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Education v. The Educationalist State

by DRYDEN GILLING SMITH

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In the first chapter of his book *Democracy and Education* (1916) John Dewey writes that "What nutrition and reproduction are to physiological life, education is to social life" and that "Education, in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life . . . Each individual, each unit who is the carrier of the life-experience of his group, in time passes away. Yet the life of the group goes on." To this one might add 'sometimes'—for the passing of societies and the disappearance of cultural traditions has been a notorious factor in history and is an even more notorious factor in our own time. Why has the word 'education' been used with such enthusiasm by so many self-confessed revolutionaries and an 'education system' found the unprecedented financial support of a 'Welfare State' the principles of whose existence mean the elimination of our own hierarchical society and culture? Men bent on the destruction of a society would be unlikely to nourish the means of its preservation. The simple answer might be that the intention of such men was to centralise as many as possible of the links, which make possible the continuity of the innumerable elements in our complex society, into one monopolistic 'educational system,' where they could be controlled in such a way as to ensure that they did *not* do their job and that the continuity was broken. Their interest would be one of sabotage.

Before however one can begin to make out a case for the application of this hypothesis to the action of the 'State' in our own time in becoming first a provider and finally, in the 1944 Education Act, absolute controller of Education in England, one must examine the new beliefs which, particularly in the last fifty or so years, have resulted in the transformation of the ideas contained in the words 'Education' and 'Society' to mean 'a system for conditioning the environment of the most pliable part of the population (children and youths) so that they will become the sort of people you want them to become and so help to make the world the sort of place you want to see made' and 'the omniscient state.' Both of these new ideas have been fostered with the same fund of subsidiary ideas and beliefs, and contemporaneously, and they are so inter-related that neither can be treated without the other. In fact the spurious education of 'environment regulating' can be said to serve the spurious society of the 'omniscient state' and it is unfortunately in those senses of the words that Education is to-day generally thought of as a 'social service.' The fact that these words still can have other meanings,

and that 'social service' could literally mean the service performed to society by the link which makes possible its continuation, has blurred the picture of what has been happening, has been a smoke-screen under which our schools and constitution have been misappropriated almost without opposition. A weakening and inexact terminology has been the chink in our armour. In the following pages I will endeavour to show how the current notion of education as a 'social service' is the opposite of the true function of education in society, how that notion has been developed and been put into practice and the confusion of thought which has hamstrung the opposition to it.

In the traditional conception of a country, as a racial and territorial bond providing for the temporal protection and means of continuation of the men and societies (family, Church, aristocratic hierarchy, trade guilds with their funds of practical knowledge, and societies for the preservation of written or oral traditions about the laws governing human association) of which it is made up, there was little in common with our notion of the 'State' as a 'unit of administrative convenience' which far from protecting these societies does its best to break them up and usurp their functions. Without going into details of the trinitarian constitution by which the country was able to do its job most effectively and with the least risk of its trying to do anything else, it will be apparent that such a constitution would be no more than a piece of irrelevant obstruction to men concerned with operating the modern 'state.' They are not concerned with the preservation of the traditional organic societies or with the country, being in many cases supporters of 'internationalism' or the 'world state.' Differences of opinion are largely concerned with who should control and what should be the slogans (or credos) of the omniscient state and its 'sub-grouping' (not being genuine societies). Mr. Jacks, for example, in *Total Education* speaks not unapprovingly of Hitler's *method* "to break down the traditional groupings (whether those be the family, the church, the political party, or the nation) in which he (the individual) finds himself and which largely determine what he is—a breakdown which is often significantly enough followed by a breakdown in the moral conscience of the individual, and then to build up immediately new groups which would determine the type of individual and promote the kind of behaviour which he (Hitler) desired. The method worked and it is a method which we can purge of its evil elements

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Growth of the Bureaucracy

The following letter to the Editor appeared in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 28, 1958:

Sir,

The parliamentary representative for Mitchell is to be commended for his statement that "the reality of power lies with the Civil servants." In your leader of May 20 you ably reviewed this matter and supported Mr. Wheeler's suggestion for curbing the power of the bureaucrat by the establishment of committees of private members.

But does this go far enough, or should not the whole legislative power of Parliament supervise the "regulations" enacted by bureaucrats in the course of administering what are often only skeleton Acts of Parliament?

It may surprise the average elector to learn that "regulations," after going through the automatic process of being laid on the table in both Houses, ultimately have the force of law—"lawless law," as Lord Hewart said.

A member can challenge any of these regulations during the above period of time, but what of those made when Parliament is in recess? Practically none of the regulations are challenged or disallowed.

Two examples may be quoted to illustrate the frequent end-result of regulation-making. In the Federal sphere import control originally came into being through a war-time regulation. In the State sphere, a tow-away regulation now impinges on the property rights of the individual. Under these circumstances the elector has no means of fixing responsibility on his Parliamentary representative. He can only resort to the costly process of law if he has the means.

In 1952 an electoral group of citizens considered from time to time the growing power of bureaucracy and its danger to Parliamentary government. The outcome was that it submitted through its Parliamentary representative a resolution for consideration by the Government as follows: "that Regulations made under any Act shall cease to be valid after an interval of three months, unless such Regulations have been debated and sanctioned by Parliament."

The Government took no action in this or any other

way and the matter seemed to lapse for lack of interest. Six years have elapsed and now we are in the position described by Mr. Wheeler.

Artarmon.

G. MARSDEN.

Crowd-Delirium

"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." In the midst of two or three hundred, the divine presence becomes more problematical. And when the numbers run into thousands, or tens of thousands, the likelihood of God being there, in the consciousness of each individual, declines almost to the vanishing point. For such is the nature of an excited crowd (and every crowd is automatically self-exciting) that, where two or three thousand are gathered together, there is an absence not merely of deity, but even of common humanity. The fact of being one of a multitude delivers a man from his consciousness of being an insulated self and carries him down into a less than personal realm, where there are no responsibilities, no right or wrong, no need for thought or judgment or discrimination—only a strong vague sense of togetherness, only a shared excitement, a collective alienation. And an alienation is at once more prolonged and less exhausting than that induced by debauchery; the morning after less depressing than that which follows self-poisoning by alcohol or morphine. Moreover, the crowd-delirium can be indulged in, not merely without a bad conscience, but actually, in many cases, with a positive glow of conscious virtue. For, so far from condemning the practice of downward self-transcendence through herd-intoxication, the leaders of church and state have actively encouraged the practice whenever it could be used for the furtherance of their own ends. Individually and in the co-ordinated and purposive groups which constitute a healthy society, men and women display a certain capacity for rational thought and free choice in the light of ethical principles. Herded into mobs, the same men and women behave as though they possessed neither reason nor free will. Crowd-intoxication reduces them to a condition of infra-personal and anti-social irresponsibility. Drugged by the mysterious poison which every excited herd secretes, they fall into a state of heightened suggestibility, resembling that which follows an injection of sodium amytal or the induction, by whatever means, of a light hypnotic trance. While in this state they will believe any nonsense that may be bawled at them, they will act upon any command or exhortation, however senseless, mad or criminal. To men and women under the influence of herd-poison, 'whatever I say three times is true'—and whatever I say three hundred times is Revelation, is the directly inspired Word of God.

"... A crowd is the social equivalent of a cancer. The poison it secretes depersonalises its constituent members to the point where they start to behave with a savage violence of which, in their normal state, they would be completely incapable ...

"In the course of the last forty years the techniques for exploiting man's urge towards this most dangerous form of downward self-transcendence have reached a pitch of perfection unmatched in all of history. To begin with ... there is the radio ... there is the loudspeaker ... there is the camera (of which it was once naively said that 'it

cannot lie') and its offspring, the movies and television, these three have made the objectification of tendentious phantasy absurdly easy. And finally there is that greatest of our social inventions, free, compulsory education. Everyone now knows how to read and everyone consequently is at the mercy of the propagandists, governmental or commercial, who own the pulp factories, the linotype machines and the rotary presses. Assemble a mob of men and women previously conditioned by a daily reading of newspapers; treat them to amplified band music, bright lights, and the oratory of a demagogue who (as demagogues always are) is simultaneously the exploiter and the victim of herd-intoxication, and in next to no time you can reduce them to a state of almost mindless sub-humanity. Never before have so few been in a position to make fools, maniacs or criminals of so many."

Aldous Huxley—*The Devils of Loudun.*

EDUCATION V. THE EDUCATIONALIST STATE— (continued from page 1.)

and adapt to our own needs . . . Hitler has only misused and distorted a so-far neglected potentiality: the creative powers of group existence."

The societies with which we are concerned at the moment are those responsible for keeping alive in every age a knowledge of the laws of the Universe, the understanding of which has been the basis of all civilisation. This function has been performed in numerous ways and has been variously regarded. Thorstein Veblen, for example, says in his *Theory of the Leisure Class*—"In point of derivation and early development, learning is somewhat closely related to the devotional function of the community . . . To a great extent, the knowledge acquired under the priestly teachers of the primitive community was a knowledge of ritual and ceremonial; that is to say, a knowledge of the most proper, most effective, or most acceptable manner of approaching and of serving the preternatural agents." The last qualification is expressed from the materialist standpoint but looked at in another light, in the belief that the world and society are primarily metaphysical, this is an attempt to gain a knowledge about matters of permanent validity as opposed to the incidental details which one acquires during the course of practical pursuits. A ritual such as the Mass or that from which Greek tragedy developed contains statements about the metaphysical society on which human society is modelled and therefore has a 'universal' or 'classical' application in any study of the latter. It was when the importance of these 'universal' matters was most widely recognised that our own civilisation reached its high water mark, and, as we would expect, when the old 'Universities' were founded. (We tend now to think of the 'universal' element in their name too much in relation to place and with too little regard for time.) Without a sufficient number of men acquainted with this 'classical' knowledge and possessing a universality of outlook the larger human society is at the mercy of opinions that vary from year to year and place to place like styles in clothing or the bonnets of motor cars. Sir Percy Nunn in *Education: its Data and First principles*, admits this last state of affairs as something we have always to contend with: "Mr. G. K. Chesterton has somewhere

gibed at the man who would decide the question of human immortality from the standpoint of an electrical engineer. But can an electrical engineer do otherwise? We can none of us escape from the habits that belong to our training. That is why men must differ in opinion to the end of time, and why large ranges of truth will always be inaccessible to each of us." What he tells us may unfortunately be true of our own age and that preceding it and he gives as an example those thinkers schooled in Darwinism who have dealt with social and political problems in terms of the biological notion of evolution through natural selection, but let us hope that Chesterton was right in the long run.

Werner Jaeger in the first volume of his *Paideia, The Ideals of Greek Culture*, tells us that the earliest references to Greek Education are to practical precept such as 'Honour the Gods' and 'Respect the stranger.' Lest it be thought that the teaching of universal matters is necessarily limited to an organised religious body, one should mention that Veblen seems to have forgotten the poets. Perhaps the greatest part of our education which comes to us through ancient Greece was contained in the works of Homer. In our own land the Beowulf poet told us much that is permanently valid about this earth, this middle place under the dome of heaven. Much of our discussion of what is 'universally significant' is centred round the works of such poets as Chaucer, Dante and Shakespeare. In a study "Paradise Lost—Visions and Obstructions" in the *Catacomb* (Autumn 1951) I examined the claims of poetry to reveal the ways of God to man and/or the nature of things—"A legend which embodies a myth or pattern of experience which is permanent to life is in itself a revelation. It gains in effectiveness at the hands of an individual teller when the latter has put at its disposal his particular excellence of imaginative perception and faculty of expression. So long as he is prepared to regard himself as the channel for something greater and more permanent than himself and of which his faculties are only a part, he will enhance the value of the story with which he is dealing."

The function of learning and education (learning's means of continuing active existence) in the hands of those who are destined to guide human society according to the principles which make its existence possible, and which I have illustrated above, clash violently with the notion of education as an 'end-product' that ought to be shared set forth by Mr. John Dewey in *The School and Society* (1900). He says that a few centuries ago "A high-priesthood of learning . . . guarded the treasury of truth and . . . doled it out to the masses under severe restrictions . . . These were stored up and hidden away in manuscripts." No doubt the scribes who did their best to increase the number of manuscripts available would smile ironically at hearing their action described as hiding knowledge away. (Mr. Dewey would perhaps dismiss them as medieval for he shows elsewhere his bland contempt for medieval culture—"The classic languages were the only means of escape from the limitations of the middle ages.") For those who were prepared to do the job thoroughly, and a fragmentary knowledge of 'universal' matters is merely useless or dangerous in the hands of those who are not willing or able to do so, there was much material available—both Chaucer and his poor scholar had a goodly supply of books (measured by standards of quality as opposed to quantity). Mr. Dewey,

no doubt thinking of his own experience, gives the real reason why such learning is restricted to a small number of people—because the majority find it more trouble than it's worth—"Of these (manuscripts) there were at best only a few, and it required long and troublesome preparation to be able to do anything with them."

The absurdity of Dewey's argument (apart from the basic fallacy of assuming education as an 'end-product') is apparent in the way he objects to learning being monopolised by a small minority while saying in effect that that sort of learning is useless to the majority in any case. It is the same argument as that employed by the people who want everybody to go to school and when they get them there they want to change the function of the schools because the curriculum isn't suitable to everybody. It is ironical that these people who consider education a plaything to be monkeyed about with for the amusement or otherwise of the 'masses,' and are therefore unconcerned with its necessary function in the continued existence of our society, should often be the people who speak of education as a 'social service.'

Though the Church, as I have shown, is not the only medium through which learning is transmitted, the Catholic Church has, particularly during its greatest periods, provided the most effective recruiting system for scholarship. Of the University, Veblen says that "Even to-day there are such things in the usage of the learned community as the cap and gown, matriculation, initiation, and graduation ceremonies, and the conferring of scholastic degrees, dignities and prerogatives in a way that suggests some sort of scholarly apostolic succession. The usage of the priestly orders is no doubt the proximate source of all these features of learned ritual" To have sufficient numbers of people trained in the necessary language work before they went to the University, the Church provided the Grammar Schools. Of course a mere intensive knowledge of Latin may not have been particularly useful to the boy who did not go on to the University but any institution providing the eternal renewal of the culture, whereby we survive, must make allowances for the many who will fall by the wayside when it decides how many will be given a grammar school training. The value of this training in itself though often belittled is testified by the "small Latin and less Greek" which Stratford Grammar School gave to Master Will Shakespeare, and which seems to have been sufficient to enable him to find much for himself in the world of literature of which those two languages comprised a considerable part. Further down the scale there was the elementary instruction given in Churches to which Mr. Colgrave refers in the Durham University Journal for June, 1951. In a note on an Elizabethan novel's reference to St. Nicholas's School, Durham, he says that "There is no record of a school at St. Nicholas's Church, but there are many instances known of children being given elementary instruction in the churches both before and after the Reformation."

The first two stages of this Church-sponsored education system were both, as it were, preliminary heats in the training necessary to the men who were to get to grips with this "classical" or "universal" knowledge and supervise its application in their own age. Since it is the intellect that is required for such a task it was absurd for Mr. Dewey

(1900) to complain that our education system "is something which appeals for the most part simply to the intellectual aspect of our natures" as it would be to complain that water was unfortunately wet. Like the assailants of our constitution he finds in the smallest remnants of our once great civilisation cause for an outburst against his *bête noire*—"It is an education dominated almost entirely by the medieval conception of learning"—one could only wish it were.

Unfortunately the medieval tradition was broken both by the Reformation and the advent of the Renaissance 'humanism' (dismissed so admirably by Mr. C. S. Lewis with the words "Ciceronian Latin and the obsession that no works in the language forged to express the thinking that had been done in the middle ages, should be studied because they contained words that Cicero wouldn't have used.") The Universities remained, most of the Grammar Schools remained and in many places the nationalised Church continued to carry out the educational work performed by the Universal Church. The notion of an education however in things universal was no longer the same, being restricted to what we now call a 'classical education,' a knowledge of ancient Latin and Greek which though it should be an important part of a really classical education is by no means all of it. There were medieval and post-medieval writings that should have been studied alongside the older works and with the same thoroughness.

The break in tradition seems to have caused the men in charge of educational institutions to lose their grip of reality to the extent of allowing local and "provincial" conceptions of Society, the School and the State to be accepted far and wide with little criticism, and to be put into practice. Changes and attempts to change the work done in schools and universities have been directed to making them do miscellaneous new jobs rather than to carry out their proper function more effectively.

(To be continued.)

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