

**EDUCATION FOR MODERN MAN by Sidney Hook**

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"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 and 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 consequences, a great discussion has been raging throughout the land for almost a decade over the nature, content and goals of education.

p. x American philosophers, until now largely indifferent to educational issues, have been rediscovering the truth of John Dewey's claim that philosophy in the largest sense is "a general theory of education." Key government officials are drawing up blueprints for educational reconstruction. State aid to schools is developing thin theoretical threads that

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may in time control the distribution of support. Newspaper editors and columnists have launched campaigns to influence instruction. Churches are beginning to eye the schools as long neglected territory into which to carry doctrines of salvation. The army and navy are evaluating our educational services in relation to what they conceive to be the military needs and tasks of tomorrow. Large-scale industry is making plans in which the schools, on the vocational and the technological side, have a significant role. Even business – to use a term broad enough to cover the ubiquitous real-estate associations – has altered the character of its traditional interest in education. In the past, business viewed education primarily from the standpoint of its bearings on the tax rate. Now it is directly concerned not only with the costs of tax-supported and tax-exempt schools but with the content of schooling.

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 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. xi. Some subjects continue to be taught because those who teach them can teach nothing else.

p. xii. Criticism of the current evils of education often suffers from two oversights. Where the present is unfavorably compared with the past, the details of achievement and failure of the present are well known but those of the past are not. Consequently, the most exaggerated virtues may be attributed to past education with no more evidence than the inner conviction that it must have been so. Or a cluster of eminent figures of the past is selected as proof of the quality of the education of their time.

p. xii-xiii. In the following discussion, we shall not only make constructive proposals for the improvement of American education, but shall consider the character of some of the major challenges currently being hurled against American educational practices.

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.

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. 2 At some level, it should equip young men and women with the general skills and techniques and the specialized knowledge which, together with the virtues and aptitudes already mentioned, will make it possible for them to do some productive work related to their capacities and interests.

It should strengthen those inner resources and traits of character which enable the individual, when necessary, to stand alone.

p. 3 The situation is not unique in education. In the realm of morals, too, we can observe precisely the same thing. Everyone believes, or says he believes, in truth, justice, loyalty, honor, dignity. Yet the strife of moral systems and the diversity of more judgments in concrete situations, where the same formal values are invoked, is even more conspicuous than in education. In part, the same reason accounts for differences in both moral and educational judgments. Values or goods are plural in morals, just as ends in education are plural. They conflict not only with the values, goods and ends that are rejected but to some extent with themselves. Two parties to a dispute may both profess allegiance to the ideals of justice and happiness or to the goods of security and adventures. But they may evaluate them differently, and assign them different weights when faced by the necessity of

choice. Similarly, although different schools of education subscribe to critical intelligence and loyalty, natural piety for one's traditions and independent exploration of new modes of thought, they may be worlds apart in their practical judgments because they accent differently the values they hold in common. They can reach a consensus only insofar as they both submit to a common method of resolving conflicts of value in specific situations. But it is at the point of method, i.e., the process by which ideals are themselves derived and evaluated, that they fundamentally divide.

p. 4 How, then, do we know when those who accept the same ideals have a common referent or meaning? Roughly, only when these words are conjoined with, or lead to, common behavior or a program of action culminating in common behavior, in a series of common historical situations. This is the prescript of crude common sense as of refined scientific method.

p. 6 How, then, do we determine what the aims of education or the good life should be? There are two generic ways of reaching what are sometimes called "the ultimate" ends of education. One relies on an immediate, self-certifying intuition of the nature of

man; the other on the observation of the consequences of different proposals of treating man. The first is essentially theological and metaphysical; the second is experimental and scientific.

p. 6 Whatever the differences between Aristotle, Aquinas and Rousseau on other points – and they are vast – all assert that from the true nature of man the true nature of education follows logically. If we know what man is, then we can lay down the essentials of an adequate education for all men, everywhere, always. The scientific approach, on the other hand, is interested in discovering what the nature of man is, not in terms of an absolute essence, but in terms of a developing career in time and in relation to the world of things, culture and history of which he is an inseparable part. It recognizes man's nature not as a premise from which to deduce the aims of education, but as a set of conditions which limit the range of possible educational aims in order to select the best or most desirable from among those for which man's nature provides a ground. An education should not be what it cannot be; it can be what it should not be; it may be what it should be.

p. 8 Growth, as everyone knows, also been emphasized by John Dewey as one of the central aims of education. But, as soon as one speaks of growth, critics who approach this

end as if it were being urged in isolation from others are sure to inquire: growth in what direction? There is criminal growth, fascist growth, cancerous growth. From the fact that a thing is, it doesn't follow that it must or should grow. From the belief that a thing should grow, we do not yet know what direction the potentialities of growth should be encouraged to take. The necessity for a social frame of reference is clearly indicated as soon as we select growth as an educational end.

p. 10 This suggests that the conviction with which the democratic ideal is held rests not so much on alleged metaphysical presuppositions that are beyond the test of experience, but on the actual or anticipated values of democracy in experience as contrasted with nondemocratic alternatives. It is interesting to observe that these nondemocratic alternatives historically have been justified by the identical metaphysical and theological presuppositions which have been advanced as the alleged premises on which democracy rests. And since these premises are compatible with social philosophies that are mutually contradictory, the latter cannot be derived from the former.

p. 11 If we ask, then, why we should treat individuals of unequal talents and endowments as persons who are equally entitled to relevant consideration and care – the central idea underlying democratic institutions – we can point to consequences of the following type: it makes for greater tranquility, justice, freedom, security, creative diversity, reasonableness, and less cruelty, insensitiveness and intellectual intolerance than any other social system that has so far been devised or proposed.

p. 12 Men are and may become unintelligent, too. Unintelligence (or stupidity) is therefore also an antecedent potentiality. But since, potentially, man is both intelligent and unintelligent, what we select as the trait to encourage depends not merely on its potentiality but rather on its desirability. And desirability is an affair of fruits not of origins.

p. 13 “Man,” Santayana somewhere writes, “is a gregarious animal and much more so in his mind than in his body. He may like to go alone for a walk but he hates to stand alone in his opinion.” This is not less true for our modern socialized world in which powerful pressures are making for uniformity of taste and opinion.

p. 13 There must be some private altars in a public world where the human spirit can refresh itself. A liberal education should enable individuals, without failing in their social responsibilities, to build such altars and to nurse their flames.

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 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. 16 A further assumption of the argument is the Aristotelian doctrine that the good of anything is the performance of its specific virtue or the realization of its potentiality. The "good" egg is one that becomes a chicken, the "good" man is one who realizes his natural capacity to think. This overlooks the fact that the natural capacities of a thing limit the range of its fulfillments but do not determine any specific fulfillment. Not every natural power of man has only one natural end; and not every power which has one end achieves it by one mode of development. Thinking is no more or no less natural to man than eating and singing. But what, when and how a man should eat; what, when and how a man should sing; about what and when he should think – all this depends not so much upon the natural powers of eating, singing or thinking as upon an ideal of fitness, appropriateness or goodness,, that is not given with natural powers but brought to bear upon them in social, historical, and personal experience. When we assert that men should be rational, we are not talking biology or metaphysics but voicing a social directive that selectively modifies the natural exercise of human powers in the light of preferred consequences among possible alternate uses.

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 If education is determined by human nature, may not human nature change, and with it the nature of education? "We must insist," writes Mr. Hutchins, *"that no matter how environments differ human nature is, always has been, and always will be the same everywhere."*

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

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

It is not the Aristotelian concept of the soul because, for Aristotle, the soul was the form of the body, all forms were incarnate in matter and the nature of man was construed from his behavior.

For Aristotle man can become a rational animal only because he is also a social and physical animal.

p.22 Nor am I denying that the study of philosophy has an important place in the liberal arts curriculum. It has many justifications – among them the achievement of a methodological sophistication that may immunize students against the confusion of definitions or linguistic resolutions with empirical hypotheses of varying degrees of generality, which constitutes so much of traditional and popular metaphysics.

p. 25 Apparently an educated man cannot distinguish between things and names. Names

are intelligently used to communicate knowledge and facilitate the control of things. The names we choose to attach to things have no bearing on how they actually are going to behave: they summarize what our experience had led us to believe they will do. The argument of the passage is equivalent to saying that what comes from a cow's udder can never become material for apparel because since the first we call "milk" and the second "cloth," their essential natures must be different. Milk cannot change into cloth. How can a metaphysical bull, in its triple sense, determine that what comes from a cow's udders must be drunk by human beings, instead, after appropriate treatment, of being turned into cloth for apparel?

p. 25 In conclusion. To speak of the nature of man is already a sign that a selective interest is present. What is designated by the term "man" may have many natures depending upon the context and purpose of inquiry. Even if the nature of man is defined in terms of what differentiates him from other animals, we can choose any one of a number of diverse traits that will satisfy the formal conditions of the definition. And for many purposes what man has in common with other animals may not be irrelevant to his nature. Once we assign a term to stand for a thing and seek to discover its nature, that nature is disclosed not by a

definition and its logical implications, as in mathematics, but in its activity or behavior. The activity or behavior of man depends upon many things within and outside of his body.

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. 31 On some levels of educational activity in some corners of modern society, the attitudes and habits of evaluation thus inculcated are brought into the light of reflective consciousness. But this is a very unusual phenomenon.

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 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. 34 The question most often put to me is: What is wrong with our educational system? The answer to this question is: 'Nothing...'

The answer to the question asked me may, however, be given in somewhat more general terms. There is never anything wrong with the educational system of a country. What is wrong is the country. The educational system that any country has will be the system that country wants."

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 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. 36 More specifically, the way education serves society in a political democracy is different from the way it serves society when political democracy is dead or not yet born.

But in an undemocratic society there is one thing education has never done and cannot do. It cannot influence the reformation of social policy or the redirection of social change. For the control of educational facilities is a monopoly of the politically dominant minority. It usually emanates from a single and central agency. The content of instruction is under careful supervision. The whole process of education is carried on with an ideological self-consciousness to a degree hardly suspected by those who have not studied the mechanisms of control. In such a society, education certainly has a social function; but it rarely serves the interests of the community as a whole or of a majority within the community. Ideas that contribute to weakening the hold of the dominant group in society, as in pre-revolutionary France, are ideas that are ignored or combated in the official schools.

p. 37 A variety of conflicting influences play upon the content and goals of teaching even though some of these influences, emanating from groups close to the sources of economic power, carry a much greater weight than others. The actual profession of the formal ideals of democracy – government by consent, freedom of opposition, freedom of speech, press

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and inquiry – may have practical consequences even when such profession is confused. It enables new ideas to get a fairer hearing than in other social systems. More important, it permits critical attitudes of thought to develop. And, more important still, these ideas and attitudes in a democratic society pervade other areas of social life. It would be difficult to explain the history of American social legislation without reference to the influence, mediated by mass education, which the ideal of “equality of opportunity” – so far from being carried out even in our educational system! – has had in formulating pointed demands for more democracy in other fields.

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.

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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 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. 42 Like so many ideas drawn from the ambiguous legacy of Rousseau, the doctrine that education should always transmit the cultural authority of the group unwittingly lays into the hands of totalitarians. This is such a serious charge that it requires further substantiation. If the purpose of teaching is to express the cultural authority of the group, and if the authority of the group is vested in the state, then the state, according to Mr. Meiklejohn, does and should determine the goal, methods and content of teaching. “Education is an expression of the will of some social ‘organism, instinct with one life, moved by one mind.’ Teacher and pupil....are both agents of the state.” Does this not seem to imperil individual freedom?

p. 42 Even individuals as sympathetic to Mr. Meiklejohn as M. Martian have confessed to a deep disquietude over these sentiments.

p. 43 With a post-nescience that is truly uncanny, Mr. Meiklejohn attributes these notions, whose source is Rousseau and Hegel, to Jefferson and the Founding Fathers. (He claims that Rousseau's thought influenced revolutionary America, a grave lapse in scholarship.) Yet on his own theory of the "unconscious direction" of the state by the people, it is difficult to explain how there ever could have been an American Revolution at all. Either Mr. Meiklejohn must believe that there was no English state at the time, or that the Revolution was an illusion of interested consciousness. He does not believe the latter. But if he believes there was no English state at the time of the American Revolution, then it is hard to see how he can believe that there ever was such a thing as a state as he defines it – or how there could be. His "state" is the social analogue of Mr. Hutchins' "reason": it is outside the world of time and history. Mr. Meiklejohn's language makes sense only on the assumption that he is discussing a community not of men on earth but of angels – who require neither state nor government. His language is dangerous because he does not distinguish between society, government and state, and between existing states on earth and the perfect state in heaven.

p. 44 In a world where the state is growing stronger every day without overmuch concern for the rights of persons, it is an exaltation of the state in the name of freedom and reason.

Mr. Meiklejohn is acutely aware that his doctrine is open to the charge of giving ideological aid and comfort to totalitarianism. As a freedom-loving educator he is concerned to meet it in advance. He tells us that he agrees with only one of the two basic contentions of totalitarianism, that "the state must be strong and powerful, eager and able to achieve its purposes against all opposition within and without." And one of its chief purposes, it should be borne in mind, is to see to it that education transmits its authority. The second contention, with which he disagrees, is that "the state can be strong and powerful only if it becomes a dictatorship...." The trouble is that if one unconditionally accepts the first statement, one must on occasion swallow the consequences of the second, for the latter is sometimes in fact true. If Mr. Meiklejohn insists that a state must be strong, and powerful, then whenever it is in fact true that this can be achieved only by a dictatorship, he is committed to it.