

Cambridge
March 14, '41

Dear Alfred:

Thank you for these precious notes. I have copied them off to fuse with my own jottings on that occasion, and shall put the result into our records. Nothing could so well (?) to our successors the spirit by which you have so often made us all one and given us heart for the task ahead.

Ever yours
Ernest H.

|1|¹ *The notes: not delivered in this order: speech extempore*

Dear. Dear. Friends

No continuous speech.

Fragmentary sentences

Deep emotion at this expression of loving feeling – Immense trouble of those who have organized in various ways this celebration – Everything has been prepared with loving care.

Not wholly (for) me –

Evelyn supplies those vivid insights and immediate activities which count for so much in our joint life –

I accept this occasion as a warm-hearted reaction to our joint life at Harvard. We have loved the place – our colleagues and students and friends beyond that immediate university circle.

|2| _____

The previous world war introduced unforgettable intense tragedy into life – The only way to bear with meet tragedy is to interweave it with loving activity.

Evelyn and I are grateful to Harvard beyond words – because we can love it.

One good test of the worth of any social system is by the sort of people it produces. Using this criterion, American life is a success.

|3| Philosophy is a very peculiar study. Other departments of thought confine themselves to special abstractions. Philosophy is the endeavour to comprehend concrete fact by the utilization of abstractions. The whole variety of experience is relevant to philosophic thought. Nothing is alien to it. ~~To emphasize this character of philosophic~~. The whole stretch of life should be vividly present. Every philosophic lecture room should contain as exhibits a baby at one end and an |4| emeritus professor at the other end – the future and the past, and in between the surging present, namely the confused thoughts of the lecturer and his class.

A successful democracy is the best seed-ground for a living philosophy. In such a democracy there is respect for the many types of humanity.

Respect for individual human beings is the fundamental requisite.

|5| ~~The Universe is infinitely~~ The Universe unbounded. Human experience is limited.

¹ This gathering took place on February 15, 1941. Whitehead had retired from Harvard after the spring semester of 1937, four years earlier.

Whitehead's remarks at his 80th birthday party <<http://wrl.whiteheadresearch.org/items/show/2246>>
Transcribed by Jesus De Luna

Human language is inadequate to express experience. Thus all philosophic systems merely point at the truth. Philosophers should not primarily hope for agreement. A teacher of philosoph(y) of course hopes to influence his pupils. He should not be over anxious for conformation of thought. |6| His experience is limited, and his pupils have a different vision.

An activity of disagreement represents a success – namely, the realization of the importance of the topic.

In every human activity, learning is necessary. There is no exception to this statement. But like all weapons it is dangerous.

The thoughts of genius in the past are of priceless value, and their systems are important. |7| But their full-fledged systems have a limited application with limitations and distortions undreamt of by their authors.

Every single doctrine that I was taught in Cambridge, during my student period from 1880 to 1885, has now been abandoned in the sense in which it would then (be) understood. The doctrines are still important with limitations and distortions and modifications. It is the business of philosophers to live in the present.

|8| You have a tremendous task before you. The world is passing into a new epoch. Your ~~life~~ philosophic thought in the present should prepare mankind for the unknown future –

This is what the ancient Greeks did. The same opportunity is set for young American philosophy. You must succeed –

My hope is that you may find some encouragement from your remembrance of the love towards you felt by Evelyn and Alfred.
