

NOTE CARDS FOR "EDUCATION FOR MODERN MAN" by Sidney Hook 1

"Education which is not modern shares the fate of all organic things that are kept too long."
...A. N. Whitehead

The way out of scholastic systems that make the past an end in itself is to make acquaintance with the past a means of understanding the present."
....John Dewey

p. ix. Depression, war and the problems of peace have placed the question of educational philosophy once more on the agenda of history. The development of American economy has raised the question to central importance. The immediate necessities of institutional planning to meet changing conditions has made it acute. In consequence, a great discussion has been raging throughout the land for almost a decade over the nature, content and goals of education.

p. x In short, education as never before is front-page news. This would perhaps be the healthiest and most encouraging sign in American education were it not marred by a tendency to exploit educational issues and proposals for purposes of sensationalism. Too

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often educational news is handled like a crime story. But even this is a small price to pay if it enables everybody to understand that education is everybody's business.

p. xi. Whatever a liberal education is, few American colleges offer it. By and large they present a confused picture of decayed classical curriculums, miscellaneous social science offerings and narrowing vocational programs – the whole unplanned and unchecked by leading ideas.

p. xiii The discussion will revolve around four generic questions:

- (1) What should the aims or ends of education be, and how should we determine them?
- (2) What should its skill and content be, and how can they be justified?
- (3) By what methods and materials can the proper educational skills and content be most effectively communicated in order to achieve the desirable ends?
- (4) How are the ends and means of education related to a democratic social order?

A satisfactory answer to these questions should provide a satisfactory answer to the problem of what constitutes a liberal education in modern times.

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expressed in the proposition: "Man is a rational animal." From which it is inferred that the end of human education should be the cultivation of reason.

p. 17 Nonetheless, rationality is not the only feature which differentiates man from other animals. Man can be defined, and has been by Benjamin Franklin and Karl Marx, as a "tool-making animal." By the same reasoning employed by neo-Thomists, we can "deduce" that man's proper education should be vocational! Man is also the only animal that can will to commit suicide. Does it follow that education should therefore be a preparation for death? Man is also the only animal that ruts all year round. What educational corollary does this unique trait entail?

p. 19 Finally, it implies that the habitation of man's nature in a human body is unaffected by changes in society and social nurture. The enormous range of variation in social behavior, which testifies to the plasticity of the simplest, physiological response under cultural conditioning, leaves the essence of human nature unaltered. In short, human nature is taken out of the world altogether. It is removed from any verifiable context in experience

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p. 1 "It is true that the aim of education is development of individuals to the utmost of their potentialities. But this statement in isolation leaves unanswered the question as to what is the measure of the development. A society of free individuals in which all, through their own work, contribute to the liberation and enrichment of the lives of others, is the only environment in which any individual can really grow normally to his *full* stature."

.....John Dewey

p. 14 The possibility is therewith established of broadening the area of moral and social agreement among men and building a better world on human foundations long before agreement has been won on first or last things.

p. 15 We have been attempting to justify the ends of education by their consequences in experience. There is another approach which rules out all reference to consequences as irrelevant. This declares that we are dealing with a metaphysical question, which requires an answer based on the true metaphysics. Its chief exponents in America are Robert M. Hutchins, Monsignor Fulton Sheen, and Mortimer J. Adler. They hold that the appropriate end of education can be deduced from the true nature of man. The true nature of man is that which differentiates him from animals, on the one hand, and angels, on the other. It is

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which would permit us to identify it and observe its operations. For anything which operates in the world does so *interaction* with other things that help shape its character.

p. 28 "The fading of ideals is sad evidence of the defeat of human endeavor."

....A. N. Whitehead

That every educational system intimately reflects the society in which it functions is a commonplace truth. Like all commonplaces it acquires relevance when ignored and importance when denied. It is ignored whenever a scheme of education is proposed for immediate adoption which would require the complete transformation of the social order. True educational wisdom must be more than a counsel of perfection; its suggested reforms should use what is good in an inadequate situation to make the whole better. Otherwise, it provides no leverage for action and runs out into denunciation or fantasy. The actual is rarely desirable, but what is educationally desirable must at least be possible within the historical actuality in which the educator finds himself.

p. 34 The history of the last ten years would indicate that the schools have perhaps failed in performing the function assigned to them. But it opens up the questions: What function

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have the schools in fact served in American democracy? Is it true that the schools have exercised precisely the same social roles in American political democracy as in Fascist Italy or Bolshevik Russia? What functions can the schools serve? What functions should they serve?

p. 34 This is the view of Mr. Hutchins, who began by proposing a scheme first to revolutionize education and then society, and has now concluded that, since education can rise no higher than its social source, it is society that must first be revolutionized. The goodness or badness of education is both a sign and effect of the goodness or badness of society.

p. 35 The moral is that there is no hope of changing the character of education to any significant degree unless the country is changed. And so the circle completes itself from educational utopianism, 'society can be changed only by changing its system of education,' to educational defeatism, 'no change in education is possible without changing society.' Interestingly enough, this type of defeatism – expressed in the proposition that educational change is futile without social change – coincides with the view of that variety of orthodox, brainless Marxism which insists that education everywhere is in every essential always tied

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to the exigencies of political power, and consequently educational reforms are willy-nilly lieutenants between the Hutchins school and this variety of orthodox Marxism is that the first advocates the transformation of society by a spiritual revolution led by men of superior theological and metaphysical insight, where as the second looks to revolution in the mode of economic production led by professional revolutionists in the name of the proletariat.

p. 40 The schools *cannot* rebuild society. The decisive steps in social transformation depend upon crises that are not prepared by education but by the development of the underlying economy, existing technology and the chances of war. What education can do is to prepare, through proper critical methods, the attitudes and ideals that come *focally* into play when crises arise. It can develop the long-term patterns of sensibility and judgment which may be decisive in resolving the short-term problems whose succession constitutes so much of the substance of contemporary history.

p. 40 In a democracy, educators as a group have a greater opportunity to influence society, and therefore a greater responsibility for what they do or fail to do, than in any other political order. Like all educators, the democratic educator serves society. But to serve

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society does not mean to be a servant of society or of the most influential classes within it. An educator who accepts the philosophy of democracy owes allegiance not to one group in the community or even primarily to the community as it is composed at any particular moment, but to a set of ideals and to a method which he believes commensurate to the task of validating these ideals.

p. 46 To say that human beings "exist through and for the state" is mystical nonsense whose vicious effects are not likely to be lessened by pious phrases about the state existing "through and for them."

p. 49 In the early centuries of the American experience the new world imposed a manner of life upon the settlers which was far different from anything they had known in Europe. But their ideas about the world, including their ideas about education, were European. In everyday affairs they lived forward; in affairs of the "mind" they thought backwards. They remained colonists of Europe in cultural matters long after they achieved their political independence and began the unique historical career of the American republic. Their schooling was formal, meager and unrelated to their life problems. Learning, beyond the bare minimum of literacy, was primarily for adornment and polite communication except for

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those who ultimately went in the professions. It was the home, the farm, the town meeting and community affairs which bred the habits, attitudes and values necessary to master the major social experience.

p. 50 The founders of the American republic were acutely aware of the twofold danger that beset their new venture – tyrannical usurpation and mob rule. They put their hope in an enlightened citizenry, eternally vigilant against abuses of government. Only education could produce this enlightenment and vigilance. Later, the process of education was conceived as the primary agency of Americanizing the heterogeneous national groups which flocked to these shores from all corners of Europe. The successive waves of immigrants were not completely assimilated – partly because of their own resistance, partly because of the snobbery of the native groups which erected lines of social differentiation along the lines of origin. But all embraced the American faith in education.

p. 54 But for many reasons, the progressive schoolroom practices made their greatest strides in private experimental schools. It was in these schools, supported by intelligent

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middle class groups anxious to see the best in their children developed, that progressive education evolved its most distinctive techniques and projects. Yet it was precisely among these groups that the social implications of progressive education were disregarded, or treated as phraseological pieties. Progressive education became a kind of luxury for the intelligent well-to-do parents looking for better schools. These schools took the democratic philosophy of progressive education for granted. They introduced it only in the political contexts of their curriculum, and wherever class activities were entrusted to students themselves. But as a social philosophy with a pressing relevance to questions of social organization it was largely ignored.

p. 56 The fundamental social problem of our culture – fundamental in the sense that it conditions a satisfactory solution of all other important social problems – is to defend and extend our democratic heritage or rights and freedoms in an industrial economy that can provide security for all. That security, on a plane commensurate with standards of human dignity, has nowhere in the world been achieved in an unplanned economy. Nor has it ever been achieved by a planned economy under a political dictatorship. For if political freedom without economic security is defective and precarious, economic security without political

democracy is impossible. Slaves have no security when their masters possess absolute power over them.

p. 58 The argument against control of our corporate economy in the interest of private profit rather than of public welfare have filled volumes. But they can be synoptically classified under fine heads. I cite them not so much to prove a case as to indicate the variety of considerations which enter into the evaluation of the problem and the rich curricular material they suggested for exploration.

- (a) The argument from utility and efficiency. A profit economy fails to use natural and social resources efficiently. It is a wasteful social system – wasteful through its pillaging of the nation's natural resources, through enforced idleness of men and machines, often from failure to employ the best known technology. This waste is as irretrievable as it is socially unwise. Yet most of it is unavoidable in a profit economy.
- (b) The argument from security – economic, psychological and political. Periodic crisis of mounting intensity are indigenous to our existing economy.

The resulting distress and unemployment, even when mitigated by social welfare legislation, generate deep emotional disturbances and maladjustments. Chronic fears, worries and resentments seek unhealthy outlets. A mass base is prepared for totalitarian movements. Those who suffer tend to dismiss the ideals of freedom as empty; those who enjoy comfort and power tend to abridge them out of fear.

- (c) The argument from morality. In our existing economy, service to the community is instrumental – often only incidental – to profit which recognizes no essential social responsibility. Competitive attitudes are built up which regard human beings in industrial and other social relations as tools, not as fellow-members in a community of shared interests. "The relationship between person and person," Felix Adler rightly says, "is mankind's supreme concern." Where a profit economy does not systematically deteriorate the quality of this relationship, it operates in independence of it.

- (d) The argument from culture. The arts and sciences, and in a more literal sense their practitioners, are often compelled to serve as handmaids to business and corporate wealth. The quality of public taste, particularly in the fields of the popular arts and communication, is degraded by standards of commercialism.
- (e) The argument from democracy. Because capital means not only power over things but power over men, concentrations of economic power in the hands of a few result in great social inequalities and in disproportionate political influence of different social groups in the community. The cumulative consequences of the functioning of an unplanned economy make a mockery of the ideal of equal opportunity.

These considerations, even if their validity is apparent to all citizens, by themselves are not sufficient to establish the desirability of a planned welfare economy. For if the present state of affairs is bad, it does not follow that what is proposed to succeed it will be better. It may be worse. But, before stating the other side of the case, there are some further observations, bound up with the professional activity of educators, that strengthen the argument for a welfare economy.

p. 61 All available evidence points to the fact that, so far as the performance of the country's work is concerned, many of those who have received a liberal education will be "overeducated." There will be no room for them. As the compulsory school age increases, as ambitious scholarship plans and government subsidies go into effect, as successive spins of the economic cycle make school a more attractive alternative than idling on the streets, the number of college-trained men and women will vastly increase even if they do not include all who should go to college. There are not enough positions in industry and the professions to absorb them in work commensurate with their talents. The sober truth is that most vocations in industry can be filled readily enough by men and women whose education does not go beyond the elementary and early high-school years.

p. 63 The arguments against planned social control of our economy are not many. But they make up in power for what they lack in number. They reduce themselves to one central contention. Planned control of society in the nature of the case must lead to such monopolistic concentrations of power – economic, legal and educational – in the hands of a few planners that political freedom and all other freedoms enshrined in our Bill of Rights will disappear. It is not the state that will wither away but democracy. An unplanned economy may end up in totalitarianism; a planned economy must.

p. 63 De Maistre said that the foundation of all society stands the executioner; Hayek says in a planned society he inhabits its every room. The second line of evidence is historical. It points out that nations like Germany and Russia, in which economic planning has been introduced on a large scale, are absolute dictatorships – in effect, gigantic concentration camps ruled by a secret police. If either form of the argument is valid, it would constitute more than a sufficient reply to all proposals for a planned society, especially in the eyes of educators. For education in such a system is nothing but an elaborate apparatus for conditioning slaves to the efficient performance of their rounds and duties.

p. 64 In all totalitarian cultures, democratic liberties were first destroyed and only then was a planned economy introduced under the aegis of a dictatorship. Where a planned economy is introduced into a country with strong democratic traditions, the historical comparisons, although instructive, are not decisive. It is the analytical argument which has the strongest force. There is what Lewis Corey has aptly called a "totalitarian potential" in the structure of a planned economy which, if realized, would mean the rule of an iron-clad dictatorship. But a planned economy, as we have seen, has a libertarian potential too, because it can liberate productive forces for a more abundant life for all. Which one becomes actual is not a question of historical destiny or inevitable law, but of human decision which will fall one

way or the other depending upon what scientific knowledge and moral courage those who are pledged to democracy bring to bear on it. A planned economy need not be total, and it may operate under plural forms of participation and control.

p. 64 To the historical warning that a planned economy has hitherto functioned only within a totalitarian framework can be counterposed the historical reminder that it was out of the consequences of an unplanned economy that this totalitarian framework arose. To the analysis that planning cannot function without political dictatorship can be counterposed the analysis that an unplanned economy cannot function without breeding want, unemployment and war. How can the issue be resolved without leaving it to the chances of drift or tragic civil upheaval? Is there any common ground?

p. 72 To demand that the content of instruction be relevant to the present emphatically does not preclude a study of the past. It only prevents us from getting lost in the past. It enables us to make some intelligent selection out of the limitless materials inherited from the past.

p. 81 It teaches us not to be impatient with what is struggling to be born, to respond to the new and inchoate in the light of its own potentialities of greatness. It helps us to accept the responsibility of making our judgment of greatness here and now, and not timidly playing it safe by deferring to the judgment of the next hundred or thousand years. Absorption in study of the greatness of the past which does not quicken our sense for greatness in the present is a preparation for a life of intellectual snobbery. In face of the emergence of the new, it often leads to a kind of cultural philistinism. "To have spent one's youth at college," writes William James, "in contrast with the choice and rare and precious, and yet still to be a blind prig or vulgarian, unable to scent out human excellence or to divine it amid its accidents, to know it only when ticketed and labeled and forced on us by others, this indeed should be accounted the very calamity and shipwreck or a higher education."

p. 83 The enormous differential gain in the modern approach is that the knowledge and values which emerge from inquiries into the massive and dramatic problems of our times have a definite relevance to the perennial task of making life better here and now. On the other hand, if we assume that we already are in possession of eternal truths that need only be applied to the present, we are likely to overlook what is distinctive in our own

times. There is a natural bias to discount the evidence showing that propositions believed eternally true are actually false or have only a *limited historical validity*. The creative sterility of modern adherents of great systems of past thought is in part due to their failure to dip into the fresh seas of contemporary experience in order to test and amplify their stock of "eternal truths."

p. 83 It is often alleged that a modern curriculum sins against tradition, and thus violates one of the deepest hungers of man, - continuity with the past. But as important as tradition is, reflection makes clear that by itself it cannot determine the content of instruction. No matter what turning in the road we take, it is continuous with the road by which we have come. And there are few things we can do today for which some warrant in past traditions cannot be found. Those who defend tradition in education would be the first to deny that the traditional is synonymous with the dead or obsolete. How, then, do we distinguish between obsolete and living traditions? When traditions are invoked to settle issues, they are always selections from the heritage of the past - judgments of comparative worth or value testifying to needs in the present - and are justified by their consequences.

p. 197 No enterprise in the history of American education has provoked more interest and attention than the new curriculum of St. John's College at Annapolis, Maryland. In books and radio broadcasts, in editorials and news stories, in effusions of columnists and in articles of academic journals, the St. John's program has been acclaimed as a sure cure for our major educational ills. Leading spokesmen of its philosophy have gone even further. They have contended that the cultural and social crisis of our times is a direct consequence of our faulty educational system and that only its radical transformation along the lines of the St. John's program can assure us of a good society. For all of their love of the classical tradition and the medieval synthesis, the organizing spirits behind this new program have not hesitated to use every device of publicity and salesmanship – so characteristic of the modern world they deplore – to put their ideas across. And they have largely succeeded. Their indisputable merit is to have shocked many educators and intelligent laymen into an awareness of the acute importance of educational issues.

p. 198 The few critics of the St. John's program – whose voices have hardly reached the public – have contented themselves with a criticism of the metaphysics of its founders. No detailed analysis has been made of the actual program and its relation to the declared objectives of the new curriculum. Discussion has taken the form of outright total acceptance

or outright total rejection. Part of the reason for this is that the proponents of the plan have insisted that it be taken as a whole or rejected as a whole. Although this may be good strategy for purposes of propaganda and conversion, it does not make for clarification.

p. 200 Under the circumstances one would have expected a certain diffidence and modesty in advancing claims on what has been achieved. Nonetheless, the President of St. John's, Mr. Stringfellow Barr, the most vocal representative of the institution, maintained in November 1943 that six years of experience with its curriculum "have convinced us that St. John's may serve as a model for the reorganization of liberal education in the United States." Mr. Mark van Doren, whose book, *Liberal Education*, is recommended by St. John's educators as an authoritative statement of their purposes, proposes that its curriculum be planted in every college of the country. "It will take time to get the proposal accepted. Until it is accepted everywhere in America, we shall lack the right to say that liberal education exists among us." Mr. Mortimer J. Adler, one of the philosophical godfathers of the curriculum, broadcasts to the nation that "St. John's is the only college in the country which is making a proportionate effort to adapt means that may succeed in achieving the ends of a liberal education."