The Main Enterprise of the World

Rethinking Education

Philip Kitcher

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford. It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship, and education by publishing worldwide. Oxford is a registered trade mark of Oxford University Press in the UK and certain other countries.

Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America.

© Oxford University Press 2022

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press, or as expressly permitted by law, by license, or under terms agreed with the appropriate reproduction rights organization. Inquiries concerning reproduction outside the scope of the above should be sent to the Rights Department, Oxford University Press, at the address above.

You must not circulate this work in any other form
and you must impose this same condition on any acquirer.

CIP data is on file at the Library of Congress
ISBN 978–0–19–092897–1

DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780190928971.001.0001

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

Printed by Sheridan Books, Inc., United States of America

Copyrighted material

Contents

Preface ix
List of Abbreviations xv

Introduction 1

PART I

1. Overload 23
2. Individuals 49
3. Fulfillment 79
4. Citizens 116
5. Moral Development 153
6. A Role for Religion? 191

PART II

7. The Natural Sciences 227
8. The Arts 256
9. Understanding Ourselves 281

PART III

10. Social Change 323
11. Utopia? 350

Appendix 1 391
Appendix 2 395
Bibliography 397
Index 407

Copyrighted material

Copyrighted material

Preface

Nearly two decades ago, shortly after I had begun a serious study of John Dewey's works, I was struck by a characterization of philosophy he offers toward the end of his seminal *Democracy and Education*. According to Dewey, "If we are willing to conceive education as the process of forming fundamental dispositions, intellectual and emotional, toward nature and fellow men, philosophy may even be defined as the general theory of education." From the perspective of my own training in philosophy, and that reigning in Anglophone professional philosophy to this day, that is a bizarre claim. Philosophy of education is viewed not only as a narrowly applied subfield, but also as one in which work is humdrum and unsophisticated. For those capable of probing the central issues of philosophy—the "core problems"—turning to philosophy of education amounts to slumming it.

Intrigued by Dewey's claim, I have spent several years exploring the supposed slum. As I have done so, I have found the orthodox professional judgments to be deeply unfair. Today there are a significant number of scholars in the English-speaking world who are doing work in philosophy of education that meets the highest professional standards. They write clearly, draw on major parts of the philosophical tradition, offer new conclusions and defend them with rigorous arguments—and, unlike some of their snootier colleagues, they address urgent questions. I have learned much from the writings of many people who have contributed to this part of philosophy: a partial list would contain Harry Brighouse, Eamonn Callan, Randall Curren, Catherine Elgin, Amy Gutmann, Meira Levinson, Martha Nussbaum, the late Israel Scheffler, Harvey Siegel, and John White.

Moreover, as I have immersed myself in this part of philosophy, the insight behind Dewey's seemingly outrageous claim has become ever clearer. Dewey was reacting, I believe, to a sentence from Emerson's famous "American Scholar"—the sentence from which I have drawn my title and which I have adapted for my epigraph. Conceiving each human generation as attempting both to foster the development of its successors, and to create for them an improved world, Dewey (and, I think, Emerson) saw the general understanding of education (of "upbuilding" the young) as the central

Copyrighted material

philosophical task. To discharge that task is to pose—and answer—some of the oldest and most recurrent philosophical questions. It is to inquire into the most important values and to try to understand how, given the circumstances and knowledge of the age, they might best be promoted.

In arriving at this perspective, I have found myself constantly articulating it in ways shaped by my long interest in historical processes and in evolving systems. The project Emerson attributes to us is one that has had to be undertaken throughout our history as a species. We have been at it for tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of years. The attempted solutions of the past have left their residues in our current situation. Often, educational approaches adapt and re-adapt them. Sometimes, however, it is wise to think more systematically, to take a more distant and abstract view, and to ask whether what are taken as fixed points should be given that status. This book is written in that spirit.

Part I of this book thus tries to construct a general framework for considering concrete educational questions. Part II attempts to consider how and what, in light of this framework, young people today should be taught. Part III asks what broader social changes might be required to implement the educational reforms proposed, and whether there are any serious possibilities of going in the directions I suggest.

The proximate cause of the pages that follow was an invitation from Peter Knox to give a series of Strauss Lectures at Case Western Reserve University. I already had in mind a volume on education and democracy as the second part of a trilogy aimed at elaborating my Deweyan pragmatism. When I proposed to Peter that this might be the topic of my lectures, he approved the idea, and I composed some twenty-five thousand words of draft material. Obviously, since then, some growth has occurred.

The discussions I had in Cleveland, and the many thoughtful and penetrating questions posed by members of the audience, led me to see how the individual lectures needed to be expanded, and how topics toward which I had only gestured (or not mentioned at all) had to be taken up. When the original versions were refereed for Oxford University Press, the readers sympathized with my plans for further development. (I hope that, if or when they see the result, they won't regret doing so.) OUP's wonderful New York philosophy editor, Peter Ohlin, also approved the proposal to extend the lectures, and, as always, offered excellent advice.

Copyrighted material

I am extremely grateful to Peter Knox for that initial invitation, and to him and his colleagues at the Case Western Center for the Humanities for their warm hospitality and the stimulating conversations I enjoyed during my week in Cleveland. (Indeed, Peter is solely responsible for the existence of one of the chapters in Part II.) Particular thanks are also due to Chris Haufe, with whom I was able to renew the lively discussions of his time at Columbia.

What I have written here has deep roots in exchanges I have had with many people in many places during the past decade. My thinking has been affected by the ideas and reactions of so large a number of generous scholars in so wide a variety of fields that any attempt to name them all would inevitably be incomplete—and for this I must apologize. During the year I spent as a fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin (2011–2012), I learned much from some of my fellow fellows, Jeremy Adler, Monique Borgerhoff Mulder, Alfred Brendel, Ayşe Buğra, Hollis Taylor, and Mark Viney, as well as from Lorraine Daston, Gerd Gigerenzer, Susan Neiman, and Adrian Piper. When I returned to Berlin in 2015, to spend a semester at the American Academy, conversations with Moishe Postone helped me to rein in my tendencies to methodological individualism. Audiences at my Munich Lectures in Ethics raised questions that have helped me in revising this book. I am particularly grateful to my three commentators on that occasion (Rahel Jaeggi, Susan Neiman, and Amia Srinivasan), whose reactions to different material (that of *Moral Progress*, the first part of my projected trilogy) have led me to modify what I otherwise might have written here.

Similarly, in presentations on pragmatist themes in various places, I have learned from the questions and objections of my interlocutors. Many thanks to audiences at my Nordic Pragmatism Lectures in Helsinki, at my Chaire Mercier Lectures at the Université de Louvain, at the Technical University of Delft, at the University of Humanistic Studies Utrecht, at the Erasmus University Rotterdam, and at my 2014 Pentekost Lectures at the University of Bielefeld. A lecture delivered at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis enabled me to try out some of the ideas of Chapter 6; and parts of the material of Chapters 7 and 8 have been presented at the University of Minnesota, at Temple University, at the University of Rochester, as the Jonathan Adler memorial lecture at CUNY, and as the Howison lecture at the University of California at Berkeley. I am particularly grateful for the many insightful comments I received on these occasions.

Participation in the meetings of the Society for Progress—the brainchild of Subrahamian Rangan—has had great influence on the material that follows.

Copyrighted material

The lively discussions among economists, business leaders, and philosophers have left their mark on the whole book, from the change of emphasis I recommend in Chapter 2 to the explorations and arguments of Chapters 10 and 11. David Autor, Julie Batillana, Robert Frank, and Amartya Sen have illuminated my thinking about economic questions. Elizabeth Anderson, Anthony Appiah, Michael Fuerstein, Susan Neiman, and Valerie Tiberius have helped me to refine my views about many of the issues I investigate here. I thank them all.

The community of American pragmatists has been generous in helping a relative newcomer find his feet. Two of my Columbia colleagues (both unfortunately now deceased)—Isaac Levi and Sidney Morgenbesser—taught me that, somewhat in the manner of M. Jourdain, I had been speaking pragmatism all my philosophical life. Richard Bernstein has been extraordinarily generous in sharing with me his store of insights into the pragmatist tradition. Catherine Elgin, Steven Fesmire, and Cheryl Misak have also been wonderful interlocutors, from whom I have learned much.

Closer to home, in the Columbia Philosophy department, I have been aided by many conversations with colleagues. Over the course of the last few years, Bob Gooding-Williams, Michele Moody-Adams, Fred Neuhouser, Christopher Peacocke, and Wayne Proudfoot have, in a variety of ways, shaped the ideas and arguments I try to present here. One of the great revelations—I think for both of us—has been the kinship between my version of Deweyan pragmatism and Axel Honneth's approach to critical theory. Like Rahel Jaeggi, Axel has aided me in seeing how to free myself (so far, I fear, only partially) from the limits of long-standing presuppositions.

The intellectual journey out of which this book has grown has been taken in the company of some truly remarkable graduate students. Over a decade ago, conversations with Michael Fuerstein enabled me (and, I think, Michael as well) to see how to begin a more synthetic treatment of questions on which epistemology, philosophy of science, social philosophy, and political philosophy all bear. More recently, regular conversations with Anuk Arudpragasam, Max Khan Hayward, and Robbie Kubala have opened up new perspectives on Deweyan themes, and have often refined and corrected my first (and second, and . . .) thoughts.

One student, however, must receive the lion's share of credit (or responsibility?) for help in gestating the ideas of this book. When I returned from Berlin at the end of 2015, Natalia Rogach Alexander, then in her first year of graduate school, asked me if I would agree to a directed study to explore

Copyrighted material

philosophical issues about education. From the fall of 2016 on, we have met almost every week of Columbia's term-time, frequently for two hours, reading and discussing principal texts and themes in this area. What I have learned from these conversations, and from her own brilliant dissertation work, is immense. I am enormously grateful to her.

In our complementary projects, both Natalia and I have benefited from the generosity of senior scholars who have devoted large parts of their careers to the philosophy of education. Harvey Siegel spurred me to write in this area by inviting me to contribute to the *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Education*. Since then, he has offered me a host of valuable suggestions, including detailed comments on a draft of this entire book. Many changes have resulted from his sensitive and informed reading. Meira Levinson's penetrating questions and suggestions about Chapters 1–4 have led me to recognize the need to clarify many points and to offer more guidance to the reader. Conversations with Ellen Winner, and her comments on Chapter 8, have prompted refinements in my approach to education in the arts. Harry Brighouse's brilliant and incisive reading of Chapters 5 and 6 enabled me to correct misleading formulations, and to make those chapters more precise. For several years now, Randy Curren has offered encouragement, support, and (probing but gentle) criticism. His extensive suggestions about Chapters 1–5 have inspired a large number of improvements.

Two readers of the previous draft deserve special thanks. For two decades, I have enjoyed teaching with two distinguished economists, first with Ronald Findlay, more recently with Dan O'Flaherty. Dan read the penultimate version in its entirety, alerting me to places where more caution was required, and advising me to elaborate some points, and to frame others differently. I can only hope that our interchanges have been half as valuable to him as they have been to me.

Martha Nussbaum offered me a series of questions and suggestions on every chapter of that draft, some general, some specific, all of them remarkably insightful. Her comments have led to the inclusion of new discussions, to the expansion of others, and to a much clearer explanation of the twists and turns of my argument. I am not sure if she will feel that all of her concerns have been adequately addressed, but I hope she will agree that the final version is better for the time she devoted to its predecessor. I am deeply grateful to her.

Finally, I want to thank my family—now a three-generation affair. During the time through which I have been working out these ideas, my life has not

Copyrighted material

only been enriched by their love and support. I have also learned much from them about the development of the young. Perhaps some progress toward the kind of education for which this book campaigns will be made in time for the little ones to benefit from it. Whether or not that is so, I am confident that the loving parenting they have received provides them with the right kind of start.

Copyrighted material

List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used for books to which frequent reference is made:

E	Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979).
LW	*The Later Works of John Dewey*, 17 vols. (Carbondale: University of Southern Illinois Press); references are given by volume number and page number.
MW	*The Middle Works of John Dewey*, 15 vols. (Carbondale: University of Southern Illinois Press); references are given by volume number and page number.
OL	John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays*, ed. John Gray, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
PPE	John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, vols. 2 and 3 of *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, selected from the University of Toronto's edition of the full set of Mill's works (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005); the pagination runs continuously through the two volumes.
R	Plato, *Republic*, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 971–1223.
SMC	Steven M. Cahn, ed., *Philosophy of Education: The Essential Texts* (New York: Routledge, 2009).
WN	Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (New York: Modern Library, 2000).

Copyrighted material

Copyrighted material

The Main Enterprise of the World

Copyrighted material

Copyrighted material

Introduction

Between two and three million years ago, our forebears started to make stone tools. Around one and three-quarter million years before the present, their technology had progressed, and they began to fashion the "prehistoric Swiss Army Knife"—the hand-axe. Our hominin ancestors continued to make further improvements, and even before our own species, *Homo sapiens*, arrived on the scene, surviving artefacts display accumulated techniques.

Behind the examples in the museum cases lie millennia of education. As we move from the deep past toward the present, it is hard to resist seeing the later tools as more functional. Edges are sharper; points are finer. Older achievements are not lost. Instead they serve later generations as bases on which to build further. Something has been learned and retained—and that means something has been taught.

So the practice of education is extremely old. It antedates the invention of writing, antedates the domestication of animals, even antedates the origin of our own species. Small hominin bands, often struggling to meet the challenges of harsh environments, devised ways of ensuring the survival of useful techniques. During the past tens of thousands of years, from at least fifty thousand years before the present, the task has been more complex. The young have had to learn the approved rules and patterns of group life, absorbing the accomplishments that have made human sociality go more smoothly. A band's continued existence has often depended on its ability to transmit its practical expertise and its social lore to the next generation. The progress of practical skills and of social life has depended on another kind of advance: the adaptation of the system of transmission to meet current needs. Educational progress.

Yet what has been found to work well in overcoming past obstacles may not only provide a basis for tackling those of the present; it may also jeopardize future progress. As with other kinds of evolution, successful ways of solving the problems at hand are retained—and they may subsequently come to constrain the possibilities for addressing today's problems. Locked into a tradition, originally introduced to cope with old difficulties, latecomers struggle

The Main Enterprise of the World. Philip Kitcher, Oxford University Press. © Oxford University Press 2022.
DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780190928971.003.0001

Copyrighted material

with new ones. Perhaps they eventually succeed, tacking on some more-or-less clumsy addition to the established arrangements. Over a long sequence of generations, the result can be a ramshackle contraption, a Rube Goldberg device whose functioning is far from perfect. At some point, people may need to strike out in a new direction. They give up the hand-axe, abandon stone tools, opt for a different style of technology. Sometimes, they even need to rethink the ways in which lore is transmitted across the generations.

Much excellent work in the philosophy of education proceeds by leaving the main contours of the *status quo* in place. A problem is taken up, and a solution according with the existing framework is proposed. The value of this kind of work—and there is a significant amount of it—should be evident. The suggested improvement can be adopted quickly (assuming policymakers will listen!) and the education of children can be immediately improved. One very strong reason for objecting to the dismissal of philosophy of education so commonly found in professional philosophy today lies in an important fact: the best work in the field does considerable social good.

This book doesn't attempt philosophy in that vein. Its proposals are more wide-ranging and more radical. The following chapters collectively argue (or campaign?) for an extensive revision of our educational policies and institutions, and for a reconfiguring of society to adapt to the functions education ought to serve today. To think of any rapid translation of my suggestions into reform will—rightly—strike readers as absurd.

Why, then, should anyone read the many pages that follow? Because, from time to time, stock-taking is necessary. Our ways of educating the young have (as I have noted) a very long history. Out of that history *may* have come a grotesque contraption, something so dysfunctional as to foil the advances required to meet human needs in today's world. Isn't it worth taking a look? Doesn't that look require thinking hard about what contemporary education must do? Can we avoid reflecting on large (and difficult) philosophical questions about what makes human lives go well and what makes societies healthy?

Taking that look might buttress confidence in the major features of education as they have developed historically. We might see how there is no need for large-scale revision, either of schools and universities or of the societies in which they are embedded. One useful result of the inspection might be a differential evaluation of facets of our institutions. We could recognize what works well, distinguishing these aspects from others whose success is less

Copyrighted material

evident. Appreciation of such distinctions would assist the piecemeal work of amending the system to improve it.

If I am right, investigation shouldn't generate contented endorsement. Instead, it ought to call for sweeping changes. Yet, even if you come to view my diagnoses and arguments as defective, they may still aid in informing a clearer conception of the virtues you identify in the *status quo*. By provoking, they should lead you to understand *why* what history has bequeathed to us remains useful for our own times. Understanding of that kind helps, when it comes to pursuing further educational progress. It can guide you to see what can be tinkered with, and what must be left intact.

So far, though, I have only gestured, vaguely, at the general tendency of evolutionary processes to constrain and to give rise to jury-rigged solutions to later problems. Beyond that abstract point, there are concrete considerations inviting reflection on our educational inheritance. We are a long way from the world in which schools were introduced to produce scribes, or from that in which universities delivered young men to fill the offices of the Church. We are even distant from the demands of the Industrial Revolution, or of the postwar years in which the importance of scientific research became clearly recognized. In contemporary societies, people from different cultures mingle. Moreover, the human population today faces challenges requiring global coordination. Without widespread cooperation, transcending national boundaries and socioeconomic divisions, our response to the problem of global heating is likely to be inadequate. One legacy we shall almost certainly leave to our descendants is an environment far harsher than that in which we (or our parents) have lived. As I was revising this book, the planet was swept by a pandemic, whose severity was vastly greater than it would have been if the children of the world had been taught to value, and aim at, pan-human cooperation.

Not just an abstract feature of evolving systems, then. Concrete features of our history and of the present suggest a real possibility that current education may be beset with a mess of ill-fitting pieces. Yet the previous paragraph remains too gestural. This book begins (properly begins) with a more precise diagnosis.

My first chapter documents a problem for educational policy—the problem of overload. It arises whenever people step back to ask just what a specific

Copyrighted material

educational institution (the elementary school, the secondary school, the university) should offer to those it serves (its victims?). So I begin with the well-motivated catalogue of necessary subjects proposed by one of the most educated and intelligent Englishmen who ever lived. In his inaugural address as rector of St. Andrew's University, John Stuart Mill presented the university curriculum he took his age to require. The speech was long, and the resulting program seems absurdly ambitious. That, I claim, is no accident. It wasn't Mill's fault.

The history of American schools displays just the same tendency—although, this time, educational reflection doesn't combine everything important into one indigestible lump but lurches from one apparently reasonable goal to another, different and equally defensible. In the contemporary world—even in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century worlds—decisions about how to educate the young are dominated by the threat of overload. It comes in two modes: a ludicrous massive conjunction (Mill) or oscillation among different priorities (the twentieth-century American school).

Once the problem is appreciated, an obvious strategy for addressing it suggests itself. Rather than consider curricular or social goals piecemeal, it would seem better to try to identify more general aims, thinking about how young people need to be prepared for life in today's world. Three large capacities seem to be required. First, a capacity for self-maintenance, most obviously directed toward readiness for the work environment. Second, an ability to function as a citizen—and here I focus on participation in democratic social and political life. Third, the ground should be laid so that individuals may be able to pursue lives they find fulfilling. Identifying three capacities rather than a single ability runs an obvious risk. Perhaps, given the circumstances in which people now live, there will be tensions among the broad goals, and thus difficulties in realizing all of them.

In fact, the problem of reconciling aims proves even more tricky than I have so far allowed. Instead of considering what education does (or should do) for the individual, we can ask what it must provide if the interests of a group—the local community, a cultural tradition, or the state—are to be well served. The question arises most obviously when nations arrive at views about the kinds of workers required for success in economic competition. Insisting on the priority of society's needs can easily distort attempts to find a healthy balance of individual capacities. Pursuits potentially promoting someone's fulfillment can become marginalized, or so poorly paid that they

Copyrighted material

make self-maintenance difficult. Developing a community of citizens may be sacrificed to the pressures perceived in the marketplace.

Chapter 1 presents the problem of overload, introduces the most important general aims of education, and identifies some major difficulties in reconciling them. The subsequent chapter then examines a particular source of tension: the demands of the labor market. Even at the dawn of economic theorizing, in the work of Adam Smith and his successors, the potential conflict between the evolution of the workplace and the development of the worker was clearly recognized. It is worth returning to the original recognition of the point to understand the full force of the danger. With that clearly in view, we can turn to the contemporary context, to confront fears of globalization and of automation and to recognize how the measures typically proposed to address the threats accord with an all-too-familiar pattern. Economic constraints are primary. Workers must adapt, or they and their nations must expect to wither and decline.

I suggest a different strategy, that of questioning the alleged economic constraints. Think about giving priority to the aims of citizenship and of personal fulfillment, in the age of globalization and of automation. Instead of lamenting the replacement of factory workers by machines, apparently forcing people into "menial" service jobs, view this as an opportunity for rethinking the conception of meaningful employment. In particular, two generic forms of significant work emerge, once the robots have liberated people from the assembly line: care of the elderly and nurturing of the young. Even under current conditions, when the caregivers and the teachers are poorly paid and often stigmatized, jobs in these sectors are widely viewed as rewarding. Remove the stigmas, offer the compensation this important work deserves, and, I suggest, many people would be able to lead far more fulfilling lives.

Chapter 2 offers some definite proposals—and this is a feature of many subsequent chapters as well. Sometimes what I suggest marks a relatively precise reform of current practice. On other occasions, I intend to indicate a direction in which more specific experiments might be tried. The most important recommendation of this chapter places education at the center of working life. Not only should there be a huge expansion in the class of those who guide the development of the young—properly paid teachers at all levels from infancy on—but all citizens ought to play a part in the nurturing of the next generations. On this conception, the "upbuilding of people" becomes central to all our lives.

Copyrighted material

Is this too cavalier? Can economic demands simply be waved away? Those are serious questions, and Part III of this book (Chapters 10 and 11) endeavors to come to terms with them. They must be postponed for a simple reason. Concerns about the feasibility of a scheme for reform can be taken up only when the entire scope and character of the revision has been described. Giving that description will take Parts I and II, the first nine chapters. At that point, it will become possible to ask what general social changes are required to adopt my education-centric position; and, once that first question is answered (Chapter 10), it is possible to explore whether the package of proposals is a utopian fantasy, one whose unfeasibility is exposed once economic constraints are given their due (Chapter 11).

Chapter 2's argument for placing education first, and configuring social and economic life to accord with its priorities, is elaborated further in Chapter 3. Here I attempt to be more precise about the concept of individual fulfillment. My efforts require wrestling with the oldest and most central question of philosophy, posed in the Western tradition by Socrates, when he asked "How to live?" The formulation covers two different issues: "How should *I* live?" and "How should *we* live together?" Anglophone thinkers often accentuate the difference by sharply separating the individual person, with distinctive talents, propensities, and interests, from the ambient society. I attempt to bring the questions closer together by recognizing how, from the very start of life, the self is constituted through relations with others.

In fact, I want to amend the Socratic question in a number of ways. First by understanding how different ways of posing it are pertinent at different stages of human history. We can ask what makes lives happy, good, fully human, meaningful, or fulfilled—and not all of the adjectives may be pertinent to someone's predicament. Appreciating that first point paves the way for a second. Socrates' question is better posed comparatively: given someone's circumstances, we should ask, "How could a life under these conditions be improved—how might it go better than such lives typically do?" The appropriate task is not to look for perfection, but to make progress.

The great liberal tradition of responding to the original question—in which Mill plays an important part—starts from an emphasis on autonomy. The life you live ought to be your own. Its pattern should not be thrust upon you. Thus liberals recognize two conditions on the fulfilled life: you should choose your own "life plan" (although your choice must be consonant with moral principles), and you should have significant success in pursuing it. Many people, including prominent liberals, have taken those two conditions

Copyrighted material

to be insufficient. Something more is required to rule out "life plans" that are harmless but trivial.

A better version of liberalism would add a constraint: your pursuit of your plan ought to make a positive contribution to the lives of others. Yet this addition shouldn't be seen as a patch, something applied after difficulties have been recognized in the original proposal. Better to see the individual's free choice—the heart of the liberal's approach—as itself formed through interactions with others in a specific social milieu. The fulfilled life must be your own, but what counts as "your own" isn't some conformity to and elaboration of a little kernel of a self, present in you at birth. We become who we are through a dialogue in which the growing person learns from and gives back to a broader social group. The autonomy liberals prize is inevitably a matter of degree. The freedom of our choice is improved when the parties in the dialogue are mutually sensitive, when the social interactions through which a person is formed are attentive to the emerging individual, and when the nascent self is similarly sensitive to those who nurture its development. The dialogue goes awry when interlocutors impose, and, equally, when the plan the person makes is insensitive to the needs and aspirations of others.

To view things in these terms deepens the case for the proposals of Chapter 2. Education is the site at which individuals are formed, and thus is rightly central. For the dialogue to go well, individual predilections have to be recognized. The chances of that are increased as more people, who bring varied perspectives, are involved. Moreover, understanding fulfillment through contribution to something larger (and more enduring) than the individual self helps connect the capacity for fulfillment to the capacity for citizenship.

That connection is elaborated in Chapter 4. I begin from a consideration of democracy—and from contemporary perceptions of its troubles. Democracy, I suggest, comes at a number of levels, as well as at various scales. A shallow conception of democracy focuses on elections and votes: democracy is in place whenever there are regular elections, with choice of candidates and opportunities for all adults to vote. A deeper level recognizes the importance of free and open debate, so that citizens have the chance to understand how their votes might best promote their interests. Deeper still lies Dewey's concept of democracy as a "shared way of life" in which regular interactions among citizens promote mutual learning and accommodation.

Although some commentators today worry about defects in the mechanics of voting (as, for example, when questions arise about the ways in

Copyrighted material

which the boundaries of electoral districts are drawn), these are not the most fundamental concerns about the health of current democracies. Many would point to the ways in which the conditions of public debate have diverged from the open arena envisaged by Mill and other champions of free speech and discussion. Critics identify the distortions apparently responsible for a misinformed electorate, unable to recognize policies bearing on widely shared concerns (as, for example, in votes for candidates who downplay or scoff at the threat posed by climate change). Worries of this kind probe more deeply than the anxieties about elections, but they do not penetrate far enough. I argue that the problems at the relatively superficial levels cannot be adequately addressed without restoring the conditions central to Dewey's approach to democracy. Deweyan democracy demands educative interactions among citizens, occasions for deliberation together by people with different perspectives.

The core of democracy, I argue, consists in conversations aiming to exemplify three virtues: inclusiveness, informedness, and mutual engagement. Deliberations are more inclusive when more of the perspectives adopted by people affected by the issue at hand are represented. They are better informed to the extent that participants base their contributions on well-established findings and there are barriers to appealing to recognized falsehoods and misinformation. Mutual engagement is promoted the more the discussants are committed to understanding the perspectives of others and to seeking an outcome all those involved can tolerate.

To the extent that deliberations of this sort can be (re)introduced into democracies, we can expect to avoid recurrent reversals of policy that harm all through the instability they generate, and to diminish polarization and fragmentation. Democracy sometimes reigns at small scales—in the family or the local community. The challenge is to build on these models, finding ways to advance democratic deliberations in the political life of large, multicultural states (and, ultimately, across national borders). Answering the challenge is, in part, a matter of constructing social institutions, but it surely requires cultivating a specific kind of citizenship. If young people were accustomed, from their earliest years, to plan together, in ever larger and more diverse groups, they would be more likely to emerge as adults who could transfer their skills and virtues into realizing Deweyan democracy.

Chapter 4 culminates in outlining an educational program for how this might be achieved (and here my proposals are frankly experimental). Deweyan citizens, if they can be reliably reared, would not only overcome

Copyrighted material

some of the pathologies currently diagnosed in democratic societies. They would also learn the kinds of sensitivities to others Chapter 3 viewed as central to personal fulfillment. Hence, an approach appropriate for realizing one of the large aims of education (good citizenship) also contributes to another (fulfillment). Two potentially conflicting goals become more closely aligned, thus helping with the problem of reconciliation (discerned in Chapter 1).

Chapter 5 sets up a further linkage. One traditionally important part of education, broadly conceived, is to foster moral development. Questions arise, of course, about what exactly such fostering requires and how the work should be apportioned between the home and public institutions (like schools). I elaborate an account of morality I have offered in earlier writings[1] and suggest that, from the early years on, schools have an important role to play in children's moral progress.

Whether we reflect on the long history of moral life, extending tens of thousands of years into the past, or consider the episodes in which striking moral advances are made—the abolition of slavery, the expansion of opportunities for women, and the acceptance of same-sex love serve as my three paradigms—the importance of collective deliberation to morality becomes apparent. Progress is made when people engage in an informed and sympathetic manner with all those who are affected by a particular issue. It is retarded when discussions exclude groups with particular perspectives, or when some of the participants are misinformed, or when no serious effort is made to appreciate how the world looks and feels from others' points of view. On my account, morality is a collective affair. No single individual is the final authority. Religious or philosophical texts may supply ideas or tools or stories for thinking through an issue. In the end, however, moral advances are made by societies when they approximate a form of ideal conversation, one in which all "stakeholders" are included, in which the participants deploy the best available information, and in which they listen sympathetically to others, attempting to discover how their lives would be affected if various alternatives came about, and seeking a solution with which everyone could live. Individuals need to acquire capacities for contributing to those kinds of discussions, and for simulating them when they have to make decisions on their own.

[1] *The Ethical Project* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2011) and *Moral Progress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

Copyrighted material

Fostering moral development is thus closely linked to creating good citizens. In both instances, we require capacities for engaging with others. Moreover, as my earlier discussions of fulfillment have tried to show, capacities of this sort are important in helping individuals find their own path to a fulfilled life. Chapters 3–5 thus combine to construct a framework within which two of the three major educational goals identified in Chapter 1 (in confronting the problem of overload) become reconciled. Further, if the education-first approach to the labor market presented in Chapter 2 proves feasible, we arrive at a framework that promises complete reconciliation.

Part II will attempt to show how that framework might be elaborated as a general curriculum for contemporary young people. Before turning to that task, however, one important concern must be addressed. Although religion is periodically mentioned in some of my discussions in the first five chapters, the status attributed to it is hardly that favored by devout people of various faiths. My stance is resolutely humanistic—not militantly atheistic, consigning religion to the trash can, but also not prepared to give it pride of place in understanding the fulfilled life, or in characterizing citizenship, or as the source of morality. Chapter 5 will surely strike some readers as committing the most glaring sin of omission. Shouldn't religion be included in public education? And what place or role should it be assigned?

These are important questions, and my proposals for reform would ring hollow unless they were addressed. Chapter 6 offers answers, using current debates to elicit and defend my position. Two polar views dominate the contemporary world. One of them, held in several different forms, maintains that a particular religious text or tradition offers authoritative moral guidance: it is the source of all true morality. The other sees all religious doctrines as false, contending that religion should be swept off the face of the earth as quickly and as thoroughly as possible. To my mind, the combination of these positions skews our thinking about the place of religion in society and in the development of the young.

Contending that some favorite piece of scripture settles moral questions is disastrous for the pictures of moral life and of good citizenship I have painted. Conversation should not be stopped by a foot-stamping appeal to the words in a book or the dicta of a religious teacher. More than two millennia ago, Plato confronted the idea of religion as the ultimate authority in moral matters, but my argument turns on Kant's more recent deepening of the point. Before we can accept anything (a text, a contemporary religious teacher) as a guide to what we should do, we must already conduct an

Copyrighted material

appraisal—a *moral* appraisal—of the putative source. Simply gesturing at the power of the supposed authority won't do. For that is to commit the moral error of numerous twentieth-century functionaries who were complicit in evil. Invoking the fact that The Leader commanded you to do it doesn't get you off the hook.

Once this point is fully appreciated, it's easy to recognize important distinctions among kinds of religion. Chapter 6 suggests a rough division, and uses it to sketch an equally rough account of religious progress. Tribal religion (in which gods are viewed as the source of morality and in which the devout serve as their foot soldiers) is the most primitive form. A second stage brings a dose of ecumenicism, as the link between morality and the divine will is retained but the faithful are no longer required to do any "smiting" on the deity's behalf. A more thoroughly ecumenical religion arises when Kant's insight is firmly adopted: even among the unbelievers, there are good people; morality is independent of religion, and properly used to provide independent assessment of the scriptures. At the third stage, the insight remains attached to the thought that the doctrines and practices of a particular faith are uniquely correct; even though unbelievers misunderstand important aspects of the universe—not recognizing the true god, or even not recognizing any god at all—that doesn't prevent some of them from acting just as well their devout counterparts. Finally, at the fourth stage, religions become completely ecumenical when they abandon the assumption of unique correctness. Refined religion takes religious texts to be metaphorical (allegorical, poetic) accounts of a transcendent aspect of the universe, one that cannot be characterized in literal language, but toward which the world's religions gesture.

I argue that the crucial step occurs between the first ecumenical stage and the second, once Kant's insight becomes firmly entrenched. Thus the educational framework and the social structure I envisage cleaves religions into two. Conversation-stopping religions, whose adherents adopt a practice of justifying moral claims by appeal to the authority of a text, cannot be permitted to pursue that practice in public moral, social, or political deliberations. Young people must be shown, at some stage of their education, why that is so. Their schooling should include some comparative understanding of different religions, and it should recognize the important benefits religion (at its best) has conferred. Children should also understand the significance of Kant's insight.

Chapter 6 concludes with some specific proposals for religious education. Those proposals are natural outgrowths of the line of argument just outlined

Copyrighted material

(one that the chapter presents in much more detail). They complete my attempt to offer a framework, capable of reconciling the potentially conflicting major aims of Chapter 1, and of placing education at the center of human life. The rest of the book is devoted to explaining in more detail what this might mean for the work of the schools (Part II) and to defending against charges that it is, inevitably, a fantasy (Part III).

Chapters 7–9 fill in the scaffolding erected in Part I by considering the content of a general, pre-university, education, one appropriately shared by all students. Chapter 7 begins with the natural sciences. Public discussions of the institution of science ("science" in the singular) or of the various sciences are frequently distorted by faulty general views—and the early part of the chapter attempts to correct these. I argue that the sciences are diverse, and that individual sciences are inevitably selective. Human inquiry could never attain more than a ludicrously inadequate approximation to "the complete truth about nature," and investigators rightly seek answers to questions meeting human needs and satisfying human aspirations. In consequence, scientific research should be viewed as a socially embedded activity, one that ought to be in dialogue with the people whom the sciences serve.

Educational implications follow. The public must be prepared to play its part in this dialogue, to offer the community of investigators a clear and realistic picture of its own interests and to rely on the outcomes of well-conducted inquiry. Schools and universities do not just have the task of renewing the scientific community, generating new specialists to replace those whose powers have waned. They must also produce citizens able to help set directions for new lines of inquiry, and able to assess how discoveries bear on public policies. All over the world, one of these needs—the need to train the next generation of scientists—is widely appreciated. In reaction to it, many nations, concerned to boost their economies through science-based technologies, have set up programs to encourage (and accelerate) the flow of new researchers.

Blanket attempts to ensure that no potential scientist is overlooked run contrary to the second goal of science education—the cultivation of a scientifically literate public. Force-feeding students as if all were destined for careers in research or in applications of the sciences tends to alienate young people who recognize, from an early age, that this is not a promising direction for them. Dulled by classes in which they are asked to memorize technical

Copyrighted material

vocabulary and to struggle (unsuccessfully) with toy problems, they lose the curiosity of their early school-years, dismissing the sciences as arid, boring, and incomprehensible. As adults—and voters—they are ill equipped to understand the technical issues on which policy questions turn. Even when, as with climate change, such questions are crucial to their own lives, and those of their children and grandchildren.

Chapter 7 proposes a remedy, distinguishing general science education from the forms of rigorous training appropriate for those who come to see a scientific career (perhaps in research, perhaps in some area where work is informed by results of past research) as a real possibility for themselves. Focusing on preserving a sense of wonder and on instilling a capacity for continuing to follow scientific developments, I suggest some concrete ways in which general education in the sciences might be reconfigured. The amended curriculum aims to avoid producing dilettantes, while simultaneously recognizing the deadening effects of treating all students as if they were researchers-in-the-making. Scientific literacy can—and should—be available to all.

If science education is often overemphasized at the secondary level—with the distortions I have noted—training in the arts is typically viewed as a luxury, something dispensable in the competitive contemporary world. Chapter 8 responds to this situation by making the case for continued education in some field (or fields) of the arts (broadly construed). Indeed, I contend that the arts should be awarded a far larger place in the curriculum than they have been given, at least in my lifetime, and quite possibly at any time in the past few centuries.

My case begins with demolishing a myth. Many people believe firmly in the progress of the natural sciences, while denying the progress of the arts. Their judgment rests on a faulty comparison. They recognize, quite correctly, how, in some periods, the works of art produced in a particular genre are superior to those created at later times—perhaps landscape painting has never again achieved the heights attained by the Dutch masters of the Golden Age (the seventeenth century). It's easy to ignore the parallel fact that scientific creativity comes in uneven bursts—Newton's *annus mirabilis* (1665) is aptly named. Natural sciences progress by accumulating resources (statements, equations, graphs, data sets, instruments, and so forth) that can be deployed by subsequent generations. So, too, with respect to the arts. We don't lose van Ruisdael, Hobbema, and Vermeer when we acquire Constable, Turner, and Van Gogh.

Copyrighted material

So perhaps the difference between the arts and the sciences consists in the practical applications to which scientific research leads? Advances in biology help (or might help?) us to conserve or improve the environment; landscape paintings don't do anything similar (although they could be sources of inspiration). Nonscientists routinely suppose the importance of investigating the natural world to lie in the practical benefits it ultimately delivers—the agricultural advances, the devices that ease our lives, and above all the medical improvements, the drugs, the treatments, and the vaccines. On that score there is a case for regarding scientific progress as more significant. Yet scientists typically do not view technology as grounding the distinctive importance of their work. Instead, they point to the intrinsic benefits of a deeper and richer understanding of nature. If that is the sphere in which the comparison should be made, then, I maintain, the everyday judgment ought to be reversed. The arts win.

Once the histories of visual art, of music, of literature, drama, dance, and film are seen as amassing resources for the improvement of human lives, it is important to ask just what these alleged resources do for people. I offer a threefold answer. First, encounters with the arts can have a special vitality—they are episodes in which we are most vividly alive. Second, the effects of our engagement with the artworks we love are not transitory; they affect, sometimes profoundly, the course of our subsequent experience. Third, the arts can teach us. Not through any direct inculcation of information, but by showing us the need to revise the concepts and perspectives we have previously brought to our decisions and to our reasoning. Art can modify the framework in which we set our lives, our experiences, and our interactions with others. In the fundamental revisions it generates, it usually has a far more powerful effect on people than do their advances in scientific understanding.

Chapter 8 tries to make a detailed case for the line of reasoning I have sketched. On that basis, I explore ways in which young people's education in the arts should proceed. Here, three points are central. First, it is important to combine receptivity to art with developing abilities to create in some mode. We should take seriously the project of instilling skills sufficient to enable people to enjoy working in the genres of art that appeal to them and to enable them to appreciate and engage with the achievements of others in those genres. Second, we should recognize the diversity of tastes. I defend a moderate egalitarianism. Almost everyone is capable of aesthetic experiences with the three significant benefits I identify. Yet there is significant variation in the genres and works capable of generating those benefits. An important

Copyrighted material

educational task is to guide growing individuals to art able to speak deeply to them. Third, the list of arts often presupposed in thinking about art education (the one I slid in at the beginning of the previous paragraph) is too narrow. For some people, artistic creativity and satisfaction are found in designing a garden, or in sewing, or in cuisine. As in other chapters, I attempt to combine my conclusions in specific proposals for how education in the arts should go.

Chapter 9 continues the lines of thought just developed, by focusing on the humanities and social sciences. Consonant with the framework of Part I, I proceed by exploring how to foster fulfilling lives and capacities for citizenship (concerns about self-maintenance—employment opportunities—are deferred to the end of the chapter). Building on the argument for the importance of the arts, I argue for the power of critical and historical studies to deepen self-understanding: to help young people locate their own distinctive talents and to enter in to the perspectives and lives of others. Achieving these goals is enriched when the humanities and social sciences work in tandem. Geography and anthropology can play an important part from the early school years on. In secondary school, they can be supplemented by introducing students to the approaches, techniques, and findings of psychology, sociology, political theory, and economics.

Conceiving this somewhat unruly collection of subject areas as concerned with understanding oneself—learning what it is to be human, as well as what it is to be a particular individual human being—points to a different educational approach. Throughout the chapter I am concerned with *interactions* among the disciplines I have mentioned. The focus is always on how studies of these kinds can promote the two major goals. In the course of the argument, I reinforce the reconciliation I claimed to achieve in Part I. We see concretely how education advancing fulfillment also contributes to good citizenship and to moral development.

The chapter also builds on my treatment of the natural sciences. Chapter 7 identified the goal of general science education in terms of cultivating scientific literacy. The humanities and social sciences demand analogous forms of literacy. Instead of conceiving them as areas in which students must be introduced to a (potentially vast) corpus of Important Knowledge, they should be seen as providing abilities to read particular kinds of presentations, thus opening the gates to diverse kinds of information and perspectives that can combine to illuminate human life, generally and in individual instances. Successful education provides skills adaptable to the situations in which people find themselves throughout their lives.

Copyrighted material

Although I offer specific suggestions about how this might proceed, discussing which kinds of history might be emphasized and which ignored, considering the value of teaching foreign languages, and reflecting on what potential role my own discipline (philosophy) might play, these are, for the most part, intended as illustrative examples. Thus the proposals at the end of the chapter stand back from the particular cases, offering a structure for the humanities and social sciences curriculum. That takes a step toward making the abstract proposals of Part I more concrete, but many details remain to be elaborated.

Yet, in concluding Part II in this way, I may well seem to have intensified concerns about the wide-eyed idealism of my venture. Self-understanding, keyed to fulfillment and citizenship, occupies center stage. Little is said to allay the worry that children educated as I propose will be unable to support themselves in the "real world." Before the end, I offer only a few words to appease the skeptic, pointing back to Chapter 2's vision of a changed labor market in which manufacturing is largely automated and service employment is ever more widespread. Does that do enough to support my focus on two out of the three original large goals? Will educating the young to understand themselves and others better translate into adequate performance in the workplace, not only in the supposedly dominant service positions, but in the many "practical" jobs that inevitably remain?

Skeptical questions of this kind are the entering wedge, provoking much larger worries. If the education outlined in Parts I and II is to succeed, how must society change? And would the reforms prove economically ruinous? Part III will attempt to answer those doubts.

First things first. Chapter 10 opens by acknowledging a crucial point. Educational reform this sweeping cannot attain the goals invoked to motivate it if change is confined to the purely educational sphere—seen as a matter of modifying schools and curricula. Features of contemporary societies pose all sorts of readily recognizable problems. Teachers are often seriously underpaid. Schools are often dilapidated and dangerous. Children often live in poverty—and many have no stable homes to leave in the morning and to return to in the afternoon. Parental resources vary widely. Social and economic conditions force students to compete for scarce opportunities. That competition intensifies as they grow older. Stereotypes and biases are everywhere.

If the factors just mentioned were left unchanged, my educational proposals would best be viewed as a joke. Beginning with the simplest problems and

Copyrighted material

proceeding to successively more intricate difficulties, the chapter explores the social changes required to enable the revisionary program for education to succeed. (Here, evidently, I adopt the "education first" stance introduced in Chapter 2.) Out of these investigations emerges the picture of a different society—a *Deweyan Society*—toward which we should strive. The distinctive features of that society are summarized at the end of the chapter.

There are seven of them. First is a validation of all forms of work dedicated toward improving human lives. Here I replace a classical distinction of political economy ("productive" versus "unproductive" labor) with what the arguments of Part I expose as a more fundamental one. Some goods are produced and consumed (and some services provided and compensated) simply because they serve as marks of status. These are (corrupting) luxuries we are better off without. All other types of employment, those advancing the fulfillment of others, should be awarded roughly equal respect.

The second feature of the Deweyan society cashes out the demand for equal respect—literally. Although there may be some differences in wages and salaries, inequalities are sharply reduced. Compensation for any validated form of work must lie within a range. That range is set through the kind of democratic discussion Chapters 4 and 5 recognized as central to political and moral life. Similarly (third feature), the Deweyan society constantly works to decrease inequalities in the performances of educational institutions. Schools, universities, and centers for adult education are free and open to all, with periodic investments to help any that are seen as less successful in promoting the two major educational goals.

Fourthly, as part of its commitment to genuine equality of opportunity, the society fully supports programs for the eradication of prejudices and stereotypes. In particular, throughout lifelong education, it provides funds for people to meet, plan, and deliberate together in heterogeneous groups. Joint decision-making starts in the first school grades, and continues throughout maturity. Adults are encouraged (fifth feature) to take periodic leaves from their regular employment to renew their education, possibly by exploring new interests. They are also expected to participate in the rearing of the next generation, not only within the family, but also in their neighborhood schools. Leaves are fully funded.

Adults who cannot find work are supported at the bottom of the range of allowable income. They are given access to a central clearinghouse, enabling them to seek employment. Finally, any efforts to reintroduce hierarchies of status for different occupations are firmly resisted.

Copyrighted material

Some of these features of the Deweyan society involve no direct costs. Others, quite evidently, call for governmental investment in the lives of citizens. The most obvious economic issue is whether, if the society were to be brought into being, it could be sustained. Answering that question is not, however, enough. Skeptics should also wonder if a transition from the *status quo* to a Deweyan society is also economically feasible.

Chapter 11 tries to tackle both questions. It starts by considering gloomy judgments proclaiming the inevitable collapse of societies exemplifying my seven features. Those features depend on a systematic change: once a society has reached a stage of economic comfort, it can increase the time spent away from the workplace instead of striving for ever greater productivity. The crucial move in bringing about the Deweyan society is to declare that enough is enough.

Hence the economic viability of my proposals turns on whether humanity is condemned to pursue economic growth, come what may. Contemporary affluent societies are used to worrying about growth. Newspapers report the ways in which GDP changes, quarter by quarter, with commentators exulting or lamenting depending on the direction. Is this simply a fetish? Something over which informed citizens obsess, with no good reason?

No. Given the arrangements of the world today, keeping track of growth is entirely sensible. Economists see growth as an indicator of the state of the business cycle. Successive periods of falling growth may point to a recession in the offing, with consequent unemployment and hardship. Deweyan societies are organized differently, offering many public goods and services and buffering the conditions under which their citizens live. Their arrangements will continue unless the ability to provide what has proved sufficient is compromised—there is no longer enough. Why should a falling growth rate, or even a state of zero growth, signal that?

Chapter 11 considers three main sources of concern. What has sufficed in the past would do so no longer if productivity failed to meet the needs of a growing population; or if those needs were modified through technological advances, not available within the society at prices it could afford; or if the *relative* growth with respect to trading partners was deficient, so that previously available levels of production could no longer be sustained. Analyses of the three threats uncovers grounds for optimism. Some forms of the challenges can be straightforwardly rebutted. Others conflict with data showing how nations can find their own economic niches, and how they can prosper despite significant reductions in the length of the workweek. At best, the case for thinking Deweyan societies are doomed to collapse is “not proven.”

Copyrighted material

Skeptics may offer more general doubts. They may deny, for example, that productivity—today or in the foreseeable future—is enough to support a satisfactory Deweyan society. Or they may question economic regulation, singing familiar anthems to the virtues of the "free market." I offer a response to the first line of argument, by recognizing the enormous waste allowed in our current practices. The second, I suggest, rests on a widespread myth, one that either invokes an impossibility (the completely unregulated market) or else favors a particular style of supposedly "minimal regulation." The latter choice is well suited to reducing the prices of consumer goods. Yet, as wise economists periodically remind us, regulation of markets should be tailored to the goals we intend to achieve. It is not entirely obvious that the lowest possible prices are the *summum bonum* to which everything else we value should be sacrificed.

The chapter concludes by recognizing the difficulty of offering a detailed roadmap showing the route to the Deweyan society. Here, I recommend a pragmatic answer. The conditions distilled at the end of Chapter 10 indicate the directions in which we might advance. Let us head off in these directions, adjust our plans as we go, and see how far we can get.

Chapter 1 begins with Mill, and it is fitting that he should return at the close of Chapter 11. A distinctive feature of his approach to economic issues is his willingness to tolerate the "stationary state"—to champion the many-sidedness of human life against the relentless striving to accumulate wealth. That attitude is shared by others, including people from very different traditions—Rabindranath Tagore and John Dewey are notable examples. Despite the dominance of supposed economic constraints in much contemporary thinking about social issues, the attitude still thrives today in the work of socially attuned philosophers—sometimes in the work of thinkers specifically concerned with education, sometimes *en passant* in studies of other facets of our culture.[2]

Perhaps the clearest and most forceful expression of the wish to turn dominance on its head comes in the passage from "The American Scholar" I have adapted as the title and the epigraph for this book. My interpretation of

[2] Thus, besides the principal writings of Harry Brighouse, Randall Curren, Meira Levinson, and Harvey Siegel, it pervades Martha Nussbaum's impressive corpus. It is also clearly discernible in Kwame Anthony Appiah's important book, *The Lies That Bind*, New York: W. W. Norton, 2018; see, in particular, 177–79.

Copyrighted material

Emerson's words is probably not what he intended.[3] His transcendentalism tends to displace a distant deity, and to view humanity as the *telos* of creation. Emerson was, after all, an odd Lamarckian, one who could write:

And, striving to be man, the worm
Mounts through all the spires of form.[4]

Perhaps he thought of the cosmos—or the organic part of it—as having a purpose, the production of the perfect human being ("man"). My use of his phrase is intended differently: the best we humans can do with our lives is to nurture and protect the sentient beings with whom we share the planet; the most striking and effective ways through which that can be done consist in fostering nascent human lives; in that activity, we contribute to something larger than our individual selves, a human project that spans the generations, and that, with our help and with luck, will continue to advance for the remaining duration (inevitably finite) of our species.

In that sense, "the main enterprise of the world is the upbuilding of a human being."

[3] I conjecture, however, that his use of the odd word "upbuilding" was an attempt to echo the German "Bildung" (education)—possibly even emphasized in a neologism ("Aufbildung", adding "auf," the German "up," doesn't exist—although "Ausbildung" is an alternative word for education).

[4] "Nature," in *The Complete Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: W. M. Wise, 1929), 913

Copyrighted material

PART I

Copyrighted material

Copyrighted material

1
Overload

In 1867, two years after the students of St. Andrews University had elected him as their rector, John Stuart Mill took a break from his duties as a member of Parliament, and traveled north to Scotland to deliver his Inaugural Address. Mill began by alluding with approval to the custom of using the occasion to offer "a few thoughts" on the subject of liberal education.[1] He continued, somewhat ominously, by remarking that "Education, in its larger sense, is one of the most inexhaustible of all topics."[2] The speech lived up to his advertisement, for, although he spoke quickly, Mill went on for more than three hours.[3] I don't know how his audience reacted, but it seems a safe bet to suppose that the undergraduates found him less entertaining than their successors who listened, just over a century later, to their own choice as rector—the British comedian, and famous silly-walker, John Cleese.

The text of Mill's address might provoke suspicion that, like Topsy, it just growed. Early on, he made it clear how some kinds of education were beyond his intended scope. Professional training has no place in his thoughts. To be sure, there should be schools of law, medicine, and engineering, but these do not belong to the project of general education, to which universities ought to be dedicated.[4] He began with the question, disputed then as now, of the relative roles of the humanities and the sciences in a general education. Mill proposed to settle the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns, the defenders of classical learning and the champions of natural science, by awarding prizes to both sides.[5] The writings of antiquity, in the original Greek and Latin, retain their great importance.[6] Study of them should be

[1] SMC 321.
[2] SMC 321.
[3] See https://news.st-andrews.ac.uk/archive/the-liberal-university-and-its-enemies/.
[4] SMC 322.
[5] SMC 324. This had not always been his position. Some of his earlier writings (e.g., "On Genius" [1832] and "Civilization—Signs of the Times" [1836]) claim distinctive virtues for classical studies. By 1867, he had become more positive about the contributions of modern languages and literature.
[6] SMC 328–33. The special character of the ancients as foils for the understanding of contemporary life and contemporary society features prominently among Mill's reasons. The ancient Greeks and Romans are more unlike (British) students than other modern European peoples, but not totally dissimilar (like the "Orientals"; SMC 329). Classical languages, literature, philosophy, and history

The Main Enterprise of the World. Philip Kitcher, Oxford University Press. © Oxford University Press 2022.
DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780190928971.003.0002

Copyrighted material

streamlined[7] to allow a thorough immersion in mathematics and the physical sciences, both mathematical and experimental. Moreover, the understanding of the principal features of astronomy, physics, and chemistry ought to be supplemented with appreciation of the general ways in which the sciences infer their conclusions from the evidence. The rules of deductive logic, and those of non-deductive inference must be studied and assimilated.[8]

At that point, perhaps after some further remarks about how all this could be managed, Mill might have stopped. He didn't. Apparently his parliamentary work had impressed him with the need for public understanding of policies of hygiene. His next step was to extend the scientific curriculum to embrace the study of physiology. Most people, he suggests, "will be required to form an opinion and to take action on sanitary subjects."[9] Moreover, the "science of the laws of organic and animal life" provides a bridge to studies of even greater significance. Following Pope, Mill takes the "proper study of mankind" to be "Man."[10]

The requirements of general education expand further. An encounter with psychology is essential, and here Mill inserts a plug for the ability of philosophy, epistemology in particular, to "sharpen" the "intellectual faculties."[11] Most of all, students need instruction in "the exercise of thought on the great interests of mankind as moral and social beings."[12] Now, subject upon subject come flooding in. History, conceived generally (or "philosophically"), should provide "some incipient conception of the causes and laws of progress."[13] Political science should acquaint the young with the "civil and political institutions" of their own country—and of others as well.[14] Political economy is crucial for understanding the economic constraints on well-intentioned policies.[15] Jurisprudence is "of no less importance," but it should

thus serve as an intended "multicultural" requirement. The social class of Mill's intended audience is made plain by his thought that acquaintance with modern languages and modern cultures is best served through travel and a period of residence in another country.

[7] SMC 325. Here Mill sketches the methods he thinks appropriate in language instruction. Later (SMC 333–34) he castigates the emphasis placed on exercises in writing Greek and Latin verse, pointing out that the important goal is to achieve a reading knowledge of the languages.

[8] SMC 338–40.

[9] SMC 340.

[10] SMC 340–41.

[11] SMC 341, 342.

[12] SMC 343.

[13] SMC 343.

[14] SMC 344.

[15] SMC 344. Here, Mill is at pains to defend the "dismal science" against the charge that it induces insensitivity to others. The significance of this apparent excursion becomes clearer in light of his later interest in the arts as cultivating the emotions.

Copyrighted material

be supplemented by some study of "International Law."[16] Yet none of these crucial educational domains can be expected to yield its proper fruits unless there is serious attention to ethics. Mill's ideal curriculum requires a thorough and impartial survey of all the "principal systems of moral philosophy," supplemented with a comparative and historical study of the major world religions.[17]

At this point (just past the two-hour mark), Mill announced that he had now said what he had to say on the debate with which he had started,[18] probably arousing the hopes of his audience. But he was not ready to stop. He added a defense of the arts.[19] The "Fine Arts," he suggested, cultivate "exalted feelings,"[20] raising people "above the littlenesses of humanity,"[21] and offering them "insight into subjects larger and far more ennobling than the minutiae of a business or a profession."[22] A deep immersion in the arts complements the other branches of education, thereby helping people to discharge a fundamental human duty. Each of us is "to leave his fellow creatures some little better for the use he has known how to make of his intellect."[23] The promise of education is to provide a "deeper and more varied interest" in life.[24] Unlike other rewards, our sense of making a contribution to the lives of others will not grow "less valuable" as we age. Instead, "it not only endures, but increases."[25] On this high note, Mill ended.

An amusing Victorian pathology? The fantasies of an over-earnest intellectual, force-fed by a father who had started him on Greek at three? The apologia of someone whose brilliance had been clouded by a nervous breakdown in early adulthood, from which he had recovered through reading the poetry of Wordsworth?[26] The demands of this apparently preposterous address are

[16] SMC 344, 345.
[17] SMC 346–49.
[18] SMC 349.
[19] SMC 349–53.
[20] SMC 351.
[21] SMC 352.
[22] SMC 353.
[23] SMC 353. As we shall see, this theme is developed by Dewey.
[24] SMC 354.
[25] SMC 354.
[26] Mill's *Autobiography* provides a detailed account of the curriculum devised for him by his father, James Mill, and gives a poignant account of his breakdown and recovery. Mill senior was a close friend of Bentham's, and intended that his eldest son should be the apostle of Benthamite Utilitarianism for the next generation. The all-too-common interpretation of Mill as a utilitarian who deviated little from Bentham would be corrected if philosophers were to read more widely in Mill's writings—studying the essays "Bentham" and "Coleridge," as well as *Principles of Political Economy*, *Considerations on Representative Government*, the posthumous chapters on socialism, the *Autobiography*, the literary essays on poetry, and the Inaugural Address. In "Mill, Education, and the Good Life," in *John Stuart Mill and the Art of Living*, ed. Ben Eggleston, Dale Miller, and David

Copyrighted material

to be explained away, partly as products of past social conditions, partly as idiosyncrasies of an extraordinarily articulate member of an elite class. So, at least, you might think.

If you are tempted to think that, I hope to convince you that you are wrong. Behind Mill's peroration stands a complex of forces, even more intense today than they were a century and a half ago. The breadth of his understanding of the possibilities of education pushes him to multiply requirements beyond credibility. He is moved by a well-considered conception of what education—"in its larger sense"—is meant to accomplish, for the individual and for the society of which the individual is a part.[27] Anyone who tries to understand and to amend the practice of education by asking after its proper aims will be forced to traverse the ground Mill attempted to cover. The more thoroughly and comprehensively you reflect on the issues, the more demands you will pile up. The end result? Overload.

In the prelude to an aria beloved of bass-baritones, Leporello informs the aggrieved Donna Elvira that she will be "neither the first nor the last" woman seduced by Don Giovanni. Similarly, Mill's exercise in overload has predecessors and descendants. Unlike Leporello, I haven't obsessively constructed a catalogue in which all the exhibits are numbered. But it's worth noting a few high spots.

Plato's *Republic* is rightly recognized not only as a foundational work in metaphysics and political philosophy, but also as the first great discussion of educational issues. The citizens of his ideal society are divided into three classes, the majority who provide the material resources the city needs, a smaller set who defend against potential invasions,[28] and an elite who rule. In the *Republic*, Plato is most interested in the education of this last group. Consequently, the middle books anticipate the form of Mill's

Weinstein (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 192–211; and in "Mill's Consequentialism," in *The Routledge Companion to Nineteenth-Century Thought*, ed. Dean Moyar (London: Routledge, 2010), 633–57, I have tried to set the record straight.

[27] This conception emerges in Mill's early characterization of the educated person as having a particular specialization set within a broad general knowledge that provides a "map" of the whole (SMC 323), and in the closing picture of human life as increased ("tenfold") in value through contributions to humanity (SMC 353–54).

[28] The military forces Plato envisages are not restricted to defense. Sometimes, apparently, it proves necessary to "seize some of our neighbors' land" (373d; R 1012). As the later *Laws* makes clear, under ideal conditions, no military class would be required. (Thanks to Randy Curren for alerting me to this point.)

Copyrighted material

address, enumerating the requirements for proper rulers, and describing the programs through which they can be adequately prepared. Finally, toward the end of Book VII, Socrates is able to add up the time needed to educate someone capable of governing the city. "At the age of fifty," he explains to his interlocutors, "those who've survived the tests" will be ready.[29]

As Rousseau observed, the conception of education developed by Plato looks outward to the public sphere.[30] Concerned to combat the corruption of the individual by the educational practices of his time, Rousseau turned his gaze inward. The detailed program undertaken by Émile's dedicated (overloaded?) tutor aims at harmonizing three factors taken to shape human development.[31] After the necessary exercises have been scrupulously prescribed and strenuously pursued, the pupil will achieve the closest approximation to "happiness on earth."[32] Although the tutor—presumably exhausted—might then be expected to enjoy a contented retirement, that is not to be allowed. Instead he is recruited to supervise and advise Émile and Sophie in their new roles as parents.

Overload is prominent in the two greatest pre-Millian explorations of the aims of education. If it is less evident in the writings of the late nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, that is because, writing, like Rousseau, in reaction to the perceived deficiencies of the times, many[33] subsequent scholars emphasize educational goals they take to have been neglected. Worried about overspecialization and curricula that "favour a particular pursuit," John Henry Newman takes the goal of university education to lie in the "formation of a character."[34] "Liberal Education makes not the Christian, not the Catholic, but the gentleman."[35] Newman's choice of words makes even more vivid the restricted focus of the major historical discussions of education. He differs from Plato and Mill—and even from Rousseau, for

[29] 540, R 1154.

[30] "Do you want to get an idea of public education? Read Plato's *Republic*. . . . It is the most beautiful educational treatise ever written." E 40.

[31] E 38. The three "masters" from which each child must learn are "nature, men, and things." I interpret Rousseau as claiming that, in being educated, development is guided by our own individual biological proclivities, by the ambient society, and by the material conditions of our existence.

[32] E 480.

[33] But not all. Systematic attempts to characterize the "aims of education" are sometimes taken up in twentieth-century writings. See, for example, A. N. Whitehead, *The Aims of Education* (New York: Free Press, 1929) and John White, *The Aims of Education Restated* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982). It's worth noting that Whitehead is aware of the problem of overload, and reacts to what he regards as its unfortunate effects on the educational regime of his times: "Do not teach too many subjects" is one of his educational "commandments" (Whitehead, 2).

[34] J. H. Newman, *The Idea of a University* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 77, 85.

[35] Ibid., 89.

Copyrighted material

whom Sophie enters at least as an afterthought and an ancillary to Émile—in overlooking women (or "ladies"?). Yet all four concentrate on the education of the privileged:[36] the guardians, the well-to-do, the small minority who qualify for admission to universities. The needs of the masses are of little interest, or possibly of none at all.[37]

From the dawn of the twentieth century on, that changes. Already in 1901, W. E. B. Du Bois questioned the style of education (industrial education) deemed suitable for black Americans.[38] One year later, he explicitly committed himself to securing for at least some "black folk"[39]—the "talented tenth"—university education of the general kind favored by his nineteenth-century predecessors. "I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not," he declares, and later (in 1930), he strips Newman's credo of its limitation to social class: "The object of education is not to make men carpenters but to make carpenters men."[40]

Concerns that education ought to be made more broadly available—and, indeed, to take on new tasks just because some groups have previously been marginalized—are expressed in some of the most significant writings on education of recent decades. Thus Meira Levinson's penetrating study of the educational opportunities available to America's poorest children, typically members of stigmatized minorities, emphasizes the lack of opportunities these young people are given to become active citizens, able to contribute to and shape the supposed democracy in which they will live. She argues cogently for a "civic empowerment gap," documenting its existence and exploring ways of overcoming it.[41] Similarly, like Du Bois before him, Harry

[36] Again, Plato's *Laws* offers a different perspective. There Plato considers the educational needs of all citizens.

[37] Pre-twentieth century discussions of questions in other areas sometimes prompt questions about the education of workers. Late in the *Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith's inquiry into the background conditions required for the market transactions he envisages leads him to consider whether public education should be provided for all. Objecting to the eighteenth-century notion of liberal education on the grounds of its uselessness, he advocates providing those who will implement the division of labor with the ability to "read, write, and account" and perhaps some acquaintance with the "elementary parts of geometry and mechanics" (WN 842, 843). Smith thus defends just the style of education Newman opposes, on exactly the grounds to which Newman objects. As we shall see in the following chapter, Smith's own reflections on his proposal inspire doubts not only in his successors (Marx, Dewey) but also in himself.

[38] "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others," Chapter 3 of *The Souls of Black Folk*, Norton Critical Edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999, 34–45).

[39] In later writings, the potential audience for higher education is considerably expanded: "Some day every human being will have college training." "Education and Work," delivered at Howard University in 1930; *The Education of Black People* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 106.

[40] Ibid., 88.

[41] Meira Levinson, *No Citizen Left Behind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014). For her introduction of the idea of the gap, see 33.

Copyrighted material

Brighouse identifies the plight of the majority of schoolchildren in the United States and the United Kingdom as one in which education has been distorted. Not, in his view, simply because they are trained for menial tasks, but rather because existing schools fail to provide resources for confronting and overcoming the narrowing effects of a popular culture, dedicated to inculcating "a life-long and unreflective materialism in as many children as possible."[42]

Others are troubled by different perceived defects. A. S. Neill founded a school dedicated to breaking down children's fears—of teachers and of life—because he saw standard educational regimes as founded on a model of military discipline.[43] Michael Oakeshott harshly dismissed any vision of this kind, taking schools to aim at preparing young people for living in and contributing to a society with settled traditions and conventions; education is to "initiate a newcomer into what was going on and thus enable him to participate in it."[44] Andrew Delbanco and Martha Nussbaum both worry about the decay of American education, Delbanco stressing the importance of community among college students and "lateral learning," Nussbaum offering an eloquent brief for the continued importance of the humanities in contemporary education.[45] Eamonn Callan sees a principal lack in the failure of educational institutions to develop "civic virtue."[46]

So many additions and amendments! My abridged catalogue isn't intended to do justice to the sophisticated thinkers whose ideas I have so cursorily reviewed. Rather, it hopes to show how, beyond Mill's seemingly

[42] Harry Brighouse, *On Education* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006, 23). The theme of personal development and the cultivation of autonomy runs through this work, as well as Brighouse's other important writings on education. See, in particular, Brighouse, Helen F. Ladd, Susanna Loeb, and Adam Swift, *Educational Goods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

[43] A. S. Neill, *Summerhill School: A New View of Childhood*, rev. ed. (New York: St. Martin's, 1992). In a similar vein, Rabindranath Tagore (perhaps inspired by Wordsworth's famous "Intimations of Immortality" Ode?) regarded the standard school as a penal institution, in which sensitive young people were encased by "straight walls staring at [them] with the blank stare of the blind." Amiya Chakravarty, ed., *A Tagore Reader* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 218. For lucid discussion of Tagore's educational ideas, see Martha Nussbaum, "Tagore, Dewey, and the Imminent Demise of Liberal Education," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Education*, ed. Harvey Siegel (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 52–64.

[44] Timothy Fuller, ed., *Michael Oakeshott on Education* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 65; the use of the past tense ("was") seems significant. For the critique of those who "affect to believe" that children are "condemned to a prison-like existence in cell-like classrooms," see 73. We might interpret Oakeshott's view as an inversion of Marx's famous thesis on Feuerbach: the point of education is to help children interpret the world and not to change it.

[45] Andrew Delbanco, *College: What It Is, Was, and Should Be* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012). Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997) and especially *Not for Profit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

[46] Eamonn Callan, *Creating Citizens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Copyrighted material

preposterous assembly of Jobs for Education to Do, there are further attractive ideals and ends. Who could quarrel with extending education to all, to trying to make up for the defects—even the savagery—of the environments in which many children grow up, to trying to cultivate freedom rather than stifling it, to preparing the young to navigate the society and culture of the time and place, to empowering them as citizens, while imbuing the virtues they require to play a constructive role in their social and political lives, to form communities of learners, to develop strong individual characters, and . . .? In a world like ours, overload seems inevitable. It is the name of the educational game.

And that is no accident. It is, rather, an expectable effect of the cultural evolution of our species. The recent history of education in the United States (and, I suspect, in most other nations of the contemporary world) reveals how failure to confront the problem of overload generates an unstable oscillation among policies designed to remedy the deficiencies of the immediately preceding educational efforts. Today's critical needs prompt a move in particular directions. Without the guidance of a synthetic vision, the result is to overlook other important ends. Hence, tomorrow, new reformers will recognize different features that need to be fixed.

Patricia Albjerg Graham's lucid and wide-ranging history of American schools documents the process of partial adaptation. Her opening sentences describe the gyrations whose rationales and whose developments the ensuing 250 pages will chart in detail:

> Schools in America have danced to different drummers during their long history. Sometimes the drumbeat demanded rigidity in all programs; sometimes it wanted academic learning for only a few. Sometimes it encouraged unleashing children's creativity, not teaching them facts. Sometimes it wanted children to solve the social problems, such as racial segregation, adults could not handle. Sometimes it tacitly supported some schools as warehouses, not instructional facilities. Sometimes it sought schooling to be the equalizer in a society in which the gap between rich and poor was growing. Sometimes the principal purpose of schooling seemed to be teaching citizenship and developing habits of work appropriate for a democratic society, while at other times its purpose seemed to be preparation for employment, which needed the same habits of work but also some

Copyrighted material

academic skills. Now, the drumbeat demands that all children achieve academically at a high level and the measure of that achievement is tests.[47]

Assimilating new citizens, addressing problems of racial exclusion, promoting equality of opportunity, instilling democratic values, nurturing creativity, providing basic skills, attending to children with learning disabilities, preparing students to compete in a rigorously demanding global economy—it's not hard to understand how *all* of these tasks can seem important, and how, at different times, one among them may appear particularly urgent. Graham's story of the dominant mood of the present reveals how constant worries about "a nation at risk," reinforced by anxious attention to the "league tables" periodically ranking the performances of students from different countries, encourage highlighting some goals at the inevitable expense of others.[48]

Contingent kicks from history often cause the lurch from one partial educational strategy to another. Launching a satellite (Sputnik) prompts startled rival nations to "get serious about science."[49] But these shifts, driven by exogenous factors, changes in other institutions or new technological advances, are not restricted to recent centuries. To ponder the aims of education by taking for granted a matrix of social arrangements and asking how we expect schools and universities to be reformed to adapt to them is already to presuppose too much. For it is to assume that education is rightly pursued in the contemporary world by continuing to have schools and universities, and also that, if the traditional forms of education are somehow at odds with the ambient environments, that it's the schools' and universities' fault; the necessary changes are to occur within the practices of education and not to be directed at pathologies of the enveloping societies. Before we pose Newman's questions about the idea of a university, it is worth pausing to reflect on why universities exist at all. In advance of asking how the school should respond to the demands posed by the modern world, we might consider whether the

[47] Patricia Albjerg Graham, *Schooling America: How the Public Schools Meet the Nation's Changing Needs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 1.

[48] Ronald Reagan's commissioned report, *A Nation at Risk*, published in 1983, has set the tone for subsequent jitters. Graham's fourth chapter explains the rise to dominance of "standards" and the reforms generated in consequence. That chapter, and its successor, should be read in conjunction with Diane Ravitch's sobering account of how the felt need to make American students more competitive gave birth to an emphasis on testing and the sacrifice of important educational values; see *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, rev. and expanded ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

[49] Graham, *Schooling America*, 106–7 tells the story concisely and accurately.

Copyrighted material

pressures that world exerts are harmful and if the wiser course would be to relax them.

Discussions of education often start too late. Fundamental issues go unprobed. Graham's history exposes overload, thus serving as a reminder to think more widely and more deeply. The characters whose actions she so vividly describes struggle with a complex problem, subject to multiple constraints, on whose *raisons d'être* they only have a partial perspective. Her century-long narrative might prompt investigation of a far longer time span and a broader range of cultural contexts. How and why did the particular vision of the American (British, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Brazilian, Finnish, Egyptian, Kenyan, Indian, Indonesian, Chinese, Saudi Arabian, Australian, . . .) school emerge? Genealogy could liberate contemporary educational thinking from the pictures that hold it captive.[50]

The formal educational practices of contemporary societies are recent inventions, emerging from an enterprise extending tens of thousands of years into the past.[51] All human societies, and possibly many hominin societies as well, have fashioned procedures through which younger generations might continue their communal life. The children must acquire the capacities and dispositions required by adults for coping with the physical and social environment. They have to complete the task Oakeshott saw as central. They need to know how to fit in and to carry on.

If you extrapolate from the characteristics of those living peoples whose modes of existence seem closest to those of our prehistoric ancestors, there emerges a simple vision of the educational practice that has dominated all but a minute fragment of our species' history.[52] Call it *basic training*. Once

[50] As I read both Nietzsche and Foucault, they envisage genealogy as a means for pursuing liberatory ends. Through investigating the ways in which an institution or a social practice has come to be, we gain insight into the purposes it was intended to serve and to the ways in which efforts to achieve those ends blocked attainment of rival goals. That can serve as a basis for redesigning the institution or reconceiving the practice. Nietzsche explicitly endorses this view in *The Genealogy of Morality*. My attribution of it to Foucault is aligned with that offered by Gary Gutting in *Michel Foucault's Archeology of Scientific Reason* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), but my own espousal of it descends from a lengthy conversation I had with Foucault during the autumn of 1982, when he visited the University of Vermont. Of course, Foucault is famous (notorious?) for having offered different explanations of his projects on different occasions.

[51] Dewey's major work on education, *Democracy and Education*, rightly begins by viewing education within the general context of socializing the young and thus "renewing" society. Formal educational structures grow within this much more general and far older project. See MW 9: 8–12.

[52] Plainly, basing conclusions about Paleolithic education on evidence derived from studies of contemporary hunter-gatherers might misrepresent the actual past. Nonetheless, it is the best available supplement to the sparse social insights available from archeology. The strategy is explicitly endorsed

Copyrighted material

infancy has ended, the young are taught to carry out the basic tasks of finding food and water, of constructing and maintaining shelter, and of defending against predation from animals (some of them human). They learn the rules of tribal conduct, and are instructed in the importance of obedience. Insofar as their ambitions transcend the urgent tasks of ensuring their own survival and that of the band, they are likely to focus on being a well-regarded member of the group. Perhaps it is also reasonable to attribute aspirations for relieving communal pain and for spreading communal happiness.[53]

So how did we get from there to here? An important part of human cultural evolution, beginning roughly twenty thousand years before the present, consisted in the agglomeration of human beings into larger groups. The small bands of the Paleolithic started to trade with one another, to form seasonal associations, and finally to merge.[54] Eight thousand years ago, the first cities—containing about a thousand inhabitants—emerged in the near east.[55] Three thousand years later, as the oldest documents we have make

in the most extensive discussion I know of prehistoric education, Frederick Eby and Charles Flinn Arrowood, *The History and Philosophy of Education, Ancient and Medieval* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1940), 3.

So far as I can tell, the project of offering a large-scale history of education is so out of fashion that I have had to appeal to this dated source (henceforth HPE). Its problematic character is reflected in the terms Eby and Arrowood unselfconsciously use. They talk of "primitive people" and of present-day hunter-gatherers as "culturally retarded." Hence I have tried only to rely on their discussions for the simplest and most basic historical points.

For illuminating studies of the lives of hunter-gatherers, see Christoph Boehm, *Hierarchy in the Forest* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Raymond Firth, *We the Tikopia* (Boston: Beacon, 1961); Richard Lee, *The !Kung San* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979); and Marjorie Shostak, *Nisa* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

[53] I thus endorse Mill's judgment in the closing pages of *A System of Logic*. Human history has been dominated by a Benthamite urge to "make human life happy," in "the comparatively humble sense, of pleasure and freedom from pain." As we shall see, Mill aims to go further, beyond this "puerile and insignificant" condition, to a form of life that "human beings with highly developed faculties can care to have." See *Collected Works*, condensed edition (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2006), Volume *8*, 952.

[54] See Colin Renfrew and Stephen Shennan, *Ranking, Resource, and Exchange* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982), and, for the hypothesis that trade in Africa developed significantly earlier, Sally McBrearty and Andrea Brooks "The Revolution That Wasn't: A New Interpretation of the Evolution of Modern Human Behavior," *Journal of Human Evolution 39* (2000): 453–563. The details are forever lost, shrouded in the mists of the Upper Paleolithic.

[55] The most famous of these are Jericho and Çatal Hüyük. There has been significant debate on whether these settlements should be called "cities" or simply seen as "overgrown villages." According to Ian Hodder, the principal authority on Çatal Hüyük, that question is best abandoned in favor of inquiry into how such settlements functioned. The evidence currently available suggests little differentiation among houses (and thus a relatively egalitarian society), and limited agriculture; see, for example, Hodder, "Çatal Hüyük: The Leopard Changes Its Spots. A Summary of Recent Work," *Anatolian Studies*, *64* (2014): 1–22, especially 5.

Copyrighted material

clear, the urban centers of Egypt and Mesopotamia had achieved a significant division of labor, requiring a complex set of ethical and legal rules.[56]

The different functions of the adult citizens demanded specialized forms of training for the young. For much of the population, the necessary skills could be inculcated in the old ways, without the need for any formal institution. The development of writing, however, demanded something distinctive. Scribes needed to learn how to keep the records, setting down information crucial to administering the city's complex of rules.[57] They required a special education, one that passed from the private spheres of family or employment into centralized social control. So the school was born.

In many subsequent societies, writing—often seen as prior to and more significant than reading[58]—has been the province of a small minority. Numerous complex tasks, building and maintaining the canals that brought water to the fields, designing and decorating the temples, embalming the dead, were passed on through lengthy apprenticeships. Inculcation of the skills required could often proceed without literacy. Some societies, like Sparta, emphasized military training, cultivating strong bodies, martial skills, and indifference to pain.[59] Others viewed writing as important not only for the mundane tasks of record-keeping and administration, but primarily in fulfilling the highest purposes of individual citizens and their collective culture. Reading and writing were taught so that the divine message might be thoroughly understood and properly promulgated.

Across cultures and across times, the organization of education, the division between the private and the public spheres, the forms provided by the society, the rules specifying who is to receive training of particular types, the ages at which education begins and at which it ends, all this is enormously variable. Schools are introduced and subsequently adapted in response to perceived social needs (and, to a lesser extent, to views of the healthy development of the young).[60] As tribes and nations interact with

[56] See James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near-Eastern Texts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969). Such documents as the surviving parts of the Lipit-Ishtar code (and the more famous later code of Hammurabi) are plainly codicils to more systematic collections of moral and legal rules, that must have been accumulated over tens of millennia. The same holds of *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* (New York: Dover, 1967).

[57] HPE 63–64.

[58] HPE 72–73, 78–79.

[59] HPE 205–18.

[60] Once schools have been introduced, and attendance at them has become recognized as a gateway to privileged positions, their further evolution is directed by two forces. Not only are they responsive to the perceived needs of the state. They also adapt to the strategies of individuals who seek competitive advantage (for themselves or for their children). Thanks to Randy Curren for drawing this point to my attention.

Copyrighted material