extensive — the preservation, discovery, and dissemination of knowledge. But it is limited to these aims and thereby distinctive. The essential conditions of the academic profession and its environment must respond to that set of goals. By the same token, the all-determining educational mission, which speaks in fact to a larger social good and to the public interest, must be the source and focus of those conditions. Hence both universities and the faculty and students who constitute their communities must be free to pursue their distinctive mission as fully as possible if the public good is to be served.

And that, quite simply, requires what we call academic freedom. Its obverse lies in the acceptance of and rigorous adherence to a wide range of responsibilities. At their heart lies the commitment to intellectual integrity, to a respect for reason and disciplined imagination, to a regard for the convictions and explorations of others, to civilized and reasoned discussion and debate, to humility and restraint in the face of complexity, ambiguity, and uncertainty when doctrinaire simplicism might offer tempting panaceas. Those responsibilities include also a refusal to abuse such freedom, to abdicate the obligations of citizenship, to use the institution as a sanctuary from those or distort its proper role by trying to convert it to other goals which, however praiseworthy, are not distinctively its own.

Let me say something about the ways in which the work of universities may serve the public good. And let us begin with the mission of education itself and what we hope maybe the contribution of an educated people not only to the strength of citizenship and immediate social productivity, but also in terms of educated capacity and its power to expand the personal and cultural horizons of humankind.

These, too, appear large claims. There have always been voices to maintain that education is not in fact the best way to educate. Mark Twain announced that he had never let his schooling interfere with his education. An ultimate (and anonymous) put-down says that education just enables you to learn more than an educator. We are all familiar with the play between the school of experiences, located securely in Hard Knocks territory and the education of books, floating in an ivory tower. The well-known philosopher Pete Seeger gave a nice twist to this equation when he asked, "Do you know the difference between education and experience? Education is when you read the fine print. Experience is what you get when you don't."

The case for higher education can be read in the words of Alfred North Whitehead: "The justification for a university is that it preserves the connection between knowledge and the zest of life, by uniting the young and the old in the imaginative consideration of learning. The university imparts information, but it imparts it imaginatively. At least, this is the function which it should perform for society. A university which fails in this respect has no reason for existence. . . . Imagination is not to be divorced from the facts: it is a way of illuminating the facts. . . . The tragedy of the world is that those who are imaginative have but slight experience, and those who are experienced have feeble imaginations. Fools act on imagination without knowledge; pedants act on knowledge without imagination. The task of a university is to weld together imagination and experience."

That emphasis on imagination, on the illumination of learning in contrast to the mere possession of facts is, I take it, what we mean by education in its serious sense. That desire to see how imaginative knowledge may shed light on experience gives meaning to our belief that education is not only a good in itself but is ultimately part of the larger reality of life rather than a way station on the road to something called "experience" or, simply, "the real world."

T.S.Eliot said, "It is. . . a part of the function of education to help us to escape, not from our own time — for we are bound by that — but from the intellectual and emotional limitations of our time." That suggests something of the sense in which education helps us make a connection with what has come before as well as what exists outside ourselves and our experience, to look beyond the narrow confines of

the self and its constraints, to imagine and empathize with as well as to appreciate the experience and culture of a larger world and of other people.

So conceived, education must have to do with developing the gift and encouraging the practice and growth of intellectual liberty. It should aim at the acquisition of critical judgment, of knowing how to get at knowledge, of understanding what it is to arrive at heightened perspective and reasoned conclusions. Above all, it should instill some understanding of what it is to see the relatedness of different things, of how an event or issue or idea or method here is related to others elsewhere. It is important to know and respect something of the terrain of human knowledge and its methods, of one's own cultural heritage and that of others. It is important to develop the capacities of independent analysis, to develop a sense of the context in which things happen and in which judgments are made. All these qualities are needed to bring some wisdom and purposeful direction to the conduct of our individual and social lives for the long term. We are aware that the rapid pace of technological change has consequences for the future that are to a large extent uncertain and unknowable; we need to be directors and not victims of those forces.

There is nothing, said Goethe, more frightening than active ignorance. Our society, for the preservation and extension of its freedom and its purposes requires an educated citizenry. Education is a public good in a free society and in a world of interconnected cultures.

There are, of course, many definitions and understandings of freedom. It may mean our individual freedom to choose, to make choices among a number of alternatives or to choose what *not* to do (which may be sometimes an even greater freedom.) Another significant tradition defines freedom as the freedom to do what we ought to do, as the voluntary acceptance of moral imperatives. Yet another would emphasize the social or civic guarantees of freedom under law. These connotations are not necessarily contradictory; they can be seen as different dimensions of what it might mean to be a "free" person or live in a "free" society. Intellectual freedom is relevant to all these senses. Its possession and thoughtful exercise have never made life easy. Freedom is, like most things of value, something of a burden. It can be a burden to be able to choose, to have to think, to follow the dictates of one's reasoned choice or conviction. It can be a burden to listen to other people and to reexamine one's assumptions. But we know that while life will not be easier, it will be richer. Intellectual freedom does not make it simpler to look at the world, for knowledge is always complicating. The more you know, the more complicated you know everything is. And the more complicated, the harder it may be to make

a particular judgment or decision. Yet the complicating effects of knowledge make for the enhancement, if not the ease, of human existence.

The other principal mission of universities has to do with research and scholarship, with the reinterpretation of enduring questions and sources, with new discovery and the creation of new knowledge. Given that mission, universities and those who work in them are bound to cause controversy.

Scholarship at its best is always controversial. There are always those who find it "useless." Why, for example, should one study the texts of Milton or the idea of toleration yet again? How many books have been written on the *Aeropagitica* and why re-examine it? And sometimes scholarship will be controversial because it's thought to be a little crazy; originality can be quite unsettling. The same holds of scientific research. Many findings which shaped the evolution of the modern natural sciences were thought unacceptable at the time of their discovery. We have seen two instances this very year. Last month Professor Chandrasekhar of the University of Chicago was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics. The award was made for work he had done in 1930 when the then establishment in the world of astrophysics said, because it challenged what was believed and understood and known, "This isn't possible." Professor Chandrasekhar's discovery simply could not be right; it did not fit into the accepted pattern of assumptions and expectations. Now it has been recognized as pathbreaking and tested work of the highest significance. In the same month Dr. Barbara McClintock won the Nobel Prize in the biomedical sciences. She, too, had worked in her own way and had brought forward a thesis which people thought eccentric; biological processes didn't, couldn't work that way and had never been known to.

These two examples say something to us about the nature of basic research. Leaps forward don't occur all at once. The work itself requires a long period of germination and time for its completion and again for its effect. Universities are places where such work is done. Their purpose is to provide an environment in which it is pursued and stimulated and tested no matter how unfashionable it may appear and no matter how long it may take to realize its full conclusions. Universities must encourage the taking of risks, acknowledge that existing wisdom will be challenged and controversy follow. They must support basic inquiry as a long-term activity of unpredictable outcome. Among its results, by the way, may be the directly useful applications which such basic research frequently and unexpectedly makes possible.

Side by side with admiration and respect for the work of scholarship and research, there has always existed another and conflicting tradition. It reflects suspicion and skepticism about the value and character of such work, a fear of new knowledge and discovery, a fear of the consequences knowledge may bring. These concerns arise not only because it may fail to fit into preconceived notions as to what is or is probably or ought to be true, not only because it provokes us to think in painful or unfamiliar ways, and perhaps to change our minds, but also out of our knowledge that the uses, or abuses, of knowledge can indeed be very dangerous. The dramatic instances of nuclear physics with its known effects in application, both positive and destructive, and of genetic biology, where these are largely unknown but seem potentially harmful as well as beneficent, are constantly before us.

Of course the fault rests not with knowledge or deepened understanding but with the ways in which these are utilized. The issue lies in the decision that people make (or fail to make) about the application of knowledge or the control of technology. The fear of new knowledge and of the threat it implies is natural and pervasive. It may be prompted by the best intentions or manipulated by the worst; its face may be that of a cautious pragmatism or of an extreme anti-intellectualism.

Universities and those who do the work of research and teaching and learning exist in an environment in which they must constantly be challenging those around them. President Robert Maynard Hutchins of the University of Chicago once made the following observation: "The University is the institution that performs its highest, its unique service to society by declining to do what the society thinks it wants, by refusing to be useful, in the common acceptance of that word, and by insisting instead that its task is understanding and criticism. It is a center of independent thought."

Our entire society and each of us would be poorer without centers of independent thought. But it is often difficult to tolerate them and to regard their role as a social benefit, given the challenge they represent. Ours is a society in which democratic convictions and goals can be distorted by the tyrannies of public opinion and their tendency to stifle or limit the development of knowledge. "The greatest dangers to liberty," said Justice Brandeis, "lurk in insidious encroachment by men of zeal, well-meaning but without understanding." Intellectual liberty and independence of responsible judgment and action are essential to our political and constitutional system. Universities exist to develop and strengthen those qualities. It should be clear that there is a vital public interest, and not simply a particular one, in enabling universities to maintain an environment in which they can perform the tasks

and observe the values they exist to serve. They must be able to do so in the face of pressures and impulses, both external and internal, which could destroy or erode their requisite autonomy.

And so I return to my initial theme, the meaning and significance of academic freedom. In the words of Fritz Machlup, "It is the purpose of academic freedom to create in institutions of higher learning an atmosphere conducive to the critical examination of all accepted doctrines and to the development of new thought, as well as to the defense of old views that have fallen out of fashion." And further, "Academic freedom consists in the absence of, or protection from, such restraints or pressures — chiefly in the form of sanctions threatened by state or church authorities or by the authorities, faculties or students of colleges and universities, but occasionally also by other power groups in society — as are designed to create in the minds of academic scholars . . . fears and anxieties that may inhibit them from freely studying and investigating whatever they are interested in, and from freely discussing, teaching or publishing whatever opinions they have reached."

Academic freedom is not identical with the constitutional right of free speech which guarantees that unpopular speech is not to be punished by the government, that Congress cannot make laws which interfere with free speech. While academic freedom is related to free speech, it is related above all to the purposes of those special purpose institutions we have been discussing. Academic freedom means not just securing the absence of governmental sanctions against free utterance. It has to do with the positive establishment within universities of people's freedom to pursue the truth, to pursue research and scholarship, to be exposed to different points of view, to express the truth and its questions as each individual conceives these, to challenge and not simply conform to some accepted or prescribed universe. As federal judges require the certainty of tenure to perform their special task — the even-handed rendering of justice without fear or favor — so scholars and teachers require a specific protection to perform theirs. To quote Machlup once again: "The occupational work of the vast majority of people is largely independent of their thought and speech. The professor's work *consists* of his thought and speech."

If society benefits from the work of universities, and if that work is founded in thought and speech, and in the conditions and objectives of its free pursuit and expression, then it must follow, too, that academic freedom is a larger social good rather than a restricted privilege. Academic freedom has to do with the freedom of knowledge and discovery to take their course, the freedom of students to learn and of teachers to instruct, the freedom of society to benefit. Academic freedom is an institutional as well as individual need. It is essential to

the institutional environment, to the pursuit of institutional objectives, to the institution's capacity to protect its appropriate autonomy and that of its individual members. The threats to such freedom may be dramatic assaults on the integrity of universities and their processes or on the views and ways of scholars and scholarship or on the substance and implications of knowledge held to be useless or dangerous or corrupting. Less visible and even more threatening in a sense are the tendencies, unintended and quietly erosive, which can weaken academic freedom by inattention and failures of judgment, by the gradual accumulating acceptance of limitations, practices or procedures incompatible with its basic purposes.

Such threats are not necessarily external. They may be internal, when standards of orthodoxy or popularity or personal partisanship are applied by members of an academic community against one another or when authority is misused. They may arise from political motives both within and without. Academic freedom is lost when the university becomes the captive or advocate of a special point of view unrelated to its special purpose, which has to do with furthering and protecting the free exercise of critical intellect.

The institution of tenure is integrally related to academic freedom. Tenure is not primarily a system of job security, although it provides that for its possessors. Above all, it aims to guarantee for academic people, and for academic institutions, whose entire work consists in thought and teaching and publication the security to think and teach and publish as freely as possible. There is an institutional and not only a personal interest in academic freedom and the system of tenure which supports it. Security of tenure and of process helps ensure that people will be free to take risks, to follow their best ideas, to carry out their independent mandate. It helps ensure for the university that its long-term objectives and requisite autonomy are not sacrificed to the pressures and interests of the moment, that it can concentrate on and strengthen its special purpose. And it helps ensure for society continuing access to the benefits which flow from the effective realization of that purpose.

It is the driving paradox of commitment to freedom that we are asked over and over to renew and prove that commitment through judgment on difficult cases and through the defense of those with whom we may disagree profoundly. It is often hard to identify and unravel the complex issues which academic freedom presents for understanding and resolution. But that is indeed the meaning of freedom in a society which respects the liberating and energizing forces of reason and knowledge. The institution of academic freedom and the goals it seeks to further contribute to our human and civil

freedoms and extend our social possibilities. Its workings require strength and confidence in confronting the unknown. Its ultimate benefits lie in our will and competence to master rather than be mastered by forces that might otherwise deprive us of purposeful freedom, and whatever degree of wisdom and effectiveness it may achieve.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER . . .

Mrs. Hanna Holborn Gray brings a long list of accomplishments to this year's Sol Feinstone Lecture. By becoming the 10th President of the University of Chicago on July 1, 1978, Mrs. Gray became the first woman to serve as the chief executive of a major American coeducational institution of higher learning. Before this, she had already achieved several other significant "firsts" in her career to include being the first woman appointed as Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Northwestern University in 1972, and as Provost of Yale University in 1974. In addition, from 1977 to 1978, Mrs. Gray had the distinction of serving as the acting president of Yale. She does not enjoy counting "first woman" honors, however, preferring, instead, to focus on "bests" instead of "firsts."

Born in 1930 in Heidelberg, Germany, Mrs. Gray immigrated to the United States when her father, the respected European Historian, Hajo Holborn, was dismissed from his academic posts in Germany because of his opposition to the Nazi party. Naturalized in 1940, she enrolled at Bryn Mawr College at the age of 15 and received her B.A. in 1950. She was a Fulbright scholar at Oxford University from 1950 to 1952, and received her Ph.D in history from Harvard in 1957.

Besides her impressive achievements as an educator and administrator, Mrs. Gray has distinguished herself equally as a historical scholar with special interests in the history of humanism, and politics in the Renaissance and Reformation. She has taught at Bryn Mawr, Harvard, Yale, and Northwestern, and has been a Visiting Professor at the University of California at Berkeley and a Visiting Scholar for Phi Beta Kappa.

Mrs. Gray is a member of several distinguished historical and educational organizations. She is also a trustee of numerous universities and foundations and a member of the Pulitzer Prize Board and other noteworthy councils. In addition, she is a member of the boards of directors of several companies to include J.P. Morgan and Company, and Atlantic Richfield.

SOL FEINSTONE'S CREDO

DEDICATED TO

The Judeo-Christian commitment of self-sacrifice for peace on earth, and the brotherhood of free nations of free men;

The Spirit of '76, a struggle of free men to remain free;

The immigrants who came after the revolution and helped build our country in freedom;

The underprivileged of all races who, by uplifting themselves, will raise all mankind to a higher humanity.

MY DEFINITION OF FREEDOM

In the beginning there was the void of sameness; the spark of life made everything different.

The stamp of sameness is the stamp of death.

Freedom to me means a social order based on individual freedom to live differently and to dream differently. I dream of a Brotherhood of Free Nations of Free Men.

Sol Feinstone