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Liberalism vs. humanism

by [James Piereson](#)

On the battle between learning for the sake of learning and learning for utility.

Writing forty years ago in *The New Industrial State*, John Kenneth Galbraith called on academics and intellectuals to seize the mantle of national leadership which at that time (he said) was in the hands of a bipartisan coalition of corporate managers, union officials, and machine politicians. Galbraith feared that these conventional leaders had defined the goals of the industrial system too narrowly in terms of production, consumption, and employment when in fact a much broader vision was needed to direct the goals of the new economy toward aesthetic, artistic, and intellectual interests such that the lives of the American people might be elevated above mere work and consumption. Noting their growing influence within the Democratic Party and the increasing activism of students and faculty, Galbraith concluded that the colleges and universities of the nation were well-positioned to exercise political leadership in the name of those humane ideals ...

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