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THE ENDS OF EDUCATION

Sidney Hook

There is more agreement about the ends of education in contemporaneous discussion than about the way in which they are to be derived. And there is more agreement about the phrasing of the ends of education than about their concrete meaning in any specific cultural context. Analysis will show that conflicting interpretations of the meaning of the ends of education are significantly associated with the different ways in which these ends are derived.

It is not difficult to draw up a list of educational ends to which most educators, who are not open apologists for a political or religious church, will subscribe independently of their philosophical allegiance. (1) Education should aim to develop the powers of critical independent thought. (2) It should attempt to induce sensitiveness of perception, receptiveness to new ideas, imaginative sympathy. (3) It should produce an awareness of the main streams of our cultural, literary, and scientific traditions. (4) It should make available important bodies of knowledge concerning nature, society, our selves, our country and its history. (5) It should strive to cultivate an intelligent loyalty to the democratic community. (6) At some level it should equip young men and women with the skills, techniques, and specialized knowledge which, together with the virtues and aptitudes already mentioned, will make it possible for them to do some productive work related to their capacities and interests.

Why, then, should controversy be so rife? After all, if these ends of education are granted, it should not be an insuperable task to determine which specific course of study in a determinate time and place will best realize them. Yet despite the enormous amount of experimental data compiled by educational psychologists, the conflict of schools and philosophies continues unabated.

The situation is not unique in education. In the realm of morals,

too, we can observe precisely the same thing. Every one believes, or says they believe, in truth, justice, loyalty, honor, dignity. Yet the strife of moral systems and the diversity of moral judgments in concrete situations, where the same formal values are invoked, is even more conspicuous than in education. In part, the same reason accounts for differences in both moral and educational judgments. Values or goods in morals are plural, just as ends in education are plural. They conflict not only with the values, goods, and ends that are rejected but to some extent with themselves. Two parties to a dispute may both profess allegiance to the ideals of justice *and* happiness or to the goods of security *and* adventure. But they may evaluate them differently, and assign them different weights when faced by the necessity of choice. Similarly, although different schools of education subscribe to critical intelligence *and* imaginative sympathy, natural piety for one's traditions *and* independent exploration of new modes of thought, they may be worlds apart in their practical judgments because they accent differently the values they hold in common. They can reach a consensus only in so far as they both submit to a common method of resolving conflicts in value. But it is at the point of method, *i.e.*, the process by which ideals are validated or derived, that they fundamentally divide.

There is another basic reason why the profession of common ends in a common situation is no assurance of agreement. The same words may actually mean different things to those who use them. Any one who has read Hitler's *Mein Kampf* will find that he invokes many of the ideals of his democratic opponents—justice, loyalty, honor, and dignity. In one passage he asserts that "the importance of the person" is the distinguishing characteristic of the Nazi philosophy of life. The terms "reason," "freedom," "order," and "discipline" appear in the writings of Thomists, absolute idealists, and experiment-naturalists, but they do not mean the same thing by them. Were one to judge educators only by their language in

discussing educational goals, there would be little ground for suspecting the presence of profound differences among them.

How then do we know when those who employ the same terms have a common referent or meaning? Roughly, only when these words are conjoined with a common behavior, or a program of action involving such behavior, in a specific historical situation. Indeed, we sometimes come to the conclusion that despite the use of different words people mean the same thing because the behavior and programs to which the words lead are virtually identical. No understanding between human beings is possible without symbols; and the symbols do not have to be verbal. Although it would be extremely difficult, in principle it would not be impossible for human beings to understand each other, on a rather primitive level to be sure, if they could not employ words. But without reference to some kind of bodily behavior, actual or prospective, remembered or imagined, no matter how long we spoke with one another there would be no assurance of mutual understanding. Even gods and angels have to intrude into the natural order to communicate with men.

The most general aims of institutional education at any time are identical with the most general aims of moral (or immoral) action at the same time. When we disapprove of the aims of an educational system, and state what they *should* be, we are also indicating, to the extent that they are educationally relevant, what the aims of the good life should be. How then do we determine what the aims of education or the good life should be?

There are two generic ways of reaching what are sometimes called "the ultimate" ends of education. One relies on an immediate, self-certifying *intuition* of the nature of man; the other on the observation of the *consequences* of different proposals of treating man. The first is essentially theological and metaphysical; the second is experimental and scientific.

When they are intelligently formulated both approaches recognize that the ends of education are relevant to the nature of man. But a world of difference separates their conception of the nature of man. The religious or metaphysical approach seeks to deduce what men *should be* from what they *are*. And what they are can only be grasped by an intuition of their absolute "essential" nature. Whatever the differences between Aristotle, Aquinas, and Rousseau on other points—and they are vast—all assert that from the true nature of man the true nature of education follows logically. The scientific approach, on the other hand, is interested in discovering what the nature of man is, not in terms of an absolute essence, *but in terms of a developing career in time and in relation to other things*. It recognizes man's nature not as a premise from which to deduce the aims of education, but as a set of *conditions* which limit the range of possible educational aims in order to select the best or most desirable from among those for which man's nature provides a ground.

What aspects of man's nature are relevant to the formulation of valid educational ideals? At least three distinguishing, but not separable, aspects of human behavior. First, man as a physical organism is subject to definite laws of growth. Certain powers and capacities mature, flourish, and decline according to a definite cycle. Second, man as a member of society, is heir to a cultural heritage and social organization that determine the forms in which his biological impulses and needs find expression. Third, man as a personality or character exhibits a pattern of behavior, rooted in biological variation and influenced by a frame of social reference, which develops through a series of successive choices.

What ends of education should be stressed in the light of a survey of this threefold aspect of man's powers, and why? We say end*s*, rather than end, because an education that is relevant to at least these three aspects of human nature will have plural, even if related, ends.

In relation to the development of the human organism, physical and mental, education takes as its end *growth*. The maturation of body and mind is natural but so is its stunting. In selecting growth as an end, we are not *deducing* what should be from what is but selecting the preferred consequences of one mode of action rather than another. Growth, as every one knows, has been emphasized by John Dewey as one of the central aims of education. But, as soon as one speaks of growth, critics who approach this end in isolation from others are sure to inquire: growth in what direction? There is criminal growth, fascist growth, cancerous growth. From the fact that a thing is, it doesn't follow that it must or should grow. From the fact that it should grow, we do not yet know what direction the potentialities of growth should be encouraged to take.

The answer to this question has been implicit in Dewey's philosophy all along because for him the end of personal growth has always been allied with the social end of democracy. There are occasions, however, in which he states very explicitly what kind of growth education should strive to achieve. "It is true that the aim of education is development of individuals to the utmost of their potentialities. But this statement in isolation leaves unanswered the question as to what is the measure of the development. A society of free individuals in which all, through their own work, contribute to the liberation and enrichment of the lives of others, is the only environment in which any individual can really grow normally to his *full* stature."[1]

Education, then, for a democratic society goes hand in hand with education for growth. But why continuous growth even if democracy is accepted as a social goal? There are at least two justifications for growth. One flows from the nature of the democratic ideal which is incompatible with fixed social divisions. It cannot function properly where individuals are trained independently of their maturing powers and possibilities of development. The second is that

[1]*The New Era*, November 1934.

a world in which growth is encouraged is more likely to make for enrichment of experience than a world where individuals remain at the same level they have reached at the close of their schooling, learning nothing new even if they forget nothing old.

We have already seen that every choice we make in selecting and fortifying certain tendencies among the plurality of potentialities in the individual must be undertaken from the standpoint of some social philosophy, or some ideal of social organization. But what are the grounds for our choice of the democratic social philosophy? Here, too, the test of consequences is decisive and not a metaphysical "demonstration" or religious "intuition."[3]

On the level of character and personality, the aim of education is the development of intelligence. Here we reach the key value in the sense that it is both an end and the means of testing the validity of all other ends, moral, social, and educational. How is it to be justified? Why should we educate for intelligence? Again our answer is not because of the antecedent nature of man, but because of the *consequences* of intelligence in use. These consequences are many and desirable. Intelligence enables us to break the blind routines of habit when confronted by new difficulties, to discover alternatives when uninformed impulse would thrust us into action, to foresee what cannot be avoided and to control what can. Intelligence helps us to discern the means by which to enstate possibilities, to reckon costs before they are brought home, to order our community, our household, and our own moral economy. All this and more, in addition to the joy of understanding.

Whether man is intelligent, and how intelligent, are empirical questions, on which considerable evidence has accumulated. One might, of course, ask: What must the nature of man be in order for him to become intelligent? And if any one can derive from the

[3]I have attempted to present the empirical case for democracy in my "Philosophical Presuppositions of Democracy" in *Ethics,* April 1942. For reasons of space this reference must suffice.

answer more illumination than he had before, we can reply: Man must potentially have the nature of a rational creature in order to *become* intelligent. How little this tells us is apparent when we reflect that it is almost tautological to assert that a thing possesses potentially the qualities and relations it actually exhibits. Potentialities may not all be realized but everything realized is a potentiality. Men are and may become unintelligent, too. Unintelligence (or stupidity) is therefore also an antecedent potentiality. But since potentially man is both intelligent *and* unintelligent, what we select as the trait to encourage depends not merely on its potentiality but rather on its desirability. And desirability is an affair of fruits not of origins.

So far we have been attempting to justify the ends of education by their consequences. But there is another approach to the ends of education. This declares that we are dealing with a metaphysical question, which requires an answer based on the true metaphysics. Its chief exponents are Robert M. Hutchins, M. Maritain, and Monsignor Sheen. They hold to the belief that the appropriate end of education can be *deduced* from the true nature of man. The true nature of man is that which differentiates him from animals, on the one hand, and angels, on the other. It is expressed in the proposition: "Man is a rational animal." From which it is inferred that the end of human education should be the cultivation of reason.

I shall not stop to analyze the notion of reason and indicate how it differs from intelligence. What I want to point out is the fallacy in the presumed deduction of the ends of education from what uniquely differentiates man from other animals.

First of all, if what we have previously said is true, from what man *is* we can at best reach propositions only about what human education is, not what it *should* be. What man should be is undoubtedly related to what he is, for no man should be what he cannot be. Yet a proposition about what he is no more uniquely entails what he should be than the recognition of the nature of an egg necessitates

our believing that an egg should become a chicken rather than an egg sandwich. A further assumption of the argument is the Aristotelian doctrine that the good of anything is the performance of its specific virtue or the realization of its potentiality. The "good" egg is one that becomes a chicken, the "good" man is one who realizes his natural capacity to think. This overlooks the obvious fact that the capacities of a thing limit the range of its fulfillments but do not determine any specific fulfillment.[8]

Secondly, grant for the sake of the argument that animals other than man are incapable of any rationality. The question is an old and difficult one, handled satirically by Plutarch and experimentally by Köhler, both of whom disagree with the airy dogmatism of the neo-Thomists. Nonetheless, rationality is not the only feature which uniquely differentiates man from other animals. Man can be, and has been, defined as a "tool-making animal." By the same reasoning the neo-Thomists use, we can "deduce" that man's proper education should be vocational! Man is also the only animal that can commit suicide. Does it follow that education should therefore be a preparation for death?

Thirdly, even if man is a rational animal, he is not only that. He has many other traits, some noble, others ignoble, or, to put it more accurately, he has traits that in some contexts can acquire the char-

[8]An identical fallacy underlies the argument of Mr. Mortimer Adler's "In Defence of the Philosophy of Education" in *Forty-first Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education,* Part 1, 1942, pp. 197–249. His argument depends upon two assertions: ". . . each power [of man] is itself a natural being, albeit an accident of the substance possessing it, and *because it is natural can only be perfected by one mode of development."* And "In the case of every human power, other than the intellect itself, *the natural tendency of the power is toward that actualization of itself which conforms to reason"* (my italics). The first assertion begs the question by assuming that every power of man has only *one* natural end. And even granting this end, it does not follow that it can be perfected by *only* one mode of development. The second assertion confuses reason as a natural power of knowing, which is no more or less natural than eating or singing, *with reason which expresses a social directive, and selectively modifies the natural exercise of human powers in the light of preferred consequences among possible alternate uses.* What, when, and how a man should eat, what, when, and how he should sing depends not so much upon the power of eating or singing nor upon the power of the intellect but upon an ideal of fitness, appropriateness, goodness, or what not, that is *not* given with natural powers but brought to bear *upon* them by social, historical, and personal experience.

acter of nobility and, in others, ignobility. An education appropriate to man should take note of more than one of his traits and must take note of less than all. In either case some element of selection is involved.

What, after all, is meant by "the nature of man" whenever we speak of relating educational ends to it? The phrase masks a certain ambiguity that makes it difficult to tell whether its reference is empirical or metaphysical. A great deal of philosophical profundity consists in shifting back and forth between these two references and not being found out. When the neo-Thomists speak of *the* nature of man as the basis for educational ideals their concern is not primarily with biological, psychological, historical, and social features of human behavior. For since these terms designate specific processes of interaction between an organism and its environment, it would be risky to choose any set of traits as fixing forever *the* nature of human nature, and therefore *the* nature of education. But the neo-Thomists are concerned precisely with a conception of human nature which will permit the deduction that, in the words of Robert Hutchins, "education should everywhere be the same." Everywhere and at any time? Everywhere and at every time. In a weakened form, Mortimer Adler repeats this: "If man is a rational animal, constant in nature through history then there must be certain constant features in every sound educational program regardless of culture and epoch." And Mark Van Doren, who carries all of his teacher's ideas to recognizable absurdity, adds that because education and democracy have the same end—the making of men—they are one and the same. "So education is democracy and democracy is education." From man's nature we can apparently deduce not only that education should everywhere be the same, but the social system, too.

If education is determined by human nature, may not human nature change, and with it the nature of education? "We must insist," writes Hutchins, "that no matter how environments differ human

nature is, always has been, and always will be the same everywhere."

This is truly a remarkable assertion. Before we ask Mr. Hutchins on what evidence he knows this to be true, let us see what it implies. For one thing it implies that human nature is completely independent of changes in the world of physical nature with which the human organism is in constant interaction. Now, certainly Mr. Hutchins cannot know that the world of nature "is, always has been, and always will be the same everywhere." He therefore must believe that no transformation of the physical basis of human life can possibly affect human nature. His assertion further implies that man's nature is completely independent of changes in the human body, particularly the brain and nervous system. This calls into question the whole evolutionary approach to the origin and development of the human species. It implies finally that the habitation of man's nature in a human body is unaffected by changes in society and social nurture.

There is only one entity that satisfies all of these conditions. It is the supernatural soul as conceived by theologians of the Christian tradition. It is not the Aristotelian concept of the soul because, for Aristotle, the soul was the form of the body, all forms were incarnate in matter, and the nature of man was construed from his behavior. The constancy of human nature in Aristotle was predicated on the notion of the constancy of the natural order as well. Were he, in the light of modern science, to abandon the latter notion, he would have surrendered the belief in the constancy of human nature, since it was integrally related to the behavior of the body in nature and society. But Mr. Hutchins admits all the facts of physical, biological, and social development in man's environment yet insists that man's nature cannot change. It is only when we realize that he is not talking about empirical, historical, suffering man that the peculiarities and ambiguities of his language are understandable.

This is the secret behind the talk of man's true and constant nature. M. Maritain and Monsignor Sheen are more frank with us

than their epigoni at Chicago and St. John's. But all of them owe us a proof that the soul, as defined by them, exists. So far not a shred of valid evidence, experimental or rational, has been adduced to warrant belief in its existence. In fact, the achievements of genuine knowledge about human nature in medicine, biology, psychology, and history have been largely won by a bitter struggle against obstacles set in the path of scientific inquiry by believers in a supernatural soul.

When it is understood that by "human nature" Hutchins really means the human soul, whose study involves rational theology, and whose nature cannot be properly grasped without the deliverance of sacred theology and revealed religion, another article of his educational faith becomes clear. The true education of man must include the education of his soul by the one true theology.

Since the problem of education is for Hutchins a metaphysical problem, all the basic issues depend for their solution upon finding *the* true metaphysical answer. Consequently metaphysics occupies the chief place in the recommended curriculum as the *only* discipline that can impart to students a rational view of the world. "By way of metaphysics," he writes, "students on their part may recover a rational view of the universe and of their role in it. If you deny this proposition you take the responsibility of asserting that a rational view of the universe and one's place in it is no better than an irrational one or none at all."[4]

The philosophic presumption of this passage vies with its atrocious logic. To deny the proposition "by way of metaphysics students may recover a rational view of the universe" is certainly *not* to assert that "a rational view of the universe . . . is no better than an irrational one or none at all." The denial of the first proposition implies that students cannot get a rational view of the universe by way of metaphysics; it leaves open the possibility that they may get a rational

[4] R. M. Hutchins, *Education for Freedom* (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1943), pp. 26–27.

view of the universe by the study of *other* disciplines, e.g., the sciences, social studies, literature, and history. It emphatically does not imply that a rational conception of the universe is worthless or worth no more than an irrational one. I pass over the additional confusion of identifying a rational conception of the world with the conception that men are rational and the world rationally ordered. A rational conception is one based on evidence and a conception of the world may be rational *if* the evidence points to the fact that men are irrational and the world chaotic.[5]

No matter whether we take "reason" or "freedom" or "order" or "discipline," analysis will show that differences in the method of deriving them express conflicting conceptions of the meaning of these terms. That is why the significance of an educational philosophy cannot be judged so much by the doctrinal catchwords and slogans with which it describes the ends of education as by the *method* it uses to reach them.

[5]The study of philosophy, including metaphysics, has, of course, an important place in the liberal-arts curriculum. It has many justifications—among them the achievement of a methodological sophistication that may immunize students against the confusion of definitions and resolutions, and of both of these with hypotheses, which constitutes so much of traditional and popular metaphysics.

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