THE CASE AGAINST P·U·B·L·I·C EDUCATION

HOW GOVERNMENT SCHOOLING HAS DISMANTLED MODERNITY AND PREPARED US FOR TYRANNY

DAREN JONESCU

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Preface

"I consider myself pretty conservative, but hearing what I've heard is alarming!"

The man had called in to a popular American radio talk show to register his outrage at the conversation taking place between the show's guest and its sympathetic host. What alarmed him was that two seemingly sane men were openly discussing the unthinkable, namely that the fundamental problem with public schools may not be that they are failing to fulfill their legitimate mission—his own view—but rather that the institution of public education itself is inherently illegitimate. Recognizing that this gentleman's alarm was likely shared by many other listeners, I, the show's guest, tried to allay his fears to the extent that the talk radio format allows, though knowing that a three-minute dialogue could hardly undo presuppositions infused through a lifetime steeped in the daily boil of progressive society. That may have been the moment when this book was conceived.

When I began writing short essays about the political dangers of public schooling, my own intellectual framework on the issue was already substantially built. I therefore wrote in the naïve confidence that if I merely made my case clearly and concisely, reasonable people would surely be drawn to the cause of genuine educational freedom. I have since realized the great folly in expecting others to move in an instant to a position that took *me* nearly three decades to reach. Since my school days in Canada, my own attitude toward the institution of government-controlled education had slowly evolved from dissatisfaction and skepticism to principled opposition and a tentative search for alternatives;

but I was probably in my mid-forties before I settled firmly upon the position that the project of modern government schooling was tyrannical right down to its historical and theoretical foundations. In other words, my doubts began very early, but only much later developed into a fully reasoned rejection of the whole concept of public education. And yet here I was thinking I could provide a knock-down argument for the abolition of a global institution in just a few pages. I finally grasped that I had thus far only been preaching to the choir, and that the positive response I had received merely indicated that many people who already shared my basic conclusion were pleased to have new arguments to support their beliefs. To my embarrassment, I saw that I had been ignoring the basic wisdom of my profession, as well as the core of my own argument against state schooling: Adults cannot jettison long-held assumptions, particularly ones supported by the emotional conditioning of their childhoods, in response to a few pithy arguments or pointed observations. They must be allowed to see the evidence for themselves, and to draw their own inferences—to generate their own pithy arguments and pointed observations, as it were.

Beginning again, I reflected on how I had arrived at the crystallization of my own view. Several years ago, a reader of my political writing sent me a most engaging e-mail in response to one of my essays. Impressed by his observations, I replied in some detail. That was the start of a lively and regular correspondence that continued until my interlocutor, a seventy-eight-year-old U.S. Navy veteran, suddenly stopped replying, and I knew I had lost a good friend. Throughout the period of our correspondence, as we discussed the decay of modern politics and morality, we frequently returned to the notion that the greatest catalyst in this civilizational collapse was the educational establishment. In this context, my friend repeatedly drew my attention to the work of John Taylor Gatto, a long-time New York

public school teacher who had become a crusader against compulsory schooling. In particular, I was incessantly urged to read Gatto's *Underground History of American Education*, wherein, my friend assured me, I would find a comprehensive autopsy report on the death of liberty.

My friend was right. When I finally heeded his advice and read Gatto's *Underground History*, its effect was akin to that of donning a new pair of prescription eyeglasses. Suddenly, objects of which I had long been aware, but which had been visible only in outline, were clearly perceptible in their full detail. Though I did not agree with all of Gatto's philosophical premises and specific conclusions, the overwhelming experience of reading his account of the practical development of public schooling was one of liberation, and I repeatedly found myself responding to particular facts or observations with an excited "That explains it!" This was only the second contemporary book on education to have had such a profound, focusing effect on my thought. The first was Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*. It gradually dawned on me that Gatto's ideas neatly complemented Bloom's. Although Bloom's underlying philosophical view was somewhat more in line with my own thinking, and indeed had helped me, as an impressionable undergraduate, to develop my own perspective, Gatto's practical radicalism—his clear-eyed willingness to get right to the heart of modern education's corruptive nature, its deliberate blunting of children's intellectual and moral growth—appealed to my mature distaste for ivory tower aloofness. Philosophical detachment is essential to the pursuit of wisdom, which means the pursuit of happiness. But practical engagement has its place in even the most philosophic life, as the greatest thinkers bear witness, and one must not allow aspirations to intellectual purity to devolve into an excuse for shirking the responsibilities of political community. Thus, my own small mission, born partly in response to those two earlier ruminations on modern educa-

tion, was to bring the full weight of philosophical investigation to the somewhat idealistic activism of the education freedom fighter.

Sorting through my essays and notes about government schooling, I asked myself a question that occurs to me often in my classroom teaching, and that perhaps ought to be the starting point of all educational endeavors: How would Socrates approach this? My search for an answer began with Socrates' lessons about the political danger represented by the Greek sophists; for the modern case for universal public education is one of history's great sophistries. A sophistical argument is only persuasive to the extent that its key terms remain ill-defined and susceptible to equivocation, that its alleged historical antecedents remain vaguely outlined and deceptively interpreted, and that its audience feels secure in the presumption that the sophist is seeking his and their mutual interest in good faith. From such considerations, I developed the chief aims of this book.

First, we must divest ourselves of the tacit assumption that government schooling is an indubitable fact of nature, rather than a purposeful (and mostly recent) political choice to which history provides clear counterexamples. For the great enabler of today's ever-tightening chokehold of compulsory state child-rearing is the nearly universal perception that such child-rearing is an unquestionable norm with no viable alternatives. Discovering that not only do such alternatives exist, but that they actually account for the great peaks in the development of civilization, is indispensable mental preparation for an open-minded review of the illiberal machinations of modern schooling.

Second, we must demystify those catchwords and clichés which dominate the public education advocacy of both the so-called left and right factions of contemporary politics, facilitating our sophists' manipulations with their siren song of "progress." Socialization, individuality, standards, fairness, "preparing children for today's economy," and the rest of our lexicon of

educational aims must be dug up by their roots, so that the roots themselves—the seminal thinkers and principles that gave rise to compulsory schooling—may be examined directly, without preconceptions. There is no shortcut to understanding on this score. To dismiss or evade the task of unraveling late modernity's most profound intellectual shifts, as these pertain to the meaning and purposes of education, is to refuse to face the seriousness of our civilizational predicament and the urgency of substantial action.

Finally, having studied the theory and practice of modern schooling from the ground up, we may, or rather must, consider what ought to be done about it, and how. It is here that I appeal to both the self-interest and the public-spiritedness of the reader. Everyone benefits directly from the tangible improvement of his own community, and therefore stands to gain immeasurably from the liberation of thousands of forcibly dulled minds in his midst. And everyone who sees tyranny growing in his community has a moral obligation to combat it in the manner appropriate to his circumstances and strengths; to fail to do so is to cower before irrational power, which in the long run means reducing oneself to something one should not wish to see in the mirror each day. Virtue and proper pride demand that one do what one can, where one can, when the lives of innocents and the future of one's society are at stake.

Exactly how one may best advance the causes of educational freedom, moral development, and intellectual achievement within any given community's legal structure will be determined somewhat by the specific machinery whereby that community's ruling establishment uses its schooling laws to predetermine social outcomes. Hence there are few universalizable answers to the practical *legislative* question, "What is to be done?" Precise strategies must vary according to institutional idiosyncrasies, although sound principles and a clear-eyed understanding of the nature and depth of the problem should guide all deliberations.

As for the more essential moral and political question, however—"What is best?"—the answers are as universal as is human nature itself. In truth, all our fashionable relativism notwithstanding, there is no theory of education that does not (overtly or tacitly) presuppose a universal conception of human nature. Seen from a certain angle, any given theory of education is really *nothing but* a theory of human nature—of our natural needs, tendencies, capacities, and purposes. For the better part of two centuries, throughout most of what we call the developed and developing world, the view of human nature indicated by our educational establishments and their most "advanced" practices has been a rather demeaning picture, in which the vast bulk of the population subsists primarily as a manipulable mass for the use and disposal of a ruling elite and its administrative officers. The extent to which this view of human nature becomes manifest in the politics of any given community is partly determined by the extent to which that community's educational establishment is centralized in its goals and methods, which, in practice, means the degree to which education has become wedded to the aims and proclivities of government as such.

In other words, not only is our modern, scientific form of tyranny, a.k.a. totalitarianism, inseparable from a more or less centralized education establishment, but in fact the innate tendency of *all* government-controlled education, at any level, seems to be tyrannical, no matter how honorably-intended the project might be in its initial stages within a particular community. To demonstrate how this is so, and how it has always been so understood by the great founders of modern schooling, is the defining task of this book. Through an account of philosophical principles, specific methods, historical movements, and practical examples, I hope to present sufficient evidence to prompt an earnest reader, one prepared to assess the evidence in good faith, to generate his or her own case against public education.

Recognizing the inherent difficulties in challenging the orthodoxy of one's time, I have adopted an approach that, at least in its intentions, combines the persuasive force of historical research with the intimacy of the personal anecdote, the rigor of detailed textual analysis with the intuitive elisions of aphorism. In this process, I will often ask the reader to accompany me into foreign terrain that is by turns maddening, heartbreaking, and, hopefully, motivating. The deliberate stunting of human potential is the topic of this book, but that topic necessitates more than a passing glance at what that potential is, or was, which ought to inspire admiration for the creature that so many strange men have worked so hard to subdue, thus far with only partial success.

I have been assisted in this project, directly and indirectly, by more people, and in more ways, than I could hope to enumerate here. First of all, I could never do justice to the contributions of a thousand students I have taught, ranging in age from five to sixty-five, on two continents. All theoretical speculations and historical research would be worthless without the understanding gleaned from years of deep engagement in the lives of so many talented children and adults, in and out of a classroom setting. A few of them find their way into this book as examples and case studies. All of them, however, must be credited with affording me years of invaluable experience, both as a teacher and as an observer of the state of modern civilization, particularly as regards our means of encouraging or thwarting human development.

I owe a great debt to Thomas Lifson and his editorial staff at *American Thinker*, where the early essays which formed the skeleton of this project were originally published, and from whose readers I received the encouragement to pursue these matters further, and in ever-greater depth.

Throughout the process of writing this book, several friends have helped me immeasurably with comments, questions, and trenchant observations that forced me to rethink various points,

to dig deeper, to develop better arguments. Guy Green and Tony Bauer, American men in all the best senses of that phrase, prodded me along from the earliest stages, dragged my ideas into the trial by fire of on-air discussion, and continue to represent principle and good citizenship in an age of petty self-interest and disengagement. Timothy Birdnow is a model of unbowed reasonableness against an enemy whose modus operandi is to flog the free man with a million irrationalities until his will to resist is broken. Ha Yun Kyoung has been a great student and a great friend; in particular, I must thank her for enduring long conversations with a sleep-deprived, companionship-starved writer during a summer spent in the unpleasant company of John Dewey. William Meisler is an increasingly rare entity in this twilight of modernity, a genuine Renaissance man; his probing analyses and questions about education, politics, the arts, my writing, and just about everything else under the sun, have become a mainstay of my intellectual life.

Finally, I thank Shannon, who, when the wars threaten to get the better of my self-control and sanity, always reminds me why I am fighting, and that every moment is worth it. The tragicomedy of the philosopher lies in his knowledge that the best of what is inside him can never be communicated in language, and hence that, insofar as he is a teacher and writer, he must reconcile himself to ultimate failure, which in this case means eternal isolation. In this alone, I have the advantage over the philosophers, for I am always aware that, whatever my deficiencies as a teacher and writer, there is in fact someone who knows.

DAREN JONESCU
Changwon, Republic of Korea, September 2016

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Introduction

> *Wherever is found what is called paternal government, there is found state education. It has been discovered that the best way to insure implicit obedience is to commence tyranny in the nursery.*[1]
>
> Benjamin Disraeli, June 20, 1839

I begin this book—part obituary for a great civilization, part wistful dream of a future one—with Disraeli's pithy account of the meaning of government schools, because his words seem to descend upon us from another world, burning away today's befogging discussions of education with the warm sun of simple clarity. In short, Disraeli is stating the obvious, which is precisely what today's education debates are typically calibrated to avoid.

It is my contention, consistent with Disraeli's précis, that government-controlled schooling, in all the variations in which it now exists throughout the developed world, is essentially a tool of paternalism, by which I mean of the tyrannical impulse; that such schooling was conceived and developed with a compliant and uniform citizenry, rather than an educated one, as its primary goal; and that our present civilizational decline, likely much graver and more intractable than is readily apparent to most of us living through it, is largely the product of the world's

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[1] "On the Order of the Day for the resumption of the adjourned debate on National Education," HC Deb 20 June 1839 vol. 48 cc578-689, available online at http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1839/jun/20/education-adjourned-debate#S3V0048P0_18390620_HOC_4.

two hundred year experiment in state child-rearing. This decline will not be slowed, or civilization renewed, as long as compulsory schooling remains the norm in education.

How strongly do I mean that last statement? How far, in other words, am I proposing to go in combating government schooling? A logician might note that Disraeli's observation that all tyrants favor state education does not necessarily entail that all who favor state education are tyrannical. Indeed, even leaving aside that majority of late modern men who, having been raised in the epoch of government schools, can barely imagine any alternative, we can certainly find prominent examples of worthy and honorable leaders and theorists who regarded some form of state-regulated education as acceptable, or even desirable. Such people, however, must be clearly distinguished from the chief architects of public schooling itself, who have generally been men of a decidedly authoritarian bent, "paternalists" who for one reason or another sought to manipulate, and specifically to soften, the general population in the name of solidifying some form of social control for themselves. These men were not always evil, but they were always wrong, and the results of their efforts to restrain society through moral and intellectual indoctrination are invariably disastrous in the long run, a judgment that can hardly be exemplified more starkly than by outlining the decisive role of their project in ending an age defined by its quest for practical freedom and its belief in the dignity of the individual.

Education is nothing less than civilization itself considered from the developmental point of view. It is the process of becoming civilized, which means of learning what we are, how we ought to live, and how we are related to one another and to the whole of existence. It is the clearest instantiation of what Aristotle meant when he described man as a political animal, but also of what he meant by saying there is something divine in us. For centuries of so-called Western humanity, this process, which

is always and by necessity as incomplete, faltering and fragile as humans themselves are, was grounded in variations on a few related themes: The rational individual, a natural microcosm who is therefore capable in principle of understanding his immediate surroundings within a comprehensive view of the whole, must live by his own will, which requires cultivating practical knowledge, intellectual self-reliance, and moral independence. To undermine self-reliance, to deny independence, and to diminish or curtail the desire for knowledge, is thus to denature men, in the sense of turning us against ourselves. And that, in capsule, is what public schooling was and is designed to accomplish.

We are living through the final stages of progressivism's two-hundred-year ascendancy. The expansion of practical liberty and material prosperity in the nineteenth century was rooted in the ideas and sensibilities of the preceding centuries. Already in the early 1800s, however, seeds of modernity's invasive weed had germinated, and were sending up shoots throughout the West. Progressivism, the idea that History itself is a kind of animate being seeking its goal in a deified Future, and hence that humanity, History's chariot, is essentially a collective entity with a collective purpose, was an impossible fit in a civilization supported by the intellectual pillars of rational self-discovery, individual sovereignty, and the moral and metaphysical primacy of the personal soul—"life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," as Thomas Jefferson, adapting Locke, so deftly crystallized our nature.

For a long time, this anti-modern, anti-rational, and anti-individual philosophy exerted its most profound effects primarily in its native soil, Germany, although it was gradually invading Western academia and the realm of high art. It might therefore have seemed little more than a background rumble or sophisticated novelty item in the practical political life of the then-ascendant English-speaking world, the world of classical liberal-

ism, rapid industrial expansion, and the promise of endless frontiers and unprecedented individual self-determination. As early as the 1820s, however, European and North American intellectuals and policy activists were making pilgrimages to German universities, and returning home with their hearts full of new, advanced ideas about man, morality, and society. The most practically potent of these ideas, forming the core of progressivism's political revolution, were those concerned with education.

If man is essentially a collective entity—not Aristotle's political animal, but rather abstract humanity elevated above the concrete individual, the "ideal" over the real—then individualism, broadly defined, is worse than an error. It is an impediment to the cohesion that is both proper to the species and indispensable to the realization of our true end. From this it follows that all moral theories based on the premise that the quest for happiness is our ultimate natural motive—the premise of the Western moral tradition prior to the late eighteenth century—must be rejected as at best naïve and primitive, at worst destructive, and in any case *obsolete*. The problem for the original progressives, the German idealists, was that the pursuit of happiness, which is to say of private knowledge, private virtue, and a private glimpse of eternity, seemed to answer to a basic human impulse, or at least one basic to the Western tradition. There could therefore be no hope of realizing their new religion of the progress of collective humanity, i.e., History, short of a radical separation of mankind from the social conditions that both derived from and fostered that older moral perspective.

This radical separation would require the strategic application of coercive authority to snap nature's thread linking men's hearts to their own lives, their own needs, and their own futures. As such a strategy, pursued against adults, would immediately be identified and resisted as a form of enslavement, the proper and necessary targets would have to be children—which, as a corol-

lary, would make all existing adults potential obstacles to be overcome on the road to the children's souls. Hence, as the purpose of this project was to eliminate countervailing influences that would interfere with the creation of a new collective man, ready at last for the great leap forward toward his new deity, the Future, the strategy would have to be applied universally, by force of law; it would have to displace the private family as the locus of authority and emotional dependency in the children's formative years; and it would have to exploit the children's natural desires, fears, and pleasures to break them to the will of the collective, which, in concrete terms, means the will of the state.

German thought had been edging toward a systematic rejection of the traditional understanding of human nature for some years before anyone had manifested the combination of profound intellect and profound megalomania needed to conceive of an effective way of bringing these radical ideas down from the ivory tower, and into the practical life of a nation. The man who finally rose to the occasion was one of the four great figures of German idealism, Johann Gottlieb Fichte. His vision of compulsory, government-controlled schooling, designed explicitly to subvert and undo the entire rational and religious heritage of the West in favor of a neo-mysticism with its own new trinity—the future, the state, and the collective—was both progressivism's first comprehensive mission statement and the blueprint for what in the twentieth century came to be known as re-education camps.

This was the bold new idea that the West's intellectuals and education reformers flocked to Prussia to study, to admire, and to adapt for application at home. Fichte's dream was never realized in its pure form even in Germany, let alone in those more liberal nations where concepts such as compulsion, uniformity, and submissiveness still had predominantly negative connotations, while free will, personal happiness, and private property still had

predominantly positive ones. Yet in the end, by persistence, obfuscation, and stealth, the admirers of Fichte's blueprint won the day throughout the civilized world. Compulsory schooling found its voice over the nineteenth century, its chorus joined by statesmen, bureaucrats, business titans, and academics—anyone desirous of coercively entrenching a social status quo with himself in an elite position; anyone swept up in the early waves of progressive theory or activism, whether of the idealist-mystical or the materialist-socialist sort (two waves politically distinguishable only by their superficial crests); and, in principle, simply anyone with the instinct to impose where he is unable to persuade.

Progressivism is a protean political monster, which is why it is not easily reducible to socialism, communism, fascism, or plain old oligarchy. It is less a political doctrine or method of governance than an elaborate rationalization; it is power lust masquerading as social theory and greed masquerading as philanthropy. By the early twentieth century, the West's first comprehensive philosophy of domination had become the dominant philosophy of the age. (Anyone who doubts this should consider that in 1912, the United States of America, the West's last bastion of resistance to progressive collectivism, held a presidential election in which two of the three major candidates ran under the progressive banner—Teddy Roosevelt named his third party challenge the Progressive Party—and those two progressive candidacies, along with Eugene V. Debs' Socialist Party, accounted for seventy-five percent of the popular vote.) As a result of this successful insurgency, compulsory schooling, tyranny commenced in the nursery, became the norm throughout the advanced world—a world, we would do well to recall, that had become advanced *without* such schooling. The schools may not yet have been all that a progressive could hope for, but the ratchet mechanism of ever-expanding government control within the private spiritual realm,

i.e., the mind, had been set in irreversible motion. The most vital, or rather fatal, step, namely compulsoriness itself, had been taken.

And what is compulsory schooling, in a nutshell? It is the legally enforced diluting of parental authority over the raising of children, with intellectual and moral lessons, goals, and methods regulated by the government. It is usually undertaken in government buildings away from the family home, and under the supervision of various levels of government agents trained in accordance with government standards to represent and administer government policy regarding the proper rank-ordering of society, the attitudes and skills deemed by the government to be most socially useful, and the pre-emptive extinguishing or subduing of beliefs, attitudes, and behavior judged to be undesirable *to the government* for any reason. It weakens the natural attachments to family and familial associations in favor of cultivating alternative attachments to government officers, and to the artificial, government-designed social order of the school. Broadly, it encourages feelings of submissiveness to, and dependence upon, the opinions and judgments of an abstract collective, thus effectively discouraging independent thought, thwarting the development of self-reliance, and in general ensuring that no one ever actualizes his full intellectual and practical potential.

At this point, no doubt, most progressive readers are rising to object that the preceding description completely misrepresents the purpose and value of public education, while many conservatives, I imagine, may be ready to accuse me of going too far, of weakening my own case with hyperbole. To those critics, or to those among them prepared to engage honestly with this subject matter, I issue a friendly challenge: Go back and reread the offending paragraph, this time without the presuppositions we have all had drilled into us about the supposed necessity of public schools. Find in that paragraph one sentence, one phrase, one

adjective that may properly be said to exaggerate anything, or indeed to say anything at all apart from a simple matter-of-fact description of public school.

Furthermore, to remove from this challenge any hint of subjective bias, I ask you to find one statement or description in that paragraph that has not also been offered, in similar words, in *defense* of public education, by any number of the institution's most influential advocates. Admittedly, you will find that most of the public school proponents who spoke this honestly about their methods and intentions were men of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, before progressivism, as part of its assault on the final pockets of civilized resistance, invented the dainty linguistic duplicity that we now call political correctness. Be that as it may, I can safely aver that the major historical architects, supporters, and caretakers of modern compulsory schooling are completely on board with every word in my description; in fact, my description was derived entirely from their own statements, as will become quite clear as we proceed.

So we return to the question I posed on the reader's behalf at the outset: How far am I proposing to go in combating government schooling? Consider, again, the last part of Disraeli's critique of paternalistic government: "It has been discovered that the best way to insure implicit obedience is to commence tyranny in the nursery." I draw your attention to the main verb, "discovered." Disraeli's important observation is that the superlative value of state education as a tool of tyranny is a *discovery* that tyrannical men have made. That is, men with a desire for illegitimate power will find their way to this most ingenious and effective method of control if it is made accessible to them. Recognizing this, many thinkers and statesmen of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries bravely resisted the calls for establishing publicly controlled and funded education systems, universal schooling, in spite of the obvious surface appeal of the idea of

using public funds to promote the kind of good citizenship that is necessary for a civilized society to survive and thrive. They fought this losing battle because they foresaw the danger inherent in mistaking some men's decent and noble sentiments for a universal condition, thereby inviting whole societies to pave their roads to hell with good intentions by establishing the legal and practical means to their own enslavement.

All that has changed since the young Disraeli and others made their cautionary stands is that we have now witnessed the full poisonous fruit of the subversion they foresaw, with government schools more comprehensively controlled and controlling than anything a nineteenth century "conservative" or "liberal" could have imagined. Public education is now universal in a sense that might have seemed unthinkable to Disraeli. By deliberately restraining spiritual growth in the name of entrenching state paternalism as an inescapable norm, progressivism has added a final twist to Disraeli's ironic stab. For he warned of "tyranny in the nursery," whereas today's educational establishments have taken this one step further, seeking, by means of the maturation-stunting effects of public school, to establish nothing less than tyranny *as* a nursery.

My aims, then, are two-fold. On a theoretical level, I hope to make the rational case for the complete elimination of government-controlled schooling as a matter of principle. My immediate practical goal, however, is more modest, namely to persuade a few thinking adults to join the fight against tyranny's most ubiquitous outreach program in any way possible within their own personal spheres of influence. The susceptibility of government schools to exploitation as tools of oppressive social manipulation was always, as it turns out, a risk too great to be borne. Today it is a reality too manifest to be denied. The so-called Western heritage, the flowering of mankind as a race of rational inquiry and self-discovery, has been reduced to embers,

and the primary agent employed in suffocating this most glorious flame has been the public school. More narrowly, the promise of modernity—the promise of liberty and a civil order grounded in practical reason—remains now only as a dim shadow of its true self, maintained merely to pacify the masses with a chimerical representation of freedom and morality in place of the real things. If there is to be a renewal of civilization in the foreseeable future, it will of necessity begin with an educational revolution. I hope the present work will play a small role in the development of such a movement.

I am a teacher. If there were a Hippocratic Oath for teachers, its primary injunction would be, "I will do my utmost to cultivate men's natural abilities, and in all instances avoid any practice or policy that would restrain those abilities." My conscience, reflecting on the many beautiful but forcibly diminished souls that I have had the privilege to call my students, demands that I give voice to the concerns detailed in the following pages.

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PART ONE: ON SWALLOWING THE CHILDREN

But Rhea was subject in love to Cronus and bare splendid children, Hestia, Demeter, and gold-shod Hera and strong Hades, pitiless in heart, who dwells under the earth, and the loud-crashing Earth-Shaker, and wise Zeus, father of gods and men, by whose thunder the wide earth is shaken. These great Cronus swallowed as each came forth from the womb to his mother's knees with this intent, that no other of the proud sons of Heaven should hold the kingly office amongst the deathless gods. For he learned from Earth and starry Heaven that he was destined to be overcome by his own son, strong though he was, through the contriving of great Zeus. Therefore he kept no blind outlook, but watched and swallowed down his children: and unceasing grief seized Rhea.[1]

Hesiod, *Theogony*

[1] Hesiod, *Theogony*, translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1914), 453-469.

The Common Sense Case

All men who have turned out worth anything have had the chief hand in their own education.[1]

Sir Walter Scott

i. A Shot Across the Bow

Here, stated as directly as possible, is my thesis: If the institution of government-controlled education is allowed to survive, all efforts to resuscitate the inert bulk of modern civilization will fail. It is time to unravel the most ill-conceived and destructive entitlement program of all. Cancer cells do not divide into healthy cells; likewise, a corrupt, power-intoxicated political class will not willingly raise a freedom-loving, self-reliant populace. Ruling establishments must no longer be permitted to predetermine their nations' fates by mass-producing populations that serve their interests.

For a long time, many people have known that what we casually call "public education" must be held partly responsible for the undoing of modernity and the shriveling of its natural political fruit, individual liberty. But for years, excepting a tiny, brave contingent of parents, educators, and social critics—cranks and extremists, as commonly designated—most of these people have assumed that the problems of government schooling,

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[1] Sir Walter Scott, letter to J.G. Lockhart, c. June 16, 1830, in *Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, edited by H.J.C. Grierson, vol. 11 (London: Constable, 1936), 365.

however grave, must be resolved through curriculum reform, bureaucratic changes, or school board activism. Such methods, though often undertaken with the noblest of intentions, have always failed, in spite of the few heartening but minor victories that may have been won on the way to ultimate defeat. This trajectory of failure is inevitable, as treating the superficial symptoms of a fatal disease will always be, whatever temporary relief such treatment may bring to the sufferer.

It is time for all those who have struggled in frustration to change "the system"—and this includes the honorable minority of principled public school teachers who continue to stand and fight quixotically against the progressive avalanche—to unite in the names of freedom and virtue and take the bolder step of acknowledging that compulsory schooling as such is rigged to fail, or rather to succeed in achieving harmful aims. Accept that, implausible as it may sound to most people at this stage, if you really want to raise a generation of rational, self-respecting adults prepared to shrug off the yoke to which modern man has submitted in exchange for his fair share of the state's ill-gotten booty, you must emancipate the *next* generation of young adults from progressivism's universal indoctrination program.

"Well," says the sober type at this point with a condescending grin, "that's all very nice, but of course it's impossible; more reasonable to work to change the schools from within." That kind of sobriety used to go by other names, before principled thought and responsible citizenship gave way to petty self-interest and *Realpolitik*. People will flock to the cinema to watch a bland action movie about an Everyman taking on gangs of imaginary bad guys to rescue a kidnapped child. Meanwhile, real life bad guys are effectively kidnapping tens of millions of children, turning ransom into a bureaucratized government program, and the children's parents are saying "What time do you want me to drop

him off?" and "It's good to know somebody's looking after him while I'm busy." Perhaps, as Allan Bloom remarked in comparing rock music to gladiatorial combat, witch-burning, harems, and cannibalism, "a society's greatest madness seems normal to itself."[2] How does one begin to question the ubiquitous, to cast doubt upon the quotidian? To do so is to make oneself ridiculous in the eyes of most men, and no one enjoys looking ridiculous. Maybe it's best to go along, then, and to confine one's criticisms to the realm of the "possible" and "reasonable."

We might at least take a moment, however, to ask ourselves what we are prepared to tolerate in order to avoid ridicule. To begin with a few basic, relatively uncontroversial premises (all of which will be explained fully as we proceed):

(1) Modern compulsory schooling, in all its variants, discourages advanced intellectual development. By "discourages," I am not referring to so-called failed schools, lazy teachers, or bad textbooks, but rather to the specific and intentional goals of compulsory schooling *as conceived and designed*.

(2) Public schools, regardless of the personal beliefs of particular teachers or administrators, promote submissive collectivism, undermine self-reliance and self-respect, and instill conformity and an emotional dependency upon group authority. This moral indoctrination may, for convenience, be referred to as the Dewey model of education, and it has been pursued and expanded by education decision makers and their minions (the teachers) for generations, throughout the advanced world.

(3) Levels of meaningful academic achievement are dropping with each generation. High school graduates in the advanced world today are notoriously deficient in general knowledge, literacy, and basic reasoning skills compared to their prede-

[2] Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 75.

cessors. More importantly, in the main they lack ordinary common sense, as well as a sense of common heritage based on shared experiences of something beyond the latest popular songs. In other words, their education has taught them no essential connection to a world before their birth, thus converting the natural distance between generations into an impenetrable dividing wall.

(4) Whereas the studies commonly known as the humanities should teach the various shadings and mysteries of human nature, greatness, and folly, as well as ideals and nuanced possibilities against which to understand and measure ourselves, modern schooling teaches the essential inferiority of the past, the moral equivalency of aspirations, and above all a self-satisfied devotion to the flavor of the month that undermines the development of deeper human understanding and intellectual independence—exactly the weaknesses that education is supposed to help us *overcome*.

In short, modern schooling, for all its rhetoric of fairness and a loving environment, is calibrated to produce through social artifice the kind of men that we find in the most pessimistic speculations about the pre-societal state of nature: ruled by fear, lust, and vanity, unable to form a unified conception of last week, and with no coherent hopes beyond tomorrow. (To be fair, public school does seek to modernize its brutish man with one significant enhancement over his primordial ancestor: economic utility.) The products of such a de-civilizing process are ideally suited, both morally and intellectually, to accept the protective embrace of paternalistic authority—even, eventually, to cry out for it. This condition of the soul represents today's mainstream, which reveals the chief difficulty for anyone who dares to challenge the premises of public education.

We are living amidst Tocqueville's soft despotism in full flower, slavery with silken chains and satin sheets. Populations systematically raised to crave comfort over freedom, gratification over self-determination, will instinctively object to any change that would force them into a more independent life; and the well-honed instrument is essentially resistant to perceiving any goal for itself beyond utility. The factory where modern man is fitted for his silken chains and trained to submit to his function is called public school. Late modernity's political calamity is therefore at its core an educational problem, and yet at the center of that educational problem stands the single most sacred of all the sacred cows of our secular political age.

In light of this, the reasonable first step toward a new, liberated perspective on our decline and its causes is to reassess the idea of government schooling from its roots. We may enter upon this investigation by following the guidance of our modern forebears, and asking the "state of nature" questions: Why was government schooling deemed necessary and good in the first place? What would lead a society that lacked this form of education to seek it out? To phrase this another way, given our current politico-educational morass: Could a system of universal public education *ever* serve the best interests of a civil society in the long run? I believe we have enough evidence to answer, unequivocally, no.

Let us begin with an unavoidable practical reality. Any true public education system is, by definition, controlled by the administrative arm of the state, which means it is managed by the ever-growing team of bureaucrats, theorists, and other unelected experts appointed, directly or indirectly, by the ruling officials at each appropriate level of government. The problem, as with any bureaucratized system, is that over time, the entrenched routines and protocols developed and practiced by these con-

trollers take on a life and momentum of their own. Reform-minded newcomers, at any level of the system, become increasingly impotent to make substantial changes, both because fundamental changes are resisted by the complexity of the machine itself, and because real reformers, should they be allowed to sneak into the system at all, are always vastly outnumbered as long as most hiring and appointing privileges remain in the hands of the entrenched leadership.

It follows that a corrupted educational establishment will tend toward further corruption. One might hope for a new direction if one could believe that the system were off course due to accident and incompetence, and hence were only in need of a critical mass of new, focused leadership to take the reins and lead the carriage back on to a reasonable path. This is far from the case, however. As we shall see, today's worldwide compulsory school religion was carefully and purposefully developed, and is forcefully and protectively micromanaged, by people with dubious political agendas. The developers, past and present, are not a bumbling band awaiting rational leadership. At the highest levels, they are an amoral band contriving the means to the emasculation, de-rationalization, and herd-animalization of mankind, as a way of aggrandizing, empowering, and protecting themselves—though always, of course, in the name of social progress. (The educational leadership will likely include some well-meaning types working in cahoots with the calculating subversives and profiteers, but insofar as these earnest people have accepted the public school propaganda at face value, they are no less destructive than the subversives and profiteers. In a sense they heighten the danger, by lending legitimacy to tyranny.)

Might it have been otherwise? Or, more practically, might even the impending final collapse of civilization create an opportunity for the development of new, uncorrupted public systems, ones

which serve the legitimate purposes of universal education in a free society, rather than undermining liberty at every turn? And then, once such good systems have been held in place for a sufficient period, might not their virtues harden into position and become relatively immovable, by means of the same bureaucratizing mechanism which now serves to perpetuate a corrupt establishment?

I concede that this possibility is not inconceivable. What is inconceivable, however, is that the large number of men and women who would have to be entrusted with the power to design, and later to administer and develop, any such system would be uniformly noble and virtuous in their intentions. One of the surest lessons of history is that power corrupts, and that absolute power is the inevitable final destination of authority once corrupted, unless this logical impetus is stopped by force. This understanding was, of course, the heart of modernity's argument for limited representative government with a balance of separated powers, a fact which indicates the primary political danger of public schooling: The power to commandeer the unformed minds of an entire population during their most malleable years trumps all structural limits and separations within government. Compulsory education gives those with administrative authority over its content and methods the power to determine the mental and moral habits of the generation that will soon be in the position of choosing, or acquiescing to, the future direction of the society. In this way, an unrepresentative educational bureaucracy gradually becomes a new, unacknowledged, separate branch of government, or rather a *supra-governmental institution*, in that it has the coercive power to determine to a large degree what kind of citizens will occupy the officially acknowledged branches of government in the future.

Furthermore, the adage "power corrupts" implies an initial uncorrupted condition, which may reasonably be presumed in a man; not necessarily so in a committee. Give a good man too much power, and the opportunities for abuse may get the better of him until, given time, the temptations breed habits, and the habits in turn breed new temptations. Give too much power to a department or ministry, on the other hand, and you cannot even count on an initial good conscience to fight those temptations. The help wanted ad for the Regional Office of Excessive Authority is hardly likely to attract the most honorable applicant pool. If, out of the blue, someone offered you exclusive and legally enforceable decision-making power over how all the children in your neighborhood would be raised—what they would and would not learn, what social attitudes would and would not be fostered in them, how most of their time and energy would be spent, and how they would be ranked and vetted to determine their future prospects—I presume you would have the decency to decline the offer. The people who would *not* have that decency are the ones currently raising the world's children. And unlike my hypothetical example, these people were not offered this authority out of the blue; they climbed, trained, and competed for it over many years. This does not mean they all had sinister motives. Most of them probably saw it as a natural career path for an ambitious "education worker." They phoned home excitedly when they got the promotion. They solemnly declared their intention to live up to the obligations of the sacred trust they had been granted. They are fond of telling people how important it is to make the right decisions "for the children." Hannah Arendt's famous phrase "the banality of evil" comes to mind.

A common classroom activity is to ask students to speak or write about what they would do if they were "king for a day." I hate that activity, as it fosters the notion that absolute power is

desirable; and to my recollection, I have yet to hear of a single child—or adult—giving the proper answer: "I would abolish the monarchy." Modern civilization desperately needs George Washingtons. It promotes Adolf Eichmanns.

It is widely observed, by people of both the so-called left and right, that for more than a century, barring corrections imposed by practical necessity, the overall trajectory of the advanced democratic world has been a more or less steady arc in the direction of greater socialization of economies, expanding entitlement programs, and increased government oversight and regulation of areas of life (and death) previously left to develop of their own accord; and also of the loosening of past moral restraints, the fading of modesty and moderation, and what we might call the casual serialization of sexual attachments; and, in addition, of the diminishing popular influence of the signposts of civilization's continuity (historical figures and events, classic literature, art, and music, etc.) in favor of an unprecedented global hegemony of the blunt, simple, and transitory in information and entertainment. The left generally sees these changes as evidence of our inexorable march forward, i.e., progress. The right generally sees them as evidence of the superior organization of leftist political factions. I see them as inevitable results of the one important structural similarity among the advanced and developing nations which has remained constant through all internal and external political changes: universal mass schooling.

Within little more than a century, a civilization whose vanguard was blazing a trail of unmatched material innovation and political liberty has been turned inside out, from a prosperous semi-free world to bankrupt democratic tyrannies that combine the totalitarian impulses of Lenin with the bureaucratic absurdism of Kafka. I know this description of the state of things will draw a chuckle from that sober type we met earlier. The

extent to which my account seems exaggerated is the measure of the severity of the crisis. We can no longer see ourselves, in part because our education, formal and informal, has made us all emotional progressives. We instinctively resist viewing our situation in the light of past ages, for we are just certain that somehow our time is different, and that the weaknesses and brutalities of the past are inherently inapplicable to us. I feel the same reticence. However, I am also compelled to stand on the side of reason in this matter, and against my habituated emotional reflexes. We are human beings; so are our leaders. We are therefore susceptible to blindness and self-delusion, and they are prone to abuse of power and deception, just as may be found throughout all previous eras, and among all peoples. Our self-delusions may be more sophisticated, and our tyrants subtler, but in essence I stand by my belief that we are still human beings, identical in kind—in strength and in weakness—to our forebears. Compulsory schooling is merely the modern world's typically systematized and sentimentalized way of acting on one of the primordial moral weaknesses of men: the desire to control and diminish one's neighbor for one's own benefit.

Still, one might maintain that, modern abuses notwithstanding, a society could not hope to survive, and to perpetuate its institutions and ideals, without recourse to a unifying educational establishment. The belief that government must mandate and regulate education to promote the kind of citizenship needed to sustain a healthy society has a long and intermittently noble history. The main problem with it, following from what I have just described, is this: Every corruption and degradation of a state's political and administrative establishment tends toward a further corruption and degradation of that state's educational system. And by the same reasoning that has led some to hope that government-controlled education might preserve a good

society, one can easily see how such a monopolistic system in the hands of misguided or subversive leaders could quickly disseminate and perpetuate a perverse ideology—a hypothesis that hardly requires elaborate theoretical justification anymore.

Allow me to emphasize this last point, as I believe it holds within it the most straightforward case for the abolition of all public education models, in favor of the theoretically infinite (but practically self-limiting) models possible in a private educational world, by which I simply mean one in which all education of children is chosen and planned at the family level, whether directly (as in so-called homeschooling), indirectly (as through church-based or other privately-managed schools), or through some combination of these.

One of the common modern arguments for government-controlled education is that without some kind of standardization and oversight, parents and their children would be at the mercy of educational charlatans, incompetents, or people with socially dangerous motives. This is all literally true, on its face; but its rhetorical force depends on accepting two typical authoritarian—or, to put it the other way around, slavish—assumptions: (1) that private citizens, left to their own devices, would be rudderless in making life's important decisions, and (2) that freedom, in markets or anything else, is by definition the special breeding ground for charlatans, incompetents, and subversives—in other words, that *only the government can be trusted*. If there is a competition for Big Lie of the Millennium, I nominate that one.

Furthermore, consider that corruption, incompetence, and subversion reach only as far as their mandate. A bad homeschooling parent fails his child. A bad private school fails many children. A bad public school system fails an entire community. And whereas an unskilled or overburdened parent has the option of seeking help in educating his child, and parents unhappy with

a failing private school may take their money elsewhere, a failing compulsory public system gives parents little recourse; corruption at the top of the pyramid quickly insinuates itself throughout the system. A few neo-Marxist theorists and activists, for example, feeding on the naïveté or corruptibility of a few administrators and legislators, can quickly spread their dye through the whole pool, and this dye, so universalized, becomes the color of the community for generations. Needless to say, that description summarizes the past—and, in my view, *final*—hundred years of what we in the West have come to call modern civilization. If anything breeds educational charlatans, incompetents, and subversives by its very nature, it is not freedom of choice, but rather the power to compel universal standards and methods.

Why do adults, even those who pride themselves on being fervent defenders of freedom, continue to support this, at least tacitly through their unwillingness to face the issue squarely? Why do parents throughout the civilized world, who presumably still love their children, willingly (or reluctantly, for that matter) send those children—their own future—to state indoctrination camps? “From my cold, dead hands,” American patriots defiantly say of their guns. Are not their children worthy of at least so strong a grip?

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ii. The Noble Ideal of State-Controlled Education

The issue at hand is of the utmost importance, as we are talking about the most determinative institution in any society. It therefore behooves us to quit our stale practical realm for a moment—our degraded reality of teachers unions, political correctness, relativism, entitlements, and the trashy combination of exhibitionism and voyeurism that we pass off as culture—and breathe the fresh mental air of a more rational age.

It was none other than Aristotle himself who provided the strongest common sense case for state-controlled education as a means to societal self-preservation; and I mean strongest not only in the sense of being the most logical but also the most moral. Latter-day public school advocacy, to the extent that it transcends unthinking presumption, is invariably political and disingenuous, whereas Aristotle, as always, is the model of impeccable honor and good faith in his reasoning, seeking what is true and good, and not merely what will serve his petty advantage or vanity. I am therefore in no way inclined to derive pleasure from being a contrarian where The Philosopher is concerned, or trivially to suggest that his ideas are inapplicable to modern problems—quite the contrary. In other words, far from dismissing his view as antiquated, I am tempted to conclude that if *he* cannot persuade me of the necessity of state-controlled education, no one can.

In *Politics*,[3] he argues that only legislative control of the goals and general content of learning can guarantee the rearing of men who will sustain a desired form of government. Leaving education in the hands of families is, he suggests, leaving too much of a political community's future to chance. The good government must take pains to outline and enforce a curriculum directed to the production of healthy and virtuous citizens.

> [F]or the exercise of any faculty or art a previous training and habituation are required; clearly therefore for the practice of virtue. And since the whole city has one end, it is manifest that education should be one and the same for all, and that it should be public, and not private—not as at present, when everyone looks after his own children separately, and gives them separate instruction of the sort which he thinks best; the training in things which are of common interest should be the same for all. Neither must we suppose that any one of the citizens belongs to himself, for they all belong to the city-state, and are each of them a part of the city-state, and the care of each part is inseparable from the care of the whole. In this particular as in some others the Lacedaemonians are to be praised, for they take the greatest pains about their children, and make education the business of the city-state.[4]

Thus, the purpose of public education, the only justification for its institution, is to foster virtue. Of course, any advocate of state-controlled schooling may say the same thing, but meaning it is quite another matter, as we shall see. As a virtuous soul is the goal, he argues, the subjects taught must be only those suitable to

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[3] Aristotle, *Politics*, translated by Benjamin Jowett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885, cosmetically edited), available online at https://archive.org/stream/politicsaristot05arisgoog#page/n12/mode/2up.
[4] Ibid. VIII.1, 1337a.

promoting this end. It is here that we see the difference between a philosopher honestly thinking through an issue and a powermonger seeking to manipulate a population for his own interests.

> There can be no doubt that children should be taught those useful things which are really necessary, but not all useful things; for occupations are divided into liberal and illiberal; and to young children should be imparted only such kinds of knowledge as will be useful to them without vulgarizing them. [Note: "useful *to them*."] And any occupation, art, or science, which makes the body or soul or mind of the freeman less fit for the practice or exercise of virtue, is vulgar; wherefore we call those arts vulgar which tend to deform the body, and likewise all paid employments, for they absorb and degrade the mind. There are also some liberal arts quite proper for a freeman to acquire, but only in a certain degree, and if he attend to them too closely, in order to attain perfection in them, the same evil effects will follow.[5]

Even allowing for our instinctive discomfort with Aristotle's typically Hellenic low regard for technical training and remunerable skills, this is a profound observation that the reader would do well to bear in mind as we examine the leading thinkers in the development of modern public schooling. Holding Aristotle's public education advocacy up next to John Dewey's, for instance, provides an object lesson in the difference between philosophy and sophistry, love of wisdom and love of power. The key point of emphasis here is that, to the degree that virtue is the goal of the process, the chief corruption to avoid is excessive specialization. The legitimate purpose of true education, whether

[5] Ibid., VIII.2, 1337b.

public or private, is not to produce "useful" citizens—that is, subservient humans whose own personal well-being is to be sacrificed to state utility—but rather good and happy men. For it is only through such means that the just regime's legitimate interest, namely the common good, may be served. Indeed, in a statement that might strike the modern reader as so out of step with today's authoritarian spirit as to be genuinely jarring, Aristotle completes his general account of what public education should be with the following:

> The object also which a man sets before him makes a great difference; if he does or learns anything for his own sake or for the sake of his friends or with a view to excellence, the action will not appear illiberal; but if done for the sake of others, the very same action will be thought menial and servile.[6]

The principle expressed here stands directly opposed to our own progressive moral indoctrination. The purpose of true learning, as of living, is self-development, excellence. The purpose of *today's* schooling, reinforced in every imaginable way, both theoretically and practically, is precisely to reduce everyone to what Aristotle calls the "menial and servile" condition. Our compulsory schooling is born of, and seeks to perpetuate, the perspective that learning or doing "for one's own sake or for the sake of one's friends" is the essence of immorality. Aristotle's earlier declaration that all citizens "belong to the city-state" must be understood in this light. Men do not simply belong to *any* state, merely by default; that is, we are not essentially property of the collective, or of the tyrant. Rather, the citizen *as such* belongs, in principle, to a good state *as such*, which means a state governed for the good of its citizens. Aristotle is speaking of men

[6] Ibid.

as political animals, naturally suited to seeking their fulfillment within a virtuous civil order. He is not careful to distinguish this from our *modern* sense of "belonging to the state"—self-obliterating collectivism—because it would hardly have occurred to a Greek thinker to imagine this latter sense could be upheld as a tenable moral position. For Aristotle, as, in fact, for Western man in general prior to the progressive era, to seek one's own genuine and rational good is both natural and virtuous. By contrast, today's primary moral principle—living for the good of the collective, without regard for one's own interest—might be classified by the Greeks as a form of morbidity, the "menial and servile" perspective of something not quite fully human. And that, in essence, is what our new, advanced forms of tyranny seek to produce: citizens who have been reduced to the not quite fully human—men trained to serve and be useful, rather than to seek completion and happiness.

So here we have the serious case for public education—opposed in every essential detail, I must emphasize, to the rationalizations offered by the men who gave us modern compulsory schools, as we shall see in detail as we proceed. If we have a good and virtuous political arrangement, and responsible leaders dedicated to the common good, then these leaders ought to take responsibility for ensuring that all children are raised with care to promote the maintenance of virtue in the community. In fact, Aristotle specifies that the realization of a good and successful public education arrangement presupposes virtuous and rational legislators attentive to the preservation of a civil society. As he observes in the *Nicomachean Ethics*[7]:

[7] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by W.D. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925, reprint 1984), available online at http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.html.

> Now it is best that there should be a public and proper care for such matters; but if they are neglected by the community it would seem right for each man to help his children and friends towards virtue, and that they should have the power, or at least the will, to do this.[8]

This stipulation clearly implies that if virtue—not some nebulous "good of society," but individual virtue—is *not* the goal and result of state-regulated learning, then there is no justification for public involvement in education at all, and the endeavor ought to be left to the private sphere. Aristotle, arguably the best friend state education ever had, explicitly rejects the idea that education ought to be in state hands merely by default, independently of its efficacy in providing for the raising of good men. In fact, he goes much further:

> For as in cities laws and prevailing types of character have force, so in households do the injunctions and the habits of the father, and these have even more because of the tie of blood and the benefits he confers; for the children start with a natural affection and disposition to obey. Further, private education has an advantage over public, as private medical treatment has; for while in general rest and abstinence from food are good for a man in a fever, for a particular man they may not be; and a boxer presumably does not prescribe the same style of fighting to all his pupils. It would seem, then, that the detail is worked out with more precision if the control is private; for each person is more likely to get what suits his case.[9]

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[8] Ibid., X.9, 1180a.
[9] Ibid., X.9, 1180b.

In other words, Aristotle's overall position on public versus private education appears to be that public would be preferable for the society, presuming an honorable government were to take on the task, but short of such a government—that is, one comprised of good and sincere statesmen—education ought to be left to private families, because these may at least be counted on to act for the good of the child, and what is more, they will be better able to distinguish and provide for the specific learning needs of their own children. This point cannot be stressed forcefully enough, as it is easily overlooked in comparisons between classical public education advocacy and that of our own age. Aristotle's plan for state education, and even Plato's more radical musings in *The Republic*, presuppose—indeed, *demand*—a state governed rationally and with wisdom, and rulers dedicated to the best interests and well-being of the citizenry, rather than to their own material advantage or the production of "useful" underlings. This overriding condition was to be an essential property of the well-governed *polis*, and was hardly a default presupposition.

The Greek advocates of public schooling also presumed one other condition the importance of which cannot be overstated: small, independent states. State-controlled education is a very different animal when designed and regulated entirely at a local level, for several key reasons. First, the highest-ranking managers of the system will necessarily be visible members of the community, and therefore directly answerable to the citizenry, who are their neighbors. In addition, the curriculum, both academic and moral, will be more likely to answer to local needs, beliefs, and traditions. Furthermore, the purely *polis*-controlled system will be calibrated to foster stronger ties to the local community, rather than to weaken real human feelings in favor of the generic "justice" of abstractions like "universal brotherhood," which only serve to alienate people from their real human context, meaning

from genuine feelings of connectedness and mutual concern, which in turn means from their own souls.

To be generous to the concept of state-controlled education, then, we might say that the Greek city-states were ideally configured to attempt such a project, because they were not only small communities but also, and most significantly, self-governing states. That is, there was no higher level of government above the *polis* that might gradually usurp local authority over education in the name of equalizing standards and results. Thus, the biggest step toward the ultimate corruption of state-provided schooling—the relinquishing of exclusively local control—was virtually impossible in classical Greece. (And it is noteworthy that Thomas Jefferson's lifelong advocacy of some limited form of public—but non-compulsory—schooling sought to entrench this same severe decentralization artificially, by statute.[10]) To state the obvious, that structural buffer against tyrannical expansion no longer exists; the pull of "greater oversight," uniformity, increased funding from higher levels of government, and expert guidance in the name of supposed national interests has long since destroyed any quaint fantasies of locally-controlled public schools.

Let us pursue this line of reasoning a little further. If education means anything, it means the individual soul's development from its original condition of material isolation toward its proper interaction with, or participation in, the cosmos. Family is an individuated soul's first and most natural means of practical connection to the cosmos, an institution grounded in the innate human desire for completion and continuity. Friendship is a

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[10] George H. Smith, "Thomas Jefferson on Public Education, Part 1," *Libertarianism.org* (April 3, 2012), http://www.libertarianism.org/publications/essays/excursions/thomas-jefferson-public-education-part-1.

more spiritual fulfillment of family's promise, a connection that transcends the boundaries of isolated individuation entirely at the level of soul, which means in the realm of virtue and reason. Political community, however, is a more abstract and (perhaps contra Aristotle) artificial connection, based less on love and need than family, less on reason and freedom than friendship—and hence more susceptible to corruption in motives and in means than either of the others. The Greek thinkers insisted that a well-organized *polis* should be small—smaller than a small city of today—precisely to ensure that it remain plausibly analogous to a large family, and citizenship recognizably akin to a community of friends. The larger the community, the more unaccountable the rulers to the ruled, the less plausible any real feelings of mutual concern and common interest among the citizens, and therefore the more untenable any general, organized rebellion in the event of institutional corruption. (At the end of the Peloponnesian War, for example, a group of sympathizers with the victorious Spartans, the infamous Thirty Tyrants, were granted governance of Athens and disarmed most of the citizenry. Barely a year later, an uprising left the Thirty dead or exiled, and Athenian democracy restored.) Contrary to our modern self-reassurance, electronic mass communication and high-speed travel do not expand the relative dimensions of acceptable smallness (except in the least important way, geographically); rather, they merely expand the reach and improve the grip of oversized government. When "fellow citizens" becomes an abstraction without comprehensible content, and government a faceless monolith of uncountable millions and uncontainable proportions, it is clear that the intermediary position the state might have held between family and cosmos is forsaken, and that any analogy between citizenship and friendship disintegrates. The state, in the modern psyche, is not a conduit to the universe, or an

intermediary between private men and the divine. It has rather *supplanted* the cosmos. The legitimacy of the state's authority to raise a community's children, dubious under ideal (i.e., locally limited) conditions, is simply beyond the bounds of reasonable consideration under modern political realities. "The state" no longer means what it meant for the ancients, and hence the best moral argument for compulsory state education dissolves.

In any case, it is telling that few examples of anything resembling what we would call state education were available for Aristotle's observation; education was, as he himself notes, strictly a family matter throughout most of the classical Greek world, and certainly in Athens itself. One detailed study of Greek education summarizes the Athenian schools this way:

> The schoolmasters opened their schools as private enterprises, fixing for themselves the fees and the subjects taught. The parents chose what they thought a suitable school, according to their means and the subjects which they wished their sons to learn. Thus Sokrates says to his eldest son Lamprokles, "When boys seem old enough to learn anything, their parents teach them whatever they themselves know that is likely to be useful to them; subjects which they think others better qualified to teach they send them to school to learn, spending money upon this object."[11] This suggests that the poor may frequently have passed on their knowledge of letters to their sons without the expense of a school. But all this was a private transaction between parent and teacher. The State interfered with the matter only so far as to impose certain moral regulations on the schools and the gymnasia, to fix the hours of

[11] Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, ii.2.6.

> opening and closing, and so forth, and to suggest that every boy should be taught his letters.[12]

Having seen very little of genuine public education, then, perhaps Aristotle's atypical idealism on this matter may be excused. Be that as it may, it is quite obvious that our moment of spiraling de-civilization and entrenched administrative state cynicism would qualify as the extreme case of what he terms "proper care for such matters" being "neglected by the community." The community, in our case, has lost all direction on questions of what Aristotle calls moral and intellectual virtue—the natural aims of a human being—and thus fails to meet his justifying condition for establishing a public education system in the first place. Indeed, "system" may be a misleading term for what Aristotle seems to have in mind. His focus is primarily on which subjects ought to be taught, and why, rather than on who should teach them, or exactly how. Of course his schools would necessarily be organized at the *polis* level, and no more broadly. Furthermore, he does not appear to have intended any truly universal standardization of means and outcomes, and certainly had no notion of scoring or ranking students hierarchically, a practice which would serve no useful purpose in education aimed at cultivating good citizenship, moral virtue, and intellectual self-sufficiency, i.e., happiness. We may therefore conclude that while he recommends legislative control of the curriculum, he certainly would not approve of any modern government school system, aimed as these invariably are at the two goals he rejects, excessive specialization and moral servility.

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[12] Kenneth J. Freeman (edited by M.J. Rendall), *Schools of Hellas: An Essay on the Practice and Theory of Ancient Greek Education from 600 to 300 B.C., Second Edition* (London: MacMillan and Co., Limited, 1907), 58-59.

It is also extremely noteworthy that the most highly developed model of state education in Greece's classical period was that of Sparta[13]—a city admired by Aristotle, as by Plato, for its ability to marshal wartime forces. Aristotle nevertheless also chastises Spartan education for its failure to address the deepest needs of intellectual and moral development.[14] Had he had access to many further examples of state-controlled schooling, one might suppose that his typical predilection for empirical observation would quickly have led him to realize that this essential flaw was not specifically Spartan, but rather intrinsic to the practical reality of state education as such.

More importantly, and I would say this point is central, the perspective of time has revealed that everything that made classical Greece truly world-historical, some would say the summit of human civilization, was the product of *other* city-states, and not Sparta.[15] That is, notwithstanding Aristotle's admiration for Sparta's unified purpose, civic courage, and fighting prowess—the sort of thing state education might be expected to do well, in effect military training—history shows that Greece's real and unprecedented peaks of intellectual, artistic, and political achievement were entirely the fruit of what we would call "private education," wisely maintained continuously in the greatest of her city-states, Athens, despite the misguided urgings of her two greatest philosophers.

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[13] "Spartan education was entirely conducted by the State, at the expense of the State, and for the ends of the State. It differed in this respect from nearly every other system of Greek education." Thomas Davidson, *Aristotle and Ancient Educational Ideals* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1892), 45. (Hereafter *Davidson*.)

[14] Cf. *Politics* VIII.4, 1338b.

[15] Cf. *Davidson*, 44: "Sparta accordingly never produced a poet, an historian, an artist, or a philosopher of any note. Even the arrangers of her choruses were foreigners."

As the idiosyncratic but insightful nineteenth-century writer Thomas Davidson noted:

> [I]t is not a little remarkable that, while many of the first thinkers of Greece, including Plato and Aristotle, advocated an entirely public education, Athens never adopted it, or even took any steps in that direction. It seems as if the Athenians felt instinctively that socialistic education, by relieving parents of the responsibility of providing for the education of their own children, was removing a strong moral influence, undermining the family, and jeopardizing liberty.... No liberty-loving people, such as the Athenians were, would consent to merge the family in the State, or to sacrifice private life to public order. [16]

The same, in essence (though to varying degrees), may be said of Renaissance Europe and Elizabethan England, when early modernity established the artistic, philosophical, and scientific foundations of civilization's new epoch; of the Britain of the Industrial Revolution, when men planted the seeds of unprecedented general prosperity, radically transfiguring the world's politico-economic aspect; and of America at the time of Independence, when courageous thinkers made common cause with ordinary decent men in establishing a new form of republican government, built on a foundation of both ancient and modern philosophical genius, and designed to preserve man's natural freedom as no previous form of government ever had. (I must add that my phrase "courageous thinkers" may strike the reader as almost amusingly oxymoronic, but in fact it only became so during the era of public schooling—I refer you to my hypothetical "sober" critic.)

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[16] *Davidson*, 63.

Seen from this perspective, the fact that the seemingly humane pursuit of universal public education is arcing toward modernity's moral, intellectual, aesthetic, and economic bankruptcy is not as paradoxical as we might be given to imagine. In truth, we ought perhaps to find it strange that we ever thought government-administered schooling could lead to anything else, in the end. For all the noblest hopes and intentions in the world cannot alter humanity's natural frailty, nor deny the destructive logic of the corrupted system, which is increasingly irreversible in proportion to the system's universality: The fewer the systems, the wider the dissemination of poison from above.

Therefore, if you hope to salvage a civilization from today's moment of disintegration, you must begin where all civilization begins, namely with education. And the first principle of the renewed educational world must be the most prosaic wisdom of all: Don't put all your eggs in one basket—especially if that basket belongs to the state.

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Compulsory Mass Retardation

When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
Before high piled books, in charact'ry,
Hold like rich garners the full-ripen'd grain;
When I behold, upon the night's starr'd face,
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And think that I may never live to trace
Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance;
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour!
That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the faery power
Of unreflecting love!—then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink.[1]

John Keats, 1818 (age twenty-two)

If a public education system functions as it is designed to do, every human being, by eighteen years of age, will have completed his government schooling in an effective state of mental retardation, moral infantilism, and childlike dependency. In other words, he will be a model citizen of a collectivist authoritarian state: deficient in reasoning, imagination, and historical awareness; easy to please with material gratifications; unable to recognize

[1] John Keats, "When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be," in *The Complete Poetical Works of John Keats* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1900), 67, available online at https://archive.org/details/completepoetical01keat.

the moral distinction between self and other, mine and thine; and willing to obey, out of mortal fear of being left alone.

Such systems often fail in their intentions, of course—to some degree. It must nevertheless be conceded that everyone, in truth, has suffered some effect of this indoctrination to submission, conformity, and intellectual diminution, unless, by the grace of God, he has somehow been spared state intervention in his education entirely. The evidence of this general effect is perhaps best revealed by considering what happened *before* compulsory public education became the norm.

I remember the surprise with which I absorbed my first philosophy professor's biographical description of eighteenth century empiricist David Hume, who entered the University of Edinburgh at or slightly before age twelve. A child prodigy in the realm of theory, I marveled! I had always assumed that the phenomenon of child prodigies was limited to the arts, or to mathematical reasoning. And yet here was a *philosophical* wunderkind. I subsequently learned, however, that although Hume was indeed somewhat precocious in his scholarly progress, his development was not as remarkable as I had imagined. The usual university entrance age in Hume's day was fourteen.

As a teenager, Hume began early work on the book for which he is most famous, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, a grand sweep through the essentials of human existence, from cognition and the experience of space and time, through the human passions, property as the basis of justice, and the origins of government. It remains one of the most broadly influential treatises of the Enlightenment, and one of a relative handful of works that may unqualifiedly be said to have altered the course of modern history. Hume completed it in 1737, at age twenty-six.

Hume's conception of empiricism was in part a response to the "immaterialism" of George Berkeley, whose own *three* most

important works were completed by 1713—at which time Berkeley was twenty-eight.

Just a few years younger than Berkeley, Alexander Pope published his first major poems and his classic *Essay on Criticism* in 1709 and 1711, respectively. In 1711, Pope was twenty-three.

It was around that time that Pope met and befriended the greatest of all English satirists, Jonathan Swift, who was twenty years his senior. Swift, for his part, after entering Trinity College, Dublin at age fourteen, and receiving his B.A. at eighteen, was forced by practical necessity to earn a living immediately, and was thus forestalled in pursuing his writing career. His youthful employment was as personal secretary to a retired English diplomat, Sir William Temple, beginning at age twenty-one. In this role, he was sent to London to make a case for parliamentary reform in a personal audience with King William III—at twenty-four.[2] As a result of this employment, Swift did not complete his first great satire, *The Battle of the Books*, until the ripe old age of thirty.

John Keats was left fatherless at eight, orphaned at fourteen; his brother George married and emigrated to America when John was twenty-two, leaving him to care for their dying youngest brother, Thomas. Keats himself was showing early signs of consumption at twenty-three, and died at twenty-five—though not before producing a body of work that would establish him as one of the greatest poets of the modern world.

Not to be neglected, however, is that during the early period of his rapid ascent from the lyrical experimentation of "Imitation of Spenser" to the great mastery of the Odes, Keats was also

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[2] The Reverend John Mitford, "Life of Swift," in Jonathan Swift, *The Poetical Works of Jonathan Swift*, Volume I (London: William Pickering, 1833), xv-xviii.

studying medicine. At fourteen, he began his years as a surgeon's apprentice. At twenty, he was working as a surgical assistant (a "dresser") at Guy's Hospital in London, where he was also enrolled as a medical student.[3] Today, the string of hardships that comprise the skeleton of his brief biography would be regarded as ample excuse for any number of failures of character, from sloth and idleness to crime and waywardness, and the death of such a "boy" today would inspire only laments about his having been deprived of the chance to "find out who he is." Instead, this boy died a learned man of broad historical awareness, an employable medical worker, and an almost unsurpassed master of the English language.

Let us now follow Keats' brother George to early America for a moment, where we find similar examples.

Thomas Jefferson was asked to write the first draft of the Declaration of Independence—that is, to construct the initial founding statement of a new nation, in defiance of the most powerful government on Earth—at age thirty-three. Consider what this means: At thirty-three, Jefferson had already established himself as a man of such depth of learning and accomplishment that he was judged by great men many years his senior to be the best available person to perform the gravest and most solemn task in any of their lives, and in the eventual history of a nation.

And Jefferson was not alone in this seeming precocity. James Madison cut his teeth as an elected representative in the Virginia Convention at twenty-five, in preparation for becoming "the Father of the Constitution"—at thirty-six. Alexander Hamilton was the first delegate invited to the Constitutional Convention—

[3] "Biography: John Keats," at *Poetry Foundation* (accessed February 15, 2015) http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/john-keats.

at thirty-two,[4] having dropped out of university at eighteen to begin writing political articles against the British, and having been chosen as George Washington's assistant during the Revolutionary War at twenty-two.

While we are wandering among the ghosts of America's Founding Fathers, we might note Samuel Adams, who entered Harvard College at fourteen, graduated at eighteen, completed his master's degree at twenty-one, and began writing political essays for the *Independent Adviser*, a weekly newspaper he co-founded, at twenty-six. John Hancock earned his bachelor's degree from Harvard at seventeen, at which point he began working toward a partnership in his uncle's trading company.[5]

The men described above are only a very small sample of like figures in the modern history of the Anglo-American world: men who would be regarded as extraordinarily precocious today—if such men could exist at all today—but who were merely proceeding, albeit with greater public success than most, according to the typical life pattern of centuries past. What do they all have in common? At least three things, to begin with: a complete lack of public school socialization, a dearth of government-standardized testing, and a total privation of state-trained teachers.

Two other things they share: Almost all of them were reading the classics, and typically studying multiple languages, at or before puberty, and most were enrolled in university at the age at which boys today are in middle school, or just beginning high school. (And remember, with the exception of Hume, they were

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[4] Or thirty—there is some uncertainty about Hamilton's date of birth. Cf. "Alexander Hamilton," at http://www.alexanderhamilton.org/ (accessed May 29, 2015).

[5] Cf. "The Life of John Hancock: Timeline," http://www.john-hancock-heritage.com/timeline/, 2015.

not starting university earlier than their less gifted contemporaries, but rather according to the norms of the time.)

And then there is this similarity, in which they perhaps differ most from today's youth: As "children," they were already, as was common in past ages, in daily and substantive contact with the real, grown-up, practical world. They were *doing* things, performing meaningful tasks, engaging with great literature, with languages and with history, and interacting with adults in contexts that required them to behave responsibly and maturely, rather than being artificially "protected" in an immature social context which imposes childishness even on its token minority of adult overseers.

Pope, severely deformed and dwarfed by a childhood bone disease, and a Catholic at a time when educating Catholics was illegal in England, received only a few years of (contraband) private schooling,[6] and from age twelve was entirely self-educated.[7] Hume famously scoffed at his own fast track through formal education, which he left behind at fifteen without completing his degree, noting that "there is nothing to be learnt from a Professor, which is not to be met with in Books."[8] Jefferson was a budding naturalist as a boy, which is to say he was pre-occupied with forests, not toys; reality, not "creative fantasy."

Comparable examples abound. Jane Austen had minimal formal schooling, but read widely under her father's direction,

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[6] New World Encyclopedia contributors, "Alexander Pope," *New World Encyclopedia,* (accessed May 29, 2015), http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Alexander_Pope&oldid=983788.

[7] Samuel Johnson, "The Life of Pope," in *The Poetical Works of Alexander Pope,* edited by William Warburton (Philadelphia: Jas. B. Smith & Co., 1859), 10-11.

[8] Ernest Campbell Mossner, "Hume at La Flèche, 1735: an unpublished letter," *Studies in English* (The University of Texas) 37 (1958), 30—33.

while transforming her quotidian family life into fodder for the hilarious juvenilia which served as an apprenticeship for writing her six classic mature novels, all of which were completed before age forty. Benjamin Franklin's school days ended at ten years of age, from which point he worked, first for his father, and then, at twelve, as an apprentice to his brother, a printer. Honoré de Balzac was a notoriously unfocused grammar school student who was routinely punished for his lack of studiousness with solitary confinement in a six foot square cell with holes in the door to allow for air. The regularity of this punishment left him seriously ill and unable to continue at the school, and years later, the only man at the school who remembered him was the priest who controlled the cells. Balzac nevertheless relished this solitary confinement, which he used for private reading.[9] He later studied law while simultaneously attending lectures at the Sorbonne, until age twenty, when he began one of the most prolific careers in the history of the French novel. Stephen Crane, a meandering student at various private academies, whose youth was pockmarked with illness and several family tragedies, published *The Red Badge of Courage*—his second novel—at twenty-four.

Denis Diderot earned a master's degree in philosophy at nineteen. Alexis de Tocqueville, a lawyer at age twenty-two, returned home from his eighteen-month investigatory tour of the United States at twenty-six, and, a year after submitting his prize-winning study of the U.S. penal system, completed the first volume of *Democracy in America* at twenty-nine. Abraham Lincoln had almost no formal education whatsoever, and yet he not only overcame this "liability," but became a world-historical figure largely on the strength of his rhetorical genius.

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[9] Mary F. Sandars, *Balzac: His Life and Writings* (London: Stanley Paul & Co., 1914), 32-33, available online at https://archive.org/stream/honoredebalzac00sandiala#page/n9/mode/2up.

To object here that I have cherry-picked some of the most exceptional biographies from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is to miss the point, or points. What, then, *are* the relevant thoughts to be gleaned from these anecdotal case studies?

First of all, the case for what we call secondary school—that is, pre-college public schooling from approximately fourteen to eighteen years of age—is dubious on its face. It was formerly *normal* for "children" in that age bracket to be completing university degrees. In other words, those years, for which we have manufactured a term, adolescence, in order to tie them decisively to childhood, and to detach them from early adulthood, are now wasted years. Indeed, they are worse than wasted; they are counterproductive. Those precious post-pubescent years when young men of the "educated class" were once being introduced to life's great questions, becoming immersed in ancient literature or the newest theories of physics, are now spent in forced, perpetual sputtering within the intellectual doomsday machine we have amusingly dubbed "high school." Show me a man who believes that today's best high school graduate is as intellectually and morally advanced as the average fourteen-year-old university freshman of 1750, and I'll show you a public school administrator.

Furthermore, a fifteen-year-old who might have been working, doing an apprenticeship, learning the family business, acquiring the practical skills that would allow him to provide for himself, support a family, and become a productive contributor to his community, instead spends four years staring bleary-eyed at the legs of the girl across the aisle while lazy government union workers drain away his rightful future, droning on with reading comprehension prompts such as "What can we infer about the salary for this job from the phrase 'Entry level position'?"[10] The

[10] From the 2007 Ontario Grade 10 English curriculum, p. 89, available online at http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/english910currb.pdf.

enthusiasm for work, the pride of developing competence, and the hope of growing self-determination are stunted, where they are not completely snuffed out, by this elaborately contrived stalling tactic.

As a boy, I used to watch the Kentucky Derby on television every year. I loved that moment when the last horses were being coaxed into the starting gate. I could almost feel the bursting frustration of the horses already inside, as they were forced to wait another ten seconds, fifteen seconds—how much more could they take?—before the final competitor was in position, and the starter finally set the horses free to run their hearts out. I wonder how long a race horse could wait in that little gate, champing at the bit, before its pent up energy released itself uselessly through a kind of mad kicking and struggling, followed by a hopeless submission to confinement, and eventually by the mental and physical inertia of desuetude. How long, in other words, before Secretariat is transformed through artificial restraint into The Old Gray Mare? The answer, I would wager, is the horse brain's equivalent of about three months of high school.

Young men and women are herded from room to room, subject to subject, on a tight, fixed schedule—requiring them to start and stop thinking about each subject on a dime, at the whim of adults most of whom they will never meet—seemingly for no reason other than to keep them awake, while their heads are pumped full of fog from the government's arbitrary program of spiritual delay. Rather than discovering something, pursuing an interest, assisting someone, or even building a remunerable skill set, they are lulled into a stupor with abstractions about career options, force-fed UN-approved progressive talking points, or titillated with the state-sanctioned deviancy of "lifestyle choices." Rather than falling in love with great books, i.e., with their own minds, they are bored into a profound disrespect for real

literature and thought with four years of "reading strategies." "Life" is the name of that mysterious world they are never permitted to see, but only to analyze and deconstruct *in absentia*, until at last the mystery, which ought to have propelled them forward, dries up and is dispersed into the fog that has become their minds. Alcohol, drugs, hypnotically bland, bluntly sexual and repetitive music and imagery, and soul-deflating erotic "experimentation" are—by intention—the only outlets available for these energetic young racers restrained indefinitely at the starting gate. They uselessly kick and struggle themselves into apathy and submission. Thus, when finally released, rather than bursting out of the gate with enthusiasm, they merely wander confusedly in groups, hoping for nothing but a safe place to graze, and an owner to bring them some water occasionally.

Of course, this depiction of high school is simplistic. For my Kentucky Derby analogy implies that high school freshmen are thoroughbreds in peak form, and that all the spiritual damage is done at that time. In truth, most students arrive at secondary school already dwarfed, flabby, and lame. By no means, in other words, am I suggesting that today's typical fourteen-year-old is ready for university—for ancient languages, for Dante and Milton, for Plato and Hesiod, for theory of government or the study of medicine; or for the responsibility of working as a skilled apprentice, ordering supplies for a farm, or even operating his own small business. He most certainly is not ready for anything of the kind. My point, on the contrary, is that *yesterday's* typical fourteen-year-old *was* ready for these things. Indeed, he was pursuing them.

We artificially restrain our boys and girls from developing themselves into young adults, so that by the time they reach the proper physical age for leaping headlong into life, they are so ill-suited to do so that they almost crave the fettered boredom of

high school as a means of avoiding a world for which they (correctly) feel utterly unprepared. Again, the crime is not merely that they are prevented from acquiring the knowledge and skills they might otherwise have developed. It is that they are rendered substantially less mentally fit for acquiring that knowledge and those skills; their innate machinery has been rewired for failure and underachievement. How else to define such a procedure, established by force of law, than as *compulsory mass retardation*?

Why would an entire civilization choose to commit such an unnatural crime against its own children? We need look no further than the most basic, universal reality of the worldwide educational establishment, namely that it consists of child-rearing undertaken by the state. Some of the reasons a ruling class might desire the systematic diminution of the general populace are almost too obvious to mention—so obvious, in fact, that most people fail to see them, as we normally fail to hear the ever-present hum of electricity around us.

To begin with, early development of skills that engender independence and self-reliance causes, among other things, a shrinking of the potential dependent class, and hence a reduction in the natural support base for progressive political factions—factions which, as the public mask for their power lust, promise entitlements and "positive rights" that will provide for men what they fear they will be unable to provide for themselves. The key-word there, as in so much regarding our current implosion, is "fear," which is the chief popular sentiment relied upon by progressives: fear of being left to one's own devices, fear of "standing alone," fear of failure; fear, in short, of living without a safety net. Children submit to adult authority when they feel incompetent to manage their situation alone; likewise, adults who have been reared to feel ill-adapted to life as self-reliant

individuals cling to the authority of those who promise to protect them, and to provide for them.

Consider again the exceptional people we have seen in this chapter. Their names, of course, constitute only a sampling of modernity's great minds. These minds are regarded as great in part because they changed life, and men's perspectives on life, in ways that could not previously have been predicted. That is, they were by definition a potential challenge to the status quo. Many of them were of the type that we often refer to strictly as revolutionary. All of them were historically notable precisely as questioners of certain accepted attitudes, sensibilities, or societal structures of their times. They were free thinkers, in the truest sense of the term, as was everyone who has ever made a major contribution to the advancement of the human condition—and, by extension, anyone who ever lived a worthy and dignified human life, public or otherwise.

Free thinkers are a problem for an entrenched ruling class. Such people might encourage or embrace new ideas which, if broadly disseminated, would threaten established power structures. And they are unpredictable, like all other manifestations of freedom. It is impossible to know where they will appear, what they will propound, or how their thoughts might affect the established social order sanctioned by, and supportive of, the ruling class. For example, the disparate collection of serious, unencumbered minds that gathered into the sudden storm cloud that produced the American Revolution could not have been foreseen; once they began to thunder, they could not have been resisted. Even at a more general level, human beings developing enthusiasms, purposes, and a picture of their own lives freely, without an artificially circumscribed and imposed list of career options, may choose ways of life that are less conducive to the

smooth operation of a social system supportive of the established brain trust at the top of the pyramid.

Progressive authoritarians, which is to say the leading establishmentarians throughout most of the developed world for more than a century, fear rebellion and unpredictability. That is, they fear challenges to their power. If a private man fears the loss of a preeminent position, his only legal recourse is to work harder and more intelligently to maintain his status. If that same man manages to gain political power, or to glom onto those who have it, he now has the capacity to use that power to restrain or limit private challenges to his preeminence. If he is a man of honor, who has earned his stake in the political apparatus by demonstrating nobility of character, genuine statesmanship, he will not willingly tie his political influence to his private material advantage. If he lacks such honor, and specifically if he is motivated, as Hobbes assures us men are, primarily by fear and vainglory, then he will use that power to *protect* himself and perpetuate his preeminence.

There is no other light in which to read the following passage, made famous by John Taylor Gatto, from "Occasional Letter Number One," an early mission statement in educational philanthropy produced by John D. Rockefeller's General Education Board (G.E.B.) in 1906:

> In our dreams, we have limitless resources and the people yield themselves with perfect docility to our molding hands. The present educational conventions fade from their minds, and unhampered by tradition, we work our own good will upon a grateful and responsive rural folk. We shall not try to make these people or any of their children into philosophers or men of learning or men of science. We have not to raise up from among them authors, educators, poets or men of letters.

> We shall not search for embryo great artists, painters, musicians, nor lawyers, doctors, preachers, politicians, statesmen, of whom we have ample supply. The task we set before ourselves is very simple as well as a very beautiful one...we will organize our children and teach them to do in a perfect way the things their fathers and mothers are doing in an imperfect way, in the homes, in the shops and on the farm.[11]

This historical gem, outlining the G.E.B.'s early social engineering experiments in the rural American south, reveals the essence of their ever-broadening aspirations. To paraphrase: We don't want any more independent thinkers; we want dependent workers, humble and efficient contributors to the great societal machine of which we shall be the masters. Thus, from the titans of American free enterprise came, quite knowingly, poison seeds of American progressivism. Is it any wonder that John Dewey, a socialist philosopher and founder of the twentieth century's most potent theory of collectivist totalitarian education, became a chief beneficiary of the philanthropic compulsory school advocacy of Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, George Foster Peabody, and many of the rest of the small group of "capitalists" who possessed a significant percentage of America's total wealth at the beginning of the twentieth century?

If this seems peculiar to you, it is probably because you believe that progressivism is, in theory, incompatible with unequal wealth distribution of the sort represented by names like Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Peabody. That is, you have accepted progressivism's account of itself, rather than adjusting your view to match the universal truth of progressivism in practice. The truth, borne out by the facts, is that progressivism, unlike all

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[11] General Education Board, *Occasional Papers* (New York: General Education Board, 1916), 6.

other historically important social philosophies, was never a genuine political theory at all—that is, a theory of how to improve man's estate—so much as a propaganda campaign. That progressivism has had its dupes and fellow travelers who actually believed that the human good was their goal is certain. These are the men and women who bought the propaganda. The leaders of this ersatz movement, both theoretical and practical, were never so naïve; theirs was the only "political philosophy" that had the power of the few, and the submission of the many, as *its primary purpose*. Power and wealth concentrated at the top—among the brotherhood of the present elite and their chosen initiates—with the mass of the population artificially prevented from rising, is, and always was, the nature and intention of progressivism in all its variations. A true progressive, we might say without much oversimplification, is a person whose primary social goal is to achieve and maintain his own preeminence; whose primary intellectual motive is power lust (whether of the paternalistic or the academic variety); and whose primary psychological state is fear.

The genius of some of America's early progressives, unlike many of their counterparts throughout most of the rest of the world, is that they intuited the secret of long-term success, which is to sustain a productive economy in which the masses, rather than rebelling at their hardship, are sated with superficial luxury—luxury purchased at the price of their liberty and their minds, which they are to sacrifice, piecemeal, in the names of comfort, security, and the white picket fence. Of course, these men had the great practical advantage of inheriting a society of tremendous productivity and inherent optimism, with well-established institutions of civil society. American progressives are the men who played Tocqueville's famous record about soft despotism backwards, and heard the hidden message: The gradual superimposition of tyranny upon a civil and economically

successful society—pursued under the rubric of "progress," of course—if undertaken without any sudden jolts, would make life a lot more predictable and comfortable for the grand designers at the top of the hierarchy.

The political machinations of the leading American business titans at the turn of the last century are now well known to most of those who care to know. Their efforts, though focused initially on redesigning the American politico-economic landscape, inevitably caused global ripples, because the nation they were subverting was not only modernity's greatest experiment in practical liberty, and hence the spiritual backbone of all others, but was quickly becoming the hub of the world economy. These men's most extraordinary achievement in social reformation, however, was perhaps the least heralded, and remains one of the least appreciated today. By providing financial and ideological support for the enactment of American compulsory school laws and the expansion of public secondary school programs, they substantially furthered progressivism's anti-modern reversion to society structured along the lines of a caste system, with a strictly protected social hierarchy. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly in the end, by providing material and political support for John Dewey's revolution in education theory and teacher training, first at the University of Chicago and later at Columbia, they helped to lend an air of science and research-based expertise to the single most influential and corruptive philosophy of education of the past century. Given the ultimate global significance of their efforts, the G.E.B. itself may serve as symbolic of the political impulse and character of the compulsory education movement. The brazenness of their assault on America's institutions and underlying principles of self-determination, and their plans for subtly reshaping the citizenry, make the G.E.B.'s writings virtually a guided tour through the

soul of progressive elitism. Thus, while a detailed analysis of their plans would take us too far afield, the present examination will benefit from delving just a little deeper into their stated goals and methods.

In 1915, the G.E.B. itself published *The General Education Board: An Account of Its Activities, 1902-1914.*[12] In an introductory note, the authors explain why they have waited until now to produce an account of their projects designed for general consumption:

> The Board has made annual reports to the United States Department of the Interior [since 1902] and these have been regularly printed in the reports of the Department; but no further report has been hitherto issued, because, as the Board's work was felt to be experimental in character, premature statements respecting the scope and outcome of its efforts were to be avoided.[13]

Even in this introductory blurb, there is a presentiment of the tone of much of the group's account of its work, as well as a strong echo of the infamous passage from "Occasional Letter Number One." These men had been working closely with an important branch of the U.S. federal government for many years, undertaking "experimental" projects related to public education policy, and specifically to the creation of sweeping new laws that would radically alter American society. And yet they blithely inform the reader that the "scope and outcome" of these activities were deliberately withheld from the general public—that "premature statements...were to be avoided." What kind of

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[12] *The General Education Board: An Account of Its Activities, 1902-1914* (New York: General Education Board, 1915. (Hereafter *G.E.B.*)
[13] Ibid., xv.

governmental or quasi-governmental projects, undertaken at a national level, are deliberately hidden from the citizenry until after the fact? Strategies of military defense, of course, would fall into this category, along with related information-gathering projects (i.e., spying). In general, we may isolate particular, targeted plans intended to defend the laws and people of a nation against enemies from within or without, as instances of legitimate government secrecy, where the "premature" release of information might tangibly jeopardize the nation's interests. Lawmaking itself, on the other hand, is precisely the arena in which a free society abhors government secrecy. And then, on the cusp of actual legislative action, there is the nebulous world comprised of those activities we subsume under expressions such as "exerting influence" and "swaying public opinion." When such activities are conducted so as to be carefully concealed from public scrutiny, we can be sure their practitioners perceive themselves as superior to those whose perceptions they would surreptitiously influence. When such men are operating in tandem with the official agencies of government, we have entered the realm of propaganda and illiberal social manipulation.

This was the early heyday of progressive elitism in the New World, when the paternalistic impulse that is an underlying threat in all times and places blossomed into an open attempt to end liberal democracy and constitutional republicanism, branding it obsolete and seeking to transform it into a workable compromise between a multi-party industrial democracy and a never-ending social engineering experiment.[14] The chief players

[14] An excellent example of this, very much in the spirit of the times, is the novel *Philip Dru: Administrator*, by Edward Mandell "Colonel" House, closest advisor to Woodrow Wilson. The book, published the very year Wilson was elected president, is an extraordinary testament to the madness of the

in the G.E.B. were leading lights in this transformation process, a fact demonstrated within the pages of their boastful "account of activities."

Two of the Board's main sources of pride were the projection of the idea of public high schools through the southern states and the gradual displacement of private education through the development of "better public standards."[15] It is notable that the goal was not, as is often claimed by historians of public education, primarily "universal education"—i.e., the provision of schools for the underprivileged—but rather *uniformity* of education. That is, the Board was explicitly seeking to eradicate the social influence of non-government schools, which, ultimately, is to say the influence of private families over their own children. Hence:

> There was need in every state of a trained specialist in secondary education, who, while sympathizing with local conditions, might skillfully and tactfully marshal all available forces for the purpose of securing concerted acts calculated in time to realize a secondary school system.[16]

The G.E.B.'s report is peppered throughout with such language: "skillfully," "tactfully," "calculated," and so on. They are demanding praise for having tricked the "folk" into accepting gradually and unwittingly what they would never have accepted as an open proposition. For, as they explain:

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progressive mind. See my "Progressivism's Revenge," at *American Thinker*, March 4, 2013. (Available online at http://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2013/03/progressivisms_revenge.html.)

[15] *G.E.B.*, 74-5.

[16] Ibid., 80-1.

> It was from the first clear that sporadic successes due to voluntary initiative on the part of interested communities would not suffice. They could, at best, whet the appetite for a substantial secondary school system. [These local efforts] were, however, valuable because they reduced opposition to satisfactory legislation—constitutional or statutory as the case may be. Within less than a decade important legislative gains have been made.[17]

Among other things, these "legislative gains" included the removal, in Georgia, of "the [constitutional] limitation of public education to 'the elements of an English education only.'"[18] Such an amendment was vital to the intentions of the G.E.B. and their federal government allies, for their hope in pushing for the extension of public school into young adulthood was never to lengthen the period of genuine learning. Quite the contrary, they hoped, in the spirit of the secularized Brahmin caste they wished to be, to *diminish* the role of the "old-fashioned literary or academic course of study"[19] in favor of increased emphasis on domestic skills, industry-related standardization, and general social submissiveness training.[20] These goals, they believed, were already well on their way to being realized through the southern states: "The methods followed by the secondary school men may indeed be commended as ideally adapted to the promotion of educational and social reform."[21]

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[17] Ibid., 86.
[18] Ibid., 86.
[19] Ibid., 96.
[20] As we shall see in Part Two, these goals are the defining mission of the two most important theorists in the development of compulsory schooling, including the G.E.B.'s most important beneficiary, John Dewey.
[21] *G.E.B.*, 89.

What were the methods employed by these agents of societal transformation? Read the following extraordinary description carefully, for while perhaps slightly less sensational than the passage from "Occasional Letter Number One," it is at least as revealing:

> Their homes were in the states they served; they took up a sympathetic attitude toward local problems and conditions; acquainted themselves with the history and resources of the states; dealt candidly and plainly with every constituency on the one hand without passion or sensationalism, on the other without the faintest suspicion of exploitation or the faintest imputation of self-interest; proposed measures that were within range of possibility, at the same time that they were essential parts of a far-reaching scheme to be developed bit by bit as opportunity afforded. In homely language, they have kept "pegging away," quietly, persistently, and with ultimate purposes far beyond the immediate propositions, the adoption of which they have urged at any particular place or any particular moment. Their progress has not been marked by explosions which shake a state like an earthquake, and are presently forgotten when some new exposure in another field takes place; but interest and enthusiasm have steadily grown on the basis of achievement, without any liability to reaction or any sign of revulsion of feeling.[22]

Consider what is meant by dealing "candidly and plainly with every constituency" while proposing measures that are in fact "essential parts of a far-reaching scheme to be developed bit by bit as opportunity afforded." Or what is implied by saying they "took up a sympathetic attitude toward local problems and

[22] Ibid., 89.

conditions," while "pegging away" "with ultimate purposes far beyond the immediate propositions, the adoption of which they have urged at any particular place or any particular moment." Only the refreshing candor of the G.E.B.'s giddy brand of elitism might prevent us from recognizing that what we are reading is a boastful account of the stealthy subversion of a nation's laws and institutions in the name of purposes never to be fully revealed to the duped until after the fact, i.e., a political bait and switch. Hence the Board's avoidance of any "premature" disclosure of the "scope and outcome" of their work.

One short-term purpose of their efforts is summarized this way: "Eight years ago the term 'high school' conveyed in the South no definite meaning; now it represents a fairly well conceived educational entity...."[23] Pushing private education into social irrelevance, converting schools from halls of intellectual and character development into training stations for humble workers, and extending public school's indoctrination and developmental delay program through to the end of the teen years, were major accomplishments to be sure. However, all of this was merely part of a broader scheme to develop a fully centralized, government-run educational establishment that would extend from kindergarten through university. The G.E.B. treats the nationalized systems of continental Europe as an ideal,[24] and identifies as the essential evil of privately-directed education its lack of "general purpose," when what is allegedly needed is a perfect and all-encompassing state-controlled pyramid, with a "strong and symmetrical university as the crown of a public school system."[25]

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[23] Ibid., 93.
[24] Ibid., 103.
[25] Ibid., 105.

At no time, naturally, does the Board dally with the question of whether their plans are consistent with the United States as founded, or with classical liberalism and individual freedom in general. Constitutions, laws, and existing notions of civil society and individual character are mere obstacles on the path to social reform. All questions are pragmatic: How can we reconstruct society to match our dreams? What existing social forces and institutions will have to be circumvented in the process? And what methods will be most efficient in achieving this aim?[26] For example, while the Board, many of whose members were themselves major funders of private universities, admit the financial benefits of the private funding of higher education, they express regret at the way this form of funding—though more advantageous economically and practically—reduces the likelihood that "the several states will soon utilize their authority to regulate the founding, development, and conduct of colleges and universities."[27] That such regulation of private educational "conduct" is desirable is never doubted, but rather it is only encouraged that this be undertaken surreptitiously, once again in order to avoid direct opposition.

> Thus far, only a single state has created a department of education with anything approaching adequate powers; and in this instance it has been found that these powers must be employed *with the utmost circumspection*.[28] (Emphasis added.)

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[26] In this attitude, they were merely echoing the normal approach to "education reform" as manifested throughout the Old and New Worlds by the nineteenth century's leading advocates of public schools. This theme will be developed further in Part Two.

[27] *G.E.B.*, 106.

[28] Ibid., 106-7.

To employ political powers, and specifically regulatory and legislative powers, "with circumspection," is a cute way of describing tyranny. Specifically, it precisely describes the methods of democratic tyranny or "soft despotism." The deliberate subversion of that spirit of "voluntarism" which the G.E.B. finds so inadequate to solving social problems, leads us right to the foundational question of modern political philosophy: Why do we have governments? That is, do men create and frame their government in response to natural needs, or does the government frame and manage its citizenry to satisfy *its own* perceived needs? The G.E.B. assumes the latter, pre-civilized position. Modern paternalism, progressivism, or what have you, is, in a sense, just the divine right of kings without any grounding in that larger conception of a cosmic order which civilized the older notion. It is the "divine right" without any divinity bestowing the right, or with the "kings" simply assigning *themselves* the divine role, and then granting themselves privileges.

From the point of view of historical understanding, we should be thankful, in a strange sense, for the heady moment of full steam ahead progressivism—authoritarianism without the mask, for once—that America experienced during the early twentieth century, perhaps reaching its zenith during the Wilson presidency. For it is hard to imagine a document produced by progressives today that would be as straightforwardly condescending in its declarations of social superiority as the G.E.B.'s *Account of Its Activities*. Substantial gains having been made, in education as on various other fronts, they no longer felt any need to "avoid" discussing their "experimental" work. Rather, it seems they could no longer resist the childish urge to announce their triumphs to the world:

> It can be fairly said that in framing and putting through this legislation the high school representatives supported by the General Education Board have in every instance taken a leading part. They would, however, be the first to refuse any undue credit.[29]

The same humility, apparently, cannot be ascribed to these representatives' supporters in the G.E.B. itself, who are only too happy to trumpet the success of their efforts to help their federal friends weaken the freedom and independence of the American population, and to dilute the significance of family life, in the name of uniform worker training.

In this light, let us return once again to "Occasional Letter Number One." Speaking of the "grateful and responsive folk" whom they wish to coerce into their compulsory schooling scheme, these reformers specify that the prescribed schooling "shall not try to make these people or any of their children into philosophers or men of learning or men of science." That is a politely negative way of stating the true goal, which is expressly to *prevent* these people from becoming "philosophers or men of learning or men of science." That is why their conception of schooling requires that "present educational conventions fade from their minds." The "present educational conventions" and "traditions" from which these men wished to become "unhampered" were, as Gatto points out, and as we have seen in the G.E.B.'s *Account* of 1915, a reference to the "intellectual and character education" that had hitherto been the motive of formal and informal teaching. The progressive industrialists and their academic allies hoped to break down that model of education—the loose, variously pursued effort to produce well-developed and independent adults—in favor of a unified system promoting

[29] Ibid., 87.

humble submission and utility, producing a citizenry grateful to be ruled by their superiors.

"We shall not search for embryo great artists, painters, musicians, nor lawyers, doctors, preachers, politicians, statesmen, of whom we have ample supply." Genuine education does not "search for" anything, strictly speaking. Rather, it seeks to encourage the development of innate capacities. "We shall not search for" is a euphemism for "We shall not try to encourage." Notice the precisely chosen qualifier, "great." This new educational model would be calibrated specifically to discourage *greatness*, which is to say individual distinction, in any of the listed endeavors. That is, students would be allowed to pursue these vocations only at meek and unexceptional levels. Truly original thinkers, statesmen of character and vision, revolutionary artists, and inspirational leaders—the natural enemies of the social structure of the progressive planners—are to be nipped in the bud by the school system, a system configured to "organize children...and teach them to do in a perfect way the things their fathers and mothers are doing in an imperfect way." "Organize" is another apt word. The plan was, and remains, to produce a stratified society in which men and women keep to their places, present no surprises, and serve the overlords' purposes without disruption. To restate the message simply: We already have a queen bee; all we need now are efficient drones. People will be sorted into useful roles, and psychologically confined to specialized areas of endeavor that serve the interests of the larger machine, at the expense of the broader, more integrated personal growth that is almost definitive of our species.

One last point: Reread that passage from "Occasional Letter Number One" one more time, with your attention focused on the word "we." Don't let that "we" out of your sight. Lest you mistakenly assume "we" means society as a whole, consider such

expressions as "we work our own good will upon a grateful and responsive folk," or "we shall not try to raise up from among them...." "We" means the G.E.B. and its political allies. Thus, after having listed the pursuits that their proposed school program will discourage—namely, those which collectively comprise the intellectual, moral and political realms—they provide the explanatory clause that gives the game away: "of whom we have ample supply." These social planners were declaring, in no uncertain terms, that "in their dreams" the intellectual and creative elite would be entirely under their sway; no new thinkers or artists would be permitted to spring up willy-nilly (that is, naturally), as this would necessarily produce social influences to rival the overseers.

Men with the urge to tame and reorganize whole societies for their own use recognize the most necessary condition of such an effort: They must feel certain their authority as organizers will never be challenged, for this would reduce all their ingenious edifices to sand. Rousseau observes that primitive man could never have invented agriculture without first having established the notion of private property ownership.[30] He had to feel confident in his stable proprietorship over a piece of land before he would invest time and energy in its cultivation. Likewise with those who come to perceive an entire nation as their personal property, and to view its cultivation for their own ends as their rightful role. Thus, "we" have ample supply of intellectuals and artists; that is, all significant theoretical and creative endeavors must be pursued under the auspices of "our" design, perhaps even within "our" very bloodlines, *or not at all.*

That last point may seem implausibly absurd, and yet it is so important, and so damning of the progressive educational

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[30] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Essay on the Origin of Languages* (John H. Moran translation), Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966, 33.

mentality, that it deserves to be mined for every last repulsive implication. After generations of progressive indoctrination, it might be difficult for a reader inclined to gloss carelessly the words of men long dead to perceive the enormity of what the authors of "Occasional Letter Number One" were actually saying. There is great cleverness in their use of the word "folk" to name their victims. "Folk," in English, suggests simple people, people without grand ambitions or aspirations. It is for the folk, therefore, that the Rockefeller egalitarians dream of creating a universal compulsory education system designed to produce efficient workers while actively discouraging or thwarting high intellectual, moral, scientific, or artistic achievement among them.

Remember that the folk they were planning to educate were in fact virtually the entire American population—that proportion which had not already attained elite stature in society. The G.E.B. and its allies were condescendingly presuming that greatness could not spring from such ordinary stock, and therefore that educating them should mean only preparing them to perform useful roles. It is easy today to forget that theories of bloodline superiority, issuing in fantasies of carefully engineered human husbandry, were part of the stock and trade of Western progressivism throughout its pre-World War II history.[31] It is also easy to overlook the obvious convenience of such pseudo-

[31] Consider Tommy Douglas, Canada's beloved advocate of the democratic West's first socialized healthcare system, whose master's thesis was an argument for genetic engineering (Cf. Caleb McMillan, "A Brief History of Tommy Douglas," at *Mises Canada* [October 8, 2012], http://mises.ca/posts/blog/a-brief-history-of-tommy-douglas/); or Margaret Sanger, the founder of America's Planned Parenthood, who advocated abortion and birth control in order to minimize the lower races (Cf. Tanya L. Green, "The Negro Project: Margaret Sanger's Eugenic Plan for Black America," at *Black Genocide* [2012, accessed June 10, 2015], http://www.blackgenocide.org/negro.html.)

science for those wishing to conceal authoritarianism behind a benign face. Invoking science becomes the perfect rationalization for rendering one's fortuitously elevated status permanent—it can make the accidental appear essential, and the contingent necessary. It was only the association of genetic engineering with one of progressivism's most advanced incarnations, Nazi Germany, that forced these convenient theories, and the general intellectual presumptions related to them, underground.

But here we arrive at the deepest implication of this desire forcibly to restrain the ambitions and development of the folk. As a matter of historical fact, the children of ordinary folk include many of civilization's great men, from Socrates and Epictetus to Cervantes and Lincoln. The explicit effort to build an impenetrable intellectual ceiling for the denizens of compulsory education bespeaks not paternalistic nobility—"Why expose them to things they cannot understand?"—but rather a profound hatred of the intellect, and a desire to prevent it from "coming up" unpredictably from anywhere, rather than from the establishment class. This is not the old democracy versus aristocracy debate. Rather, it indicates a more fundamental dispute, one that returns us to the foundations of Western civilization: reason versus power. The full significance of this progressive hatred of the mind, and the meaning of the effort to stifle it, cannot be overemphasized. Socrates is, ultimately, precisely the problem these elite planners were hoping to obviate through compulsory schools—the independent thinker who asks questions of the elite, undermines their moral authority in the minds of the folk, and thereby destroys the illusions on which unjust power is based. Athens dealt with Socrates in the immediate term, but, as Socrates himself predicted at his trial, she lost the long war. Modern progressives, wised-up authoritarians that they are,

recognize that competing with Socrates is difficult and dangerous. Socrates must be *prevented*.

A defining goal of all modern compulsory schooling, stated with what in hindsight seems remarkable candor by Rockefeller's G.E.B., was and remains nothing short of the practical effort to *abort Socrates*.

Of course, this is a statement of ideals. Even the most committed progressives are capable of seeing that no system of indoctrination and mass diminution is flawless. Men will slip through the cracks and achieve exceptional things despite the best efforts of the school system to prevent such anomalies. Compulsory schooling gives the ruling class their best chance of preventing mass challenges to their authority, and also of isolating and intercepting individual exceptions on their way up. What to do, however, with men who somehow manage to beat the system, and to rise from among the "folk" to achieve the kind of social influence capable of changing the political dynamic in unpredicted ways? Complete one-party states which dispense with the pretense of pluralism, or are not burdened with a local history of tolerance and free-thinking to begin with, have an easier time of it. Exceptions, insofar as they survive youth at all, may simply be killed, imprisoned, or controlled with threats to loved ones. Things are more complicated in those progressive nations whose ruling establishments are forced by historical precedent and remnants of citizen vigilance to manage their societies' descents into tyranny by gradual steps. In these cases, the elite must, in the name of self-protection, adopt a more difficult policy: If you can't prevent them, co-opt them.

One of the saddest spectacles of the compulsory schooling era is the manner in which some of the most extraordinary living arguments *against* public education have become not merely dupes, but shills, for the very establishment whose intellectual

and moral bankruptcy they exposed. Modern conservatives or classical liberals are all too familiar with the despair induced by watching a seemingly principled man or woman rise through the political ranks to achieve national office, only to turn around and start behaving like the rest of the political establishment once he or she is in a position to do some good. The education equivalents of this corruption are even more disturbing; these turncoats use their success, which ought to serve as inspiration in the war to end compulsory schooling, to seal up the cracks in the very oxygen-deprivation apparatus they escaped.

That is to say, where independent minds do develop beyond the clutches of public schooling, these are brought into the progressive fold, and thereafter used as "experts" to justify a more all-encompassing authoritarianism, rather than holding themselves up as models of independent thought and the benefits of intellectual freedom.

Bill Gates developed his computer programming interests and skills while a student at a private prep school.[32] In fact, having shown promise in this area, he was permitted to work on his own in the computer room, puttering and programming, rather than attend math classes. Through this freedom to spend time working on (and playing with) his interests, rather than being forced to conform entirely to a standardized study schedule and curriculum, Gates quickly developed his innate talents, becoming the Henry Ford of the computer age, judging a Harvard degree a waste of his time, and amassing tremendous wealth and influence while still in his twenties. Would anyone dare to argue that he might have developed his computer wizardry and business acumen more quickly or more successfully in a public

[32] Academy of Achievement, "Bill Gates Interview—Academy of Achievement" (Last modified September 23, 2010), http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/gat0int-3.

school environment? On the contrary, one of the contemporary world's famous benefactors might never have accomplished any of this had he been confined more completely within compulsory schooling's favored social and academic context.

Nevertheless, today Gates is a key player in, and chief advocate for, the U.S. federal government's creation of an even more inescapable system of compulsory school uniformity, through his participation in the Department of Education's Common Core Standards Initiative, which is designed to standardize and micro-manage alternative education and locally controlled public schools out of existence. By being the technological point man in the implementation of this monopolistic atrocity, Gates becomes yet another self-made individual who has forsaken the lesson of his own life in the name of the self-serving "philanthropy" of the progressive elitist.[33] Private education, freedom from regimented study schedules, opportunities to apply his enthusiasms directly in real-life situations, and dropping out of his freshman year of college were good enough for Bill Gates, but apparently they are not good enough for those he actively seeks to confine to standardized schooling, and whom he insists must complete university degrees in order to be ready for today's economy—the economy of which he, a privately educated university drop-out, is the foremost exemplar. A well-bred modern reflex compels us to

[33] It is an important question in itself, though one slightly beyond the scope of this book, to ask what drives so many self-made men to support the very ideology whose most recent figurehead openly rejects their lives and accomplishments, declaring "You didn't build that." In other words, why do the men who might, in theory, do the most good in helping mankind resist the progressive bulldozer almost invariably take the side of paternalistic oppression? An examination of this question would, I suspect, uncover a powerful pair of self-perpetuating motives controlling the hearts of men who have broken free of conventional expectations and limitations, but without having developed a proper moral compass: greed and fear.

respond to such an example with, "But that's different—he's Bill Gates!" If you can carry on and explain exactly what you mean by that response without blinking, without shame, then you are a perfect product of the system advocated by the G.E.B. and its spiritual allies throughout the modern world.

Let us sum up, then, what we have outlined thus far. Compulsory public education is a mass retardation factory. Its planners and advocates are the factory managers and foremen, in charge of overseeing modern civilization's dismantling in favor of a paternalistic quasi-caste system.

The next question, however, is the most important, if we are to persuade those for whom history and common sense are not enough to awaken radical action: *How* does public schooling work its black magic? It is time to proceed from the antechamber, where we have investigated modernity's hell in relative safety, down into the subterranean channels to which modern man has condemned his children, and hence, through divine justice, himself.

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Please Do Not Adjust Your Child

> *Thank goodness my education was neglected. I was never sent to school...it would have rubbed off some of the originality (if I had not died of shyness or been killed with over pressure).*[1]
>
> Beatrix Potter

Of all the arguments public school advocates have used to hoodwink generations of parents into condemning their own children to years of state-controlled subservience training, one of the most successful is that without public schools, children cannot be properly "socialized," and will therefore be ill-prepared for life in the real world. Not only is this argument absurd on its face, but that face is in fact the mask concealing the ugliest intentions of compulsory schooling.

One benign-sounding premise of the argument for public schools as necessary tools of socialization is that learning to get along, or fit in, with the majority of children one's own age is a vital life skill. Is it?

Childhood, contrary to the worst tendencies of democratic thought, is not an end in itself. Common sense teaches us that a child is an immature specimen, a partial view of humanity. A researcher from another planet who examined only children would never understand the human race, for he would not have seen a fully actualized instantiation of the species. A child is an entity in flux, a potential being with a natural goal, but a goal

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[1] Private letter from 1929, quoted in Linda Lear, *Beatrix Potter: A Life in Nature* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2008), 42.

which may be actualized in various ways, to widely varying degrees of success, depending on the conditions of its growth. Children are potential adults. Their proper development requires, therefore, that they gradually learn *how* to be adults. That is, they need to be encouraged to develop the character and intellect suitable to adult life, in order to fulfill their natural potential, by which I mean human nature itself. To thwart this development is to stunt the fulfillment of nature. To thwart it *deliberately* is a moral crime.

Everything in a child's upbringing ought to be focused on the aim of achieving the most successful adulthood. Not the most useful, the most comfortable, or the safest, but the most fully *human*. This means finding ways to ignite interests and enthusiasms that will lead him to develop the faculty that defines his chances as an adult, namely reason, and the states of character that will prepare him to face adulthood's vicissitudes and temptations without succumbing to indignity and unnaturalness, namely his moral virtues. This does not entail "taking the fun out of being a child." Nor does it mean expecting children to "think like grown-ups." What it means, rather, is that the fun of being a human child should come precisely, or primarily, from applying one's childlike thoughts and sentiments to the task of learning how to be a grown-up.

This is not the recommendation of a bureaucratic study group; it is a self-evident imperative of nature, understood by everyone until very recent times. It explains the hero worship children commonly feel toward older siblings, and their desire to emulate their parents. "Potential," as we have known since Aristotle, is simply nature's desire for development expressed in metaphysical terms. Children naturally pursue knowledge of their surroundings, and admire that which they perceive as a more complete version of themselves. They hope to achieve a fuller

existence by modeling their behavior on that of others who appear exemplary of the more mature state that they have not yet attained. Contrary to today's pop psychology and the progressive kindergarten ethic that has dominated education theory since Dewey, this constant effort to find and emulate exemplars of maturity is not a burdensome chore for children, or a cruel deprivation of the pleasures of childhood. The most powerful natural desire of a child is the desire to grow up, and the satisfaction of desire always brings immediate pleasure. This, however, is both the key to educating children and the secret to undermining true education. Desire and pleasure will motivate children; this is inevitable. The question is whether the dominant desires will be those conducive to the fulfillment of our nature as rational, independent beings—the inheritance of millennia—or other desires which curtail that proper development, trapping children in an avalanche of confused feelings and self-doubt that permanently block the road to mature adulthood. This is where the environment in which learning takes place becomes all-important.

Two general conditions are paramount in establishing the environment for the child's proper development: regular opportunities for patient, independent examination of naturally interesting things, and plentiful interaction with reasonable examples of adulthood.

The first condition enlivens the child's capacity for reasoning about causes by appealing to his natural curiosity. The hours of fascination that children can derive from examining insects in a field are a common example of this. I have taught boys who were difficult to manage in a classroom, either due to "laziness" or "daydreaming," but who lit up with the focused passion of a great scientist when talking about bugs. Dragging them away from this passion and back to the detached, unreal world of the classroom

is a perfect example of how to kill intellectual growth at its roots, by smothering a sincere desire for knowledge. The forcible removal of the child's mind from its fruitful realm of curiosity stifles the motivation to reason, to categorize, to seek causes. *And this stifling process is what modern education is all about*. The ten-year-old budding entomologist is responding to an impulse that might truly be called philosophical; "there are gods even here," said Aristotle, to explain his own incessant dallying over the minutiae of animal life. The public school classroom provides the broom that sweeps those gods away, and with them the healthy mind's urge to understand. "Learning can be fun" is the kind of empty, manifestly ineffectual abstraction that serves to kill the genuine yearning of the soul that cries out, "Learning is *life*."

The second vital condition for learning, interaction with exemplary adults, is important as a means of showing the child what he is aiming at. Contrary to the mantra of progressives, who aggrandize the innocence of childhood because they wish to trap the masses in that state of trusting dependency in which they may be more easily manipulated, children naturally gravitate toward imitating the grown-up behavior they see around them. (The traditional children's tea party is a simple example.) If they see dedication, sobriety, and rational self-reliance, they are likely to emulate these. If they see the opposite of these things, they emulate what they see, and become the critical mass of progressivism's advance—lacking confidence in their ability to care for themselves, lacking seriousness in assessing their situation and making plans, and lacking the basic respect for others' property and person that makes civil society possible.

Consider, now, how public schools address these two necessary conditions of human moral and intellectual growth. The primary fact of life in a public school is that the child will be

restrained within a large group of children his own age for most of the day. This severely reduces childhood's precious opportunity for independent investigation, which is actively discouraged as selfishness or idleness. In addition to the physical reality of being forever confined to the company of others, the child faces the endless insistence, direct and implied, that he must accommodate himself to those others, get along with them, think about what they are thinking about, act only in reaction to their instigations, and, most of all, avoid getting on the wrong side of the majority of them. (I have just summarized John Dewey's philosophy of education without the neo-Romantic flourishes about democracy and socialism.) Children who have not yet developed courage, self-reliance, and any practical means of protecting themselves are easily susceptible to fear of not fitting in, or of being disliked. Fear, then, takes the place of curiosity or wonder as the primary drive, which in turn makes fear-avoidance, rather than discovery, the most compelling need. This breeds a new set of desires to displace the natural search for understanding. The desires to be liked, to be accepted, to be protected, or *to escape*, fill the void left in the child's heart after the school's moral restraints forcibly curtail the intellectual adventurousness of the wandering bug-collector, stargazer, or bookworm.

Nature's window of opportunity for learning how to concentrate one's thoughts fruitfully and channel one's feelings productively is relatively short. If this opportunity is missed or ill-used, the resulting adult life will be less than it ought to have been. And the damage done through such missed opportunities cannot simply be repaired later. Humans are creatures of habit, both mental and emotional. Adults can change their opinions, or develop new tastes; new ways of thinking or states of character, however, are a far more difficult matter. And even to the extent that such remedial effort is possible, there is no way to measure

or undo the damage of lost time, years that might have been spent in so many fruitful ways, and years of painfully restoring oneself to the natural condition that was subverted in school.

The conservative version of the "socialization" argument is the rationalization that the evils of public education are necessary as preparation for the harsher reality of life in a society populated by the products of this system. This is the argument that children must "learn how to survive in the real world." But the real world is precisely what public school is designed to prevent children from experiencing. Prefabricated areas of study, artificially imposed regimentation of one's time and mental space, and the almost complete deprivation of privacy and the ability to pursue idiosyncratic curiosities exclusively for a while—these daily oppressions of public school existence do not prepare children for any real world you would want them to inherit. Rather, they are preparation for practical enslavement in a progressive authoritarian conception of society as a vast assembly line of interchangeable "worker units"—which, once again, is precisely what modern compulsory education was created to produce, as its major early promoters at least had the decency to admit.

To elaborate on this point: There is a strain of "hardnosed" conservative who is inclined to insist that the deprivations of public school life, in which choice and effort are circumscribed within artificial confines that reduce the child's environment to something akin to a cockfight ring, prefigure the analogous realities and/or injustices of the working world, and therefore serve a useful purpose. This neglects the true causal relationship between public schools as designed and that working world for which schools were always intended as indoctrination. There is a kind of life of utility within a social machine coercively managed by and for a progressive elite to which few people would submit

themselves willingly, unless they had been *trained* to submit. Why put a child through such submissiveness training?

The same goes for the related fantasy that surviving public school's social pressures will build character. Parents who tell themselves this are attempting to live vicariously through their children, while forcing their children to take all the risk. You may tell yourself all day long that your child is strong enough to withstand the moral pressures of school life. You are probably wrong. Children do not have a set character with which to face challenges to their will and their moral habits. They can only take so much. The ability to stand firm on principle against the fear of rejection, mockery, and belittlement is a trait of mature adult virtue. Even among adults, such strength of character is rare these days, as anyone can see by observing modern electoral politics. It is too much to expect a mere child to exhibit such strength against the level of threatening social conformism imposed continually in a public school classroom. If a child survives with his soul relatively intact, it will not be without severe damage to his faith in life, his sense of hope, and his belief in mankind. He will suffer years of humiliation and degradation as an outcast or social misfit—in fact, he *must* do so, if he is to have a chance of coming out with his spirit alive.

This is not because the other children in the school are any less naturally moral or rational than he is. It is because they are all children—and this usually includes, for all intents and purposes, the teachers. The real beauty of childhood innocence is not found in the popular progressive kitsch about "sharing" or "playing together," but rather in the way this innocence reveals the pre-indoctrinated common sense understanding of human nature that compulsory schooling aims to destroy: the constant, eager quest for comprehension and competence, which is to say for intellectual and practical independence. As children are not yet

rational, however, they are all looking for direction, and in need of mature examples and the private time to begin reasoning. Deprived of these necessities for so much of their young lives by compulsory schooling, they all end up in the same boat—a lifeboat adrift in a violent sea of confusion and boredom, fear of others, fear of being alone, with no land, no rational grounding in sight, and with their animal instinct for survival tempered by the fear-driven sense that survival requires blind acquiescence. If this sounds like the real world, that is only because the world is now populated almost entirely by the products of compulsory schooling.

"Preparing" your child for such a world is a euphemism for inuring him to life as a serf in a progressive fiefdom. If mankind is to have a human future, that future will ultimately belong not to the damaged survivors of public school, but to the "unprepared" and "maladjusted," namely the bug-collectors, stargazers, and bookworms whose intellects and character were permitted to develop naturally, with curiosity, not fear, as their impetus, and self-sufficient adulthood, not socialization, as their goal. This means we must begin the process of liberating children's souls now, so that in the future there will once again be men and women prepared to do what will need to be done.

The problem is that "liberating children's souls," while perhaps rhetorically pleasing, is not a prescription for a specific course of action. Knowing that radical change is needed is not enough; every self-described reformer advocates change. Change in the abstract is not a solution; as often as not, such abstraction becomes the music of a progressive pied piper. The question is what *kind* of change is needed. Before we can even begin seeking clear answers to such a question, we must determine exactly what needs to be changed. That is to say, government-controlled education is the broader problem, but until we understand

precisely what harm public schools are doing to the human mind, we run the risk of proposing a cure almost as bad as the disease, albeit without the added fever of being compulsory.

Let us not strike out on a path of "hope and change," then, without first carrying on a little further toward an understanding of what is *not* to be done. For public education has long been a house divided, not so much against itself as against its victims. That is to say, social control and population management are the purposes of the enterprise, but there are alternative perspectives regarding which kind of control is most desirable, roughly corresponding to the so-called left and right factions of the mainstream political establishment. These competing perspectives are typified by different buzzwords, methods, and overt goals, but they are united in their declared devotion to, and implicit disdain for, the potential and worth of the individual human being.

We must therefore avoid the temptation to take sides in the establishment's internal debate, incautiously reasoning that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," without seriously considering the implications of both the left's compassion-and-cooperation approach and the right's measurable achievement approach. Let us now consider the dangers of such reasoning by placing the supposed rival perspectives under the microscope.

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Individualism vs. Individuality

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools[1]

Rudyard Kipling

Our era of doublespeak teaches that using certain politically progressive concepts in accordance with their original significations, which may prove slightly uncomfortable for progressives, is vulgar or gauche. Hence we all timidly insist on obscuring any link between "socialization" and socialism, as though the similarity between the two words were purely coincidental, and attempt to persuade ourselves that "proper" socialization is apolitical, and merely a matter of learning how to interact with other people appropriately. Those who developed the term "socialization" in its original, educational sense, however, were quite clear about its implications. One Russian scholar's examination of the absence of a clear definition of the word "socialization" among social scientists themselves begins by noting that:

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[1] From Rudyard Kipling's "If—," in *Rewards and Fairies* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1910), 181, available online at https://archive.org/stream/rewardsfairies00kipl#page/n9/mode/2up.

> The etymology of the concept "socialization" leads to the German language when two words "Sozialisierung" and "Vergesellschaftung" were borrowed by the Anglo-Saxon language system for the description of absolutely new social phenomena and processes:
>
> 1) "Sozialisierung"—transition of private property to public one (or state one);
>
> 2) "Vergesellschaftung"—as "cooperation of persons in a mental unity of group life" and as "the central process in social evolution." [2]

Public school socialization, understood in its early formative connotations, implies the de-privatization of the individual, i.e., psychological training for life in a socialist collective.[3] That it has gradually lost the explicit political associations should not be misconstrued as indicating a fundamental change in meaning. Rather, the normalization of the term as a descriptor for the educational process in *any* kind of society indicates the extent to which the once-radical idea, like many others essential to the realm of what we now casually call "the social sciences," has taken hold of both the academic and popular minds. We no longer identify socialization as a function of political collectivism per se, simply because it is now implicit in our universal indoctrination that *every* society is, at heart, a collective being—a social entity logically, morally, and metaphysically prior to its

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[2] Cf. Sergey Vinkov, "An FCA-Based Approach to the Study of Socialization Definitions," available online at http://ceur-ws.org/Vol-757/paper_10.pdf.

[3] For a nice summary of some of the early development of the term, see Jenna St. Martin, "'Socialization': The Politics and History of a Psychological Concept" (master's thesis, Wesleyan University, 2007), 13-31. Available online at http://wesscholar.wesleyan.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=etd_mas_theses.

constituent individuals—and hence that in every society child-rearing is merely a variation on the process of absorbing the individual into the collective life and will. That is, child-rearing and moral education—the preparation of an individual for life as an adult human being—which were adequate and accurate terms to describe what adults were doing with their children prior to the late nineteenth century, have been replaced, not just lexically but conceptually, by "socialization." On this new view, any society, including a supposedly democratic and capitalistic one, is a "culture," a living organism in a geographical Petri dish, in which individuals are problems to be solved, natural anomalies to be resolved into the cultural growth. Socialization, as the term is now used—not a new definition, but a mere universalization of its original socialist sense—means any given culture's solution for *the problem of nature,* nature being understood as an impediment to social evolution.

More concretely, to socialize a child through government schooling is to divest him of certain psychological traits that would develop of their own accord in a reasonably healthy environment—traits that progressives implicitly regard as symptoms of disease—most notably a thoughtful concern for his own personal welfare and that of his loved ones, and a craving for the freedom required to pursue his interests and goals without artificial restrictions. Consider the normal arc of the old-fashioned parent-child relationship, a character-forming tug of war between the child's continual pleas for increased freedom and his parents' gentle resistance, resulting in a gradual loosening of restrictions on the condition that the child demonstrate the maturity to employ his new powers intelligently and honorably. In a reasonably healthy family setting, therefore, the child's pursuit of private interests and goals fosters the growth of self-reliance, responsibility, and a maturing self-determination—

everything progressives hate, as these traits weaken the popular appeal of paternalistic regulatory control and its devil's deal of ever-shrinking liberty exchanged for ever-growing "security." Therefore this child, the well-developed, independent-minded human being, is the prime instance of what today's educational establishment would call a maladjusted child in want of socialization. Socialization is rarely defended openly in precisely these terms anymore, for obvious reasons. Today it is usually upheld in public as a necessary preventive against antisocial behavior, violence, and selfishness—concerns which, to the "conservative," affect a small minority of troubled children, hardly warranting universal preemptive care; the "liberal," however, identifies these traits with early symptoms of *conservatism*, thus defining the core mission of state child-rearing, namely habituation to progressive collectivism. Modern compulsory schooling was always intended by its leading advocates to be the cure for the natural development of independence and so-called ethical individualism. Socialization was and is the general name for the application of this cure.

The practical difficulty with the systematic rerouting of human development was that in those nations with deep roots in classical liberalism and its philosophic precursors, a direct explanation of the aims of public school socialization was bound to meet with principled resistance. What was needed in these nations, then, was a manner of presenting the aims of state child-rearing that would make the project seem less directly antagonistic to liberty. That is why our program of universal collectivist indoctrination has been supported, for several generations, with carefully conceived manipulations of language, a kind of political hypnotism to lull incautious populations into a sleepy compliance with tyranny.

One of the key terms in this mass hypnosis is "individuality," the progressive doppelgänger of individualism.[4] This notion, spewed from the crater at the peak of modern education theory like lava, has long since hardened into a permanent feature of our landscape.

The purpose of the progressive pseudo-concept individuality is to obscure the authoritarian sensibilities of its purveyors behind a mask suggestive of a kind of freedom. This clever abstraction has been so successful as a substitute for the broad notion of individualism that it has virtually replaced the latter in popular usage, even among people who do not realize they are espousing the lexicon of progressive reformation.

No word, however, is "just a word." The political corruption of language leads to the eventual corruption of thought, as the ideas behind the new word slowly supplant the ideas behind its predecessor in the public consciousness. An important part of the long project of undoing the damage done by public education will be to revivify and reassess the important ideas it has buried. This requires exposing and exploding the deliberate distortions of these ideas by means of which progressivism has displaced the human heritage. As an example of the kind of constructive demolition that is needed, let us directly compare the twentieth century sense of individuality with the concept it was designed to replace, individualism. For despite the (intended) superficial resemblance, the two concepts could not be more profoundly opposite.

First of all, the magma at the core of the volcano. The man most prominently responsible for the popularization of our notion of individuality is the man commonly dubbed the father of

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[4] Note: the progressive usage of "individuality" essentially ignores or displaces that word's medieval metaphysical usage, viz., to denote the property of being an individual existent, a logical *atom*.

progressive education, John Dewey. His understanding of the individual human being is diametrically opposed to the individualism associated with classical liberalism, a view which Dewey, channeling Marx, identifies primarily with the desire for material profit. In a 1930 collection of essays, *Individualism Old and New*,[5] he dismisses traditional ethical individualism as selfishness and material acquisitiveness, while declaring his discovery of a new sense of individualism which answers more truly to the need to honor the individual human being.[6] That is, he rejects the modern moral tradition outright, but seeks to evade the full implications of what he has done by proposing a consolation prize for those, particularly in his English-speaking audience, who might refuse to accept his anti-individual ethic. His solution, typical of Dewey (as we shall see in Part Two), is to argue that the old individualism, spanning the thirteenth to eighteenth centuries, has been rendered obsolete through the forces of history, specifically by the development of science and technology, but that he can save the day for the individual, if only we adhere to his new form of individualism, one which is some-

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[5] Dewey, *Individualism Old and New* (1930), hereafter *ION*, in John Dewey, *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953* (hereafter *Later Works*), edited by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), vol. 5.

[6] Not only is there nothing new in Dewey's reduction of "old individualism" to materialism and selfishness, but in fact it is worth noting that the very term "individualism," used in a politico-ethical context, may not have been coined by the supposed defenders of ethical individualism. Rather, it seems to have begun in the early nineteenth century as a *pejorative* used by socialists as a rebuke to classical liberal theory. (Cf. Gregory Claeys, "'Individualism,' 'Socialism,' and 'Social Science': Further Notes on a Process of Conceptual Formation, 1800-1850," Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol. 47, No. 1 [Jan.-March 1986], pp. 81-93.) In other words, "individualism," like "capitalism," is a term originally promoted by opponents of modern liberty, and only later adopted as a self-description by defenders of the idea. One would do well, therefore, to employ the term as a theoretical category only with a grain of salt.

how consistent with moral and political collectivism. This new individualism, in fact, is dependent for its realization upon the establishment of a socialist collective. In short, he argues that whereas the old individualism presumed that humans exist independently of their social relations and build a society out of their voluntary associations, today we must concede the contrary, namely that the genuine individual is a *product* of his social relations.

This does not mean anything as prosaic and obvious as that individual character, attitudes, and tastes are influenced by the societal structures within which one is raised. Rather, Dewey is making the much more substantial claim that without the proper pre-existing social structures, *there can be no individuals*. In other words, whereas modernity had previously viewed individuals as the primary realities, and collective humanity as an abstraction derived from these—thereby making political philosophy the quest for the best way to advance the natural individual—Dewey contends that the collective is the primary reality, from which individuals may or may not develop.

This last point is the key. The development of individuals, in Dewey's new sense of the term—a sense which denies principles of metaphysics, ethics, psychology and logic going back more than two thousand years—is not only dependent on the prior existence of the collective, but is contingent upon the existence of a *correctly structured* collective. That is to say, Dewey, in a more congenial, less openly revolutionary parallel to Marxist doctrine, believed that only socialism could produce fully realized individuals. The means to his preferred notion of democracy—a lyrical fantasy of majority rule grounded in collectivist ethics and (literally) collective thought—would be an educational establishment that promoted his "new individualism," individuality.

Individuality, as opposed to the antiquated classical individualism, would, on his view, consist in acting out one's feelings regarding one's relationship to the collective, after a process of guided self-critique. (This is where public school socialization becomes essential to the process.) Reflecting the pro-Soviet idealism endemic to leftists of that era, Dewey identifies his socialism-dependent individuality as a "scientific attitude," in which everyone participates in a communal enactment of a loosely defined social science, i.e., the shared embodiment of scientific ideas for social transformation. In this dream world, the man who believes he owns himself, has individual rights, and so on, is the deluded one, whereas the true individual is the man who actively submits his mind and energy to the flow of collective progress.

Consider this representative assault on the old individualism, a prefiguring of Franklin Roosevelt's famous "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself":

> The mind that is hampered by fear lest something old and precious be destroyed is the mind that experiences fear of science. He who has this fear cannot find reward and peace in the discovery of new truths and the projection of new ideals. He does not walk the earth freely, because he is obsessed by the need of protecting some private possession of belief and taste. For the love of private possessions is not confined to material goods.[7]

In this passage, Dewey leaves his trickery showing just a little too plainly, as the subject of his critique slides stealthily between "fear of science" (e.g., wishing to believe the earth is flat) and fear of "the projection of new ideals," implying that discoveries based

[7] *ION*, 118.

on empirical evidence and political aspirations grounded in progressive theory are truths of the same ungainsayable quality—or indeed even the same truths. This is not careless reasoning; it is careful sophistry. And the upshot of the argument is that individualism in the old sense—the sense linked to modern theories of political liberty and private property—is the enemy of freedom, where freedom is redefined as the willingness to relinquish one's possessions, including one's thoughts, in the name of projecting new truths and ideals that would debunk political liberty and the ethical individual in favor of scientific socialism.[8]

Here is how Dewey explains this in another context:

> Liberty is that secure release and fulfillment of personal potentialities which take place only in rich and manifold association with others: the power to be an individualized self making a distinctive contribution and enjoying in its own way the fruits of association.[9]

Translated from academic Newspeak into English: Individuality is the result of striving to make oneself interesting and useful to the collective, on the collective's terms, and without rocking the social/historical boat except in the name of strengthening the social uniformity that allows the aims of socialism to flow efficiently from the practice of state-directed majority rule. Individuality means "active" conformity to the collective, as indicated as early as 1899 in one of Dewey's more lucid critiques of old-fashioned non-progressive schooling:

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[8] For a sympathetic scholarly presentation of these ideas, see S. Scott Zeman, "John Dewey's Critique of Socioeconomic Individualism" (1998), available at *The Paideia Project Online*, https://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Poli/PoliZema.htm.

[9] Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, in *Later Works*, vol. 2, 329.

> The mere absorbing of facts and truths is so individual an affair [in the "old" sense of individual] that it tends very naturally to pass into selfishness. There is no objective social motive for the acquirement of mere learning, there is no clear social gain in success thereat.[10]

In other words, independent development of one's mind and character is the enemy of the state's interests—of "objective social motives." This leaves only the development of socially useful skills and collectivist attitudes as the purpose of education. Dewey seeks to establish a "scientific" democracy in which a dependent mob of useful moving parts sing songs of harmony and individuality—songs written by the overlords who stand to benefit, not only materially but in self-protection and self-importance, from this system of mass social control.

Here is one of Dewey's more entertaining descriptions of the obsolescence of that old individualism which he has reduced to the pursuit of "private pecuniary gain":

> [I]t is no longer a physical wilderness that has to be wrestled with [as was the case in the pre-industrial period]. Our problems grow out of social conditions: they concern human relations rather than man's direct relationship to physical nature. The adventure of the individual, if there is to be any venturing of individuality and not a relapse into the deadness of complacency or of despairing discontent, is an unsubdued social frontier.... Traditional ideas are more than irrelevant. They are an encumbrance; they are the chief obstacle to the development of a new individuality integrated within itself and with a liberated function in the society where-in it exists. *A*

[10] Dewey, *The School and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1900, Second Edition 1915), 12-13. Hereafter *SS*.

> *new individualism can be achieved only through the controlled use of all the resources of the science and technology that have mastered the physical forces of nature.*[11] (Emphasis added.)

Old individualism was the ethos of a world of primitive frontiersmen, and is therefore an encumbrance in the new world of industrial interdependency. In the old era of complacency, the lone individual standing face-to-face against nature may have seemed sufficient to constitute a complete being. In the new age of "general problems" and "complex forces," what is required is an individuality that serves "a liberated function in the society," which—recalling how Dewey defines liberty—means the human being reconceived as essentially a useful contributor to the collective rather than a self-sufficient entity. Not to be overlooked is the final sentence of the passage: Individuality is not merely a conception of man more suited to industrial society; it is one which cannot come into existence at all except through "the controlled use of all the resources of science and technology." In other words, only the state, operating as the grand regulator and controller of industrial society, can *create* the new individual. (Try that one on for a while if you are one of those inclined to scoff at conservative claims that progressives seek to replace God with the State.) Thus we find, buried in this characteristically Deweyan obfuscation, an implied contrast between the supposedly outdated illusion of the individual as a natural entity, and the bright new reality of the individual as a mere by-product of history's collective progress toward scientific socialism.

The preceding is offered by way of ground-clearing. By no means am I suggesting that Dewey developed our contemporary non-ethical notion of individuality on his own. His ideas are

[11] *ION*, 85-86

derivative upon a variety of sources, most of them in nineteenth century European (primarily German) thought, with extensions in early twentieth century psychology, perhaps most obviously Alfred Adler's socialist "individual psychology."[12] Nor do I believe that everyone who uses the word "individuality" today means exactly what Dewey meant. In fact, my point is that it would be better if they *did* mean what Dewey meant; for the effect of using the word with the casual imprecision we do today is to obscure fundamental differences of principle and motive under a mask of vague kinship. An essential moral divide disappears into a haze of abstract language, as tyranny marches forward behind a shield emblazoned with the motto, "We all want the same thing in the end." Clarifying your terms by rediscovering their history is the only way to win an argument against opponents whose stock in trade is sophistry.

With that brief initiation into the peculiar ancestry of the "new individual," we may now compare our progressive individuality to traditional individualism more directly. This comparison will provide one small window into how the moral inversion of modernity has been achieved in practice.

For one thing, modern individualism, however one may judge it in the end, was an ethical position, based on an understanding of human nature, and of the virtues which are consistent with it. Individuality, on the other hand, is not an ethical position at all,

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[12] During the period when Dewey was developing his new individualism, Austrian psychoanalyst Adler was gaining prominence with his method of individual psychology, which, like Dewey's individuality, was a euphemistic term, as Adler's individual, like Dewey's, was essentially a social creation, one fully realizable only in a socialist society. Early twentieth century socialists seem to have been quite revealingly obsessed with the need to reinvent the idea of the individual, dismissing the previous notion—the individual man as fact of nature—in favor of the individual "personality" as a new, previously unrealizable entity made possible only as a by-product of socialism.

but rather an aesthetic appendage of collectivism. It denotes the superficial sparks of color that progressives believe will issue from the gray mass of uniform humanity under socialism. Dewey concludes his account of individuality this way:

> To gain an integrated individuality, each of us needs to cultivate his own garden. But there is no fence about this garden: it is no sharply marked-off enclosure. Our garden is the world, in the angle in which it touches our own manner of being. By accepting the corporate and industrial world in which we live [at present], and by thus fulfilling the pre-condition for interaction with it, we, who are also parts of the moving present, create ourselves as we create an unknown future.[13]

You might notice an inconsistency between this notion of "creating ourselves" and Dewey's earlier claim that individuality can only be achieved through a controlling state. The inconsistency is deliberate; it is part of Dewey's propaganda method, standard among progressive activists, to stay one step ahead of critics by seeming to be saying everything. As will become clear in Part Two, however, the inconsistency fades when we piece together Dewey's understanding of the relationship between state and society, and flesh out the meaning of such rhetorical flourishes as "we, who are also parts of the moving present."

Dewey's individuality is Hegel's divine self-revelation converted into a children's coloring book. It is how the progressive collective preens, namely by holding parts of itself up for its own approval and acceptance.

While the early modern conception of ethical individualism left plenty of room for serious disagreement about principles and

[13] *ION*, 122-123.

practice, it began from a metaphysical view traceable to the ancient Greeks, namely that earthly existents, including and especially living entities, are essentially individuated. The notion of the soul, so central to the development of our great traditions of ethics and education, is inextricably tied to the primacy—at least in the earthly realm—of individual beings. Life is fundamentally individual (which need not imply antisocial); hence the human good, virtue, is that which accords with our nature as separate living things that desire to survive and thrive.

Individuality, on the other hand, is only an outgrowth of our supposed collective humanity, and therefore has no place for old-fashioned virtue as such. Instead of moral rectitude and practical reasoning, the progressive ethic deifies subjective feelings, attitudes, and "values," in particular those which glorify the collective and debase the individual. Barack Obama's "You didn't build that" is the resentfully anti-individual sentiment of a perfect Dewey dupe. The applause this sentiment brings from the speaker's fellow progressives is a model of the hoped-for relationship between the new state-created individual and the social group—the former's individuality is defined by his ability to excite the approval of the group by glorifying the collective (i.e., pandering to the state) and marginalizing those maladjusted "conformists" (i.e., actual non-conformists) who have the gall to pursue interests with "no objective social motive."

In sum, old individualism encouraged proper pride and self-reliance. Approval will come as it may, but it can never be the primary motive of genuine virtue. Individuality, on the contrary, is defined by an emotional need to be seen and embraced, a desire for approval and acceptance. This follows quite logically from the understanding of our new individual as a product of socialization, i.e., of learning to relinquish one's private (natural) mind to the collective utility of the social (artificial) mind. One

stands out from the crowd—though without fundamentally distinguishing oneself from it—precisely in order to be noticed, to be applauded and appreciated, to be more fully and actively immersed in the collective will.

We might, therefore, conclude that individualism was an adult sensibility, whereas individuality is essentially childish. This should not be surprising, in light of the fact that individuality, like the socialization through which it is realized, was created and promoted by "scientific" authoritarians with a view to reducing populations to compliant masses of obedient, needy, trusting dependents. Individualism begins by presuming the fundamental distinctness and significance of particular human beings, despite their many similarities and shared interests. Individuality, on the other hand, is the consolation the rulers offer their chattel for the essential indistinctness of life within the collective mass. Anything superficially different or unique, as long as it supports, rather than threatening, the progressive status quo—in other words, as long as it in no way challenges progressive rule—is to be encouraged and praised.

By systematically displacing so-called individualism in favor of collectivist individuality, the socializing educational establishment does much more than replace a well-grounded philosophical account of mankind with ill-defined poppycock. It completely reverses a fundamental moral tenet of the modern world and political liberty by means of verbal trickery. Rather than simply renouncing individualism outright—being honest, and allowing alternative ideas to stand on their real merits and appeal—progressive reformers have sought to deceive modernity into accepting its own demise under the guise of one of its own founding principles. The new individualism has won the day. Never has civilization displayed more kaleidoscopic differences, irreverence toward traditional beliefs and behavioral norms,

infatuation with technology, scientific reductionism about human life, and dreams of "being somebody" and "expressing yourself"—or more emotional dependency, disrespect for others' lives and property, unwillingness to take responsibility for oneself, and moral and political submissiveness.

Dewey would be pleased. Through universal public school socialization, we have largely realized his hope of a world without the selfishness of "mere learning," in which men and women are raised to be unthinkingly compliant with the will of the collective and its masters, to seek self-expression only in ways that present no threat to those masters and their plans, and to apply their "creativity" only to the task of strengthening the progressive hierarchy. We have achieved a civilization in which every one of the following sentiments rings false:

> If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
> Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
> If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
> If all men count with you, but none too much;
> If you can fill the unforgiving minute
> With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
> Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
> And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son.

Our new individualism, largely a product of compulsory government socialization, effectively teaches the contrary of all that. Today, to "talk with crowds" is the highest achievement of life; keeping your virtue, as something separate from that association, means selfishly guarding yourself against the collective, which demonstrates an unscientific mind "hampered by fear lest something old and precious be destroyed." "If all men count with you, but none too much," this implies that you insist on reserving a

private realm of moral judgment apart from all social relations, which indicates materialistic possessiveness. "Fill the unforgiving minute with sixty seconds' worth of distance run"? That is precisely the concern that necessitated the development of compulsory schooling in the first place. Public education reconfigures that "distance run" into the shape of a hamster wheel, to ensure that the energy and enthusiasm of youth will be spent in a way that gets you nowhere, least of all to any place that the old individualism would have identified as being "a Man, my son."

By contrast, today we have an entire popular music sub-genre of anthemic paeans to post-Deweyan individuality, typified by Katy Perry's "Firework," or "Let It Go" from the cartoon movie *Frozen*, songs which aim straight at the fully socialized heart of adolescence, whether of the chronological or perpetual variety. The message of these songs and their many cultural equivalents is doctrinaire and simple: Throw off your inhibitions, break free of the grown-up world's rules (traditional virtue, modesty, and responsibility), and dazzle us all by flaunting your unique personality, meaning the collection of groundless "values" and ruling desires you have acquired through immersion in the collective. In this upside-down moral world, freedom means living unencumbered by past notions of right and wrong, and non-conformity means acting out your superficial and inessential "identity" in the hopes of gaining greater social acceptance and a sense of belonging. This is textbook individuality in practice—the pop-cultural distillation of the socialist psychological theories of Dewey, Adler, and others.

Individuality, along with its sister concepts, such as "creativity" and "self-expression," has become one of the defining mantras of modern schooling. Every well-trained mainstream schoolteacher will tell you that she wishes to encourage individuality, and to foster self-expression. She will not be able to explain coherently

what she means by individuality, anymore than she will be able to define the older individualism that she is certain must be counteracted or restrained through school socialization. But there is no denying that these teachers and their trainers have been successful, worldwide, in promoting the former at the expense of the latter. Today's garish array of socialized "individuality" has about as much in common with traditional individualism as Katy Perry has with Rudyard Kipling.

The new individualism is no doubt a little blander and dumber in practice (and yes, more materialistic) than Dewey had envisioned—but as the famous pragmatist would surely concede, no tyranny is perfect.

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The Standards Trap

> *Were we directed from Washington when to sow, & when to reap, we should soon want bread.*[1]
>
> Thomas Jefferson

i. Standards vs. Standardization

As in most areas of late modern politics, wherein the "liberal" and "conservative" factions of the progressive ruling elite fight their turf war over the future of a general population for which they have little or no regard, so in education these self-styled titans clash repeatedly over the superficial tenor of public schools, leaving out of account any serious alternative, such as the freedom both factions usually claim to be defending. And as is typical, the effect of this ruling class family quarrel is to produce the illusion that the entire range of plausible options is on the bargaining table, when in truth the competing establishment solutions on education represent a classic false dichotomy—a noisy debate that obscures the reasoned alternative, which is never given a hearing.

Thus, while the liberals have their socialization, creativity, individuality, and self-esteem, the conservatives, for their part, typically go all in on "standards."

On its face, "standards" sounds like the more rational mantra, since it seems to adhere to concerns and goals that at least have measurable, objectively meaningful correlatives. That is to say,

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[1] Thomas Jefferson, *Autobiography of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1821), 123.

apart from all the other horrors embedded in the liberal catchwords mentioned above, those will-o'-the-wisp notions also have the considerable demerit of being so elastic as to be indefinable. How does one know when a child is socialized? (A cynic might answer, "When the child is a submissive, reliable voter for socialism," but contemporary advocates of socialization would not likely accept this answer, at least in public.) Likewise, creativity and individuality are notorious linguistic ciphers, while self-esteem runs the gamut of definitions, from the rational egoism of the libertarians to progressive fantasies of feeling guilt-free, shame-free, and "comfortable in your own skin."

Academic standards, by contrast, are at least determinable, in the sense that one may know when or whether one has attained them. The problem with the call to impose tougher standards or benchmarks in public education—that is, measurable goals according to which a community may judge the effectiveness of its education system—is not that such standards cannot be met. Rather, I am tempted to say that the problem is precisely that they *can* be met. The call for standardization of means and outcomes is, in practice, merely the call to systematize the mass retardation factory along quantitative lines, rather than along the sentimental lines preferred by the "liberals." What I finally came to understand, after years of sympathizing with the push for higher standards in education, was how careful one must be to square this position with the defense of educational freedom and the desire to resist despotic paternalism. Specifically, I learned to distinguish standards from standardization, and discovered how frequently the latter arrives at the party dressed up as the former. In fact, the two concepts represent utterly opposed views of education, roughly corresponding to the difference between Athens and Sparta, civilization and regimentation, virtue and socialization. In human terms, the result of academic standard-

ization is the crushing of the spirit. In societal terms, the result is the normalization of mediocrity.

The great progressive impulse, stemming from its German roots and branching out in a thousand directions ever since, is the urge to universalize. From Kant with his categorical imperative, which effectively siphons the yolk of context-defined humanity out of ethics, leaving a pristine empty shell of freedom redefined as the obliteration of the individual, to the socialist's "universal healthcare" imposed at the point of a gun, the desire to steamroller experience and common sense out of life in the name of humanity is intrinsic to the progressive sensibility. In practice, this universalizing impulse involves the application of fallacious logic to human experience, invalidly inferring that what is applicable to individuals in a given situation is *ipso facto* applicable to mankind generically. The result of this tortured logic of universalization is invariably something inhuman, and often something truly bestial.

One particularly infamous example will suffice to demonstrate the kind of faulty reasoning I have in mind. Consider communism. The idea of the communal life has a perfectly legitimate realm of applicability, and has been a useful notion throughout the history of civilization. The early Pythagorean maxim, "All things in common among friends," captures the spirit of proper communalism quite well. True friends, as Aristotle would later say, are like two bodies sharing one soul—that is, a friend is one from whom we feel no fundamental separation, from whom we therefore withhold almost nothing of importance, and for whose benefit we would happily part with almost anything. "What's mine is yours," says the man to his true friend. And then of course there is the most common "commune," the family. Here, the formula Marx borrowed from Louis Blanc, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need," is both a

fair maxim and an accurate description of how normal families have always functioned. Adults who withhold their time, labor, or goods from their spouses, children, or aging parents, in an effort to maintain a degree of separation from the social unit to which they (voluntarily) belong, are rightly judged bad family members. Family is nature's safety net.

Political communism is, at base, nothing more than the attempt to broaden the scope of nature's modes of communal life to encompass entire societies, and ultimately the entire world. That is, the communist seeks to extract the "all things in common" sensibility from the real, human context of friendship and family—the context comprised of shared purpose and genuine sympathy rooted in voluntary interaction and experience—and to impose this communal sensibility artificially upon relationships that barely exist, except as abstractions, and hence where none of the deepest experience-based sympathies may be found.

The faulty logic of the communist lies in the presumption that the fully communal sensibility can be universalized beyond the private, particular context by which it is conditioned, while yet remaining a valid human sensibility. But in moral matters, to discard the context is to discard individualized humanity itself. The true outcome of such pseudoscientific reasoning, as history proves with painful absoluteness, is precisely the opposite of the result of the natural communal feeling experienced among friends and family. In other words, while nature's "communism" leads to strong character, mutual attachment, and a less materialistic life, political communism promotes exactly the contrary of all these things, both at the individual and societal levels. The logical error is revealed in the millions of murdered, tortured, and oppressed men and women sacrificed by necessity in the effort to universalize the communal effect beyond its natural boundary conditions, and in the growing amorality with which

the oppressed betray and devour their comrades under the cover of such abstractions as "the collective good," "social justice," and "equality."

The same illogical universalization may be observed in the case of academic standardization.

Standards, i.e., goals, are a necessary element of any kind of teaching. The teacher must have at least a sense, if not a clearly defined account, of what he hopes the student will learn from his teaching, how long it might take to reach this goal, and how he will know when the goal has been reached. The relevant question is, "How does the teacher arrive at his standard?" Optimally, the standard of learning is determined with reference to the particular student, in the particular context, and in accordance with the particular needs of the situation. If, for example, you are given the task of teaching someone a language—a task common to every parent in history—you begin with a few basic, implicit considerations: What level of language skill does the student currently possess? What are the personal circumstances and intellectual interests or curiosities of the student? What kind of commitment (temporal, emotional) is the student likely to be able to make to this learning endeavor?

From these questions, and related others, you will form a basic idea of what you might reasonably hope to achieve with the student. If the student is actually your child, such that you have, in principle, unlimited access, the strongest possible emotional commitment from the student, and all the time in the world, the standard you set might be nothing more specific than, "I want my child to have a great vocabulary, a masterly facility with the core grammar, a love for great literature, and the ability to communicate with effective rhetorical skills, but without excessive artifice." Even in this case, you will likely benefit from setting provisional goals to be met along the way, both as signposts of progress, and

to encourage your child's sense of accomplishment. For example, "I want him speaking in complex grammatical sentences by this time next year," or "I'd like to give him a copy of *Gulliver's Travels* for his tenth birthday." And if you are not the child's parent, and therefore have much more limited access, emotional attachment, and so on, your goals will be some partial version of the parental goals, determined according to the conditions in which you receive the child as a student, and the projected temporal limits of the relationship.

In every instance, then, the teacher will indeed have standards—and by standards, to reiterate, I mean aspirations determined according to the nature of the individual case.

Of course, in many real teaching situations, especially those in which the teacher is not also the parent, practical contingencies may require that standards be applied to two or more students simultaneously. Difficulties arise as soon as a second student is introduced. For this second student will of necessity present the teacher with a different set of answers to the standard-setting questions with which we began. How is the teacher to match his efforts to the two different levels of skill, natural capacity, and desire for knowledge without shortchanging one or the other of the students on one or more levels? Assuming neither student is a problem case, requiring extraordinary and special attention, a clever and earnest teacher should be able to manage this situation without sacrificing much in the way of individualized teaching, i.e., individualized standards.

Add more students to the mix, however, and the problems grow exponentially. In principle, the larger the class, the less individualized teaching is possible, which means that every student loses, and the teacher, if he is honest, knows he has not done his absolute best by any one student. All teachers—I mean teachers, not bottom-feeding careerists looking for a safe job at

public expense—know this. I recall discussing this issue with a graduate class in which most of my students were professional teachers. One public school teacher agreed with my suggestion that fewer students means better teaching opportunities, and therefore more learning. I encouraged her to decide how many students would be ideal. At first, she wanted to keep it general, "as few as possible," but after I pressed her to be more specific, she said "fewer than ten." I pushed further: "Why not fewer than two?" Now she became uncomfortable, imagining that I was trying to trick her into some kind of confusion, or into contradiction. No, I explained, I actually agreed with her, and was merely trying to discover to what extent she agreed with *herself*. [2]

However, for all the natural problems with developing a set of standards for application in a classroom situation—that is, with multiple students—there nevertheless remains the consolation that at least the teacher is still in the position of developing the standards, or some kind of composite standard, for *his own students*, meaning for people he knows personally, has observed personally, has examined and assessed as to level and potential personally. We are still talking about individualized teaching, albeit of a more or less attenuated sort.

We are also, therefore, talking about a world of education that began to expire in the late eighteenth century, and barely exists at all today.

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[2] It should be noted that merely teaching a smaller number of students does not necessarily entail a more individualized standard. Even one-on-one tutoring can be, and today usually is, pursued according to "universal standards," at least in the sense that such tutoring is now sought primarily in the name of boosting results on government-standardized tests.

ii. From Spiritual Development to Social Utility

> *The aim of public education is not to spread enlightenment at all, it is simply to reduce as many individuals as possible to the same safe level, to breed and train a standardized citizenry, to put down dissent and originality.*[3]
>
> H.L. Mencken

A loving mother teaching her child to read would never be so foolish as to cordon off an arbitrary segment of time, and to assign the child a definite score or rating of ability based on the level of proficiency he had reached within that time. There are many educationally sound reasons why not. Let us note just three:

(1) Spiritual development is not a race, which is to say there is no finish line or end point in education, *unless you are intending to lead the student to a certain predetermined level of thinking, and no further*. No mother who cared about her child's future prospects and happiness would ever place such an artificial limit on his intellectual horizons. Therefore, since getting to an arbitrarily selected "stage" of progress by a certain arbitrarily chosen point in time indicates absolutely nothing about a child's ultimate ability, and bears no definable relation to any fixed end point, a score would be inherently meaningless.

(2) There is no objectively correct level of reading progress for any specific age or period of study that can be universalized as a

[3] From H.L. Mencken's review of "The Goslings: A Study of American Schools" by Upton Sinclair, in *The American Mercury* (April, 1924), available online at http://www.ralphmag.org/menckenI.html.

standard for every child.[4] Hence, there is no rational, i.e., reality-based, scale of quantification against which the mother could judge her child's reading at this or that moment, so as to assign a definite score.

(3) The only conceivable way to quantify the child's reading level meaningfully would be *relatively*—that is, to assign him an ordinal position in comparison with the reading levels of other children. However, given reason (2), there would be no way to define the appropriate group against which to compare him, so as to attain an informative rank. At the same time, there would be no value or relevance in judging him exclusively against other children his own age, without artificially circumscribing the comparison group to encompass only children who had been learning to read for approximately the same period of time, and under observably similar conditions. And given reason (1), this ranking, arbitrarily limited and artificial as it would have to be, would also be valueless as an assessment of long-term potential, seriousness, or dedication. Hence, this rank would only skew the child's learning by detaching it from its proper purposes—self-development and the pursuit of happiness—and tying it instead to the meaningless pursuit of ephemeral prizes and accolades unrelated to real growth and living.

A mother who loved her child would never knowingly shrink his mind, aspirations, and potential in this way. That is, she would never deliberately reduce her child's experience to something generic, quantifiable, and unindividuated. A cynical societal elite, by contrast, might be expected to attempt precisely such a forced shrinkage.

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[4] It is strange to me that education theorists who would laugh derisively at Descartes' theory of innate ideas have no problem imagining that we can determine the precise age at which a normal child should know algebra or the periodic table of elements.

On their face, standardized methods and schedules of assessment, exemplified by the semi-annual report card or the Grade Point Average, serve only (a) expedience purchased at the price of any meaningful real world standards for measuring intellectual development, and (b) the illogical impulse toward universalization at the price of overlooking the vagaries of human nature, which are ineluctably individual and context-sensitive. There is, however, another less obvious reason for such methods—or rather one so ubiquitous today that its obviousness is obscured by over-familiarity. That reason, to anticipate, is the pursuit of an artificially imposed social stratification, which is to say the deliberate stifling of natural potential.

Let us return to our dialectic of standardization, and pick up where we left off. A teacher struggles to keep up with a number of students at the same time without completely sacrificing the basis of the teacher-student relationship, namely personal engagement with each individual, and learning materials, standards, and methods devised in accordance with each individual's character, level of development, and idiosyncratic interests.[5] He knows that anything less than this kind of personal engagement falls short of teaching in the proper sense. One may impart

[5] For an amusing but typical example of how all of these priorities have been abandoned, I recall my own tenth grade English teacher, a kindly middle-aged lady who, faced with the anomaly of a class comprised entirely of boys, bravely forged ahead with her predetermined choice of novel: Judith Guest's *Ordinary People*, a gooey pop-psychological confection about a family's emotional crisis. After weeks of rising anger at our snickers and sarcasm over the characters' repressed feelings, suicide attempts, and haunted pasts, she finally exploded. She stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind her, after screaming at us for not appreciating "one of the greatest novels of the twentieth century!" Even then, I couldn't help wondering whether she had read any others. Today, I can only marvel at the thought processes of a teacher who, faced with a large group of teenage boys, would consider such a prototypical "girl book" appropriate fare. We may call this the human face of academic standardization.

information to a crowd, but imparting information in itself is not teaching, any more than having one's ears inundated with words is learning.

(As for genuine understanding—God forbid we should go as far as to talk about anything so quaint as wisdom—if it can arise at all from the mere generic dissemination of information, it will occur only accidentally, and entirely as a result of the student's private effort. In such a case, then, any learning of the soul-improving sort is achieved *in spite of* the teacher, not because of him. In other words, the teacher in such conditions has become an impediment to be overcome, rather than a helper, guide, or mentor.)

This means that any attempt to squeeze multiple students into a generic mold, either in terms of temporal progress or of levels of learning, departs from education proper—which is individual by definition, insofar as minds are individuated—in favor of some other, non-educational goal. At first, that goal might be nothing more complicated or nefarious than the practical convenience or material advantage of the teacher. If, for instance, a teacher wished to spare himself the trouble of monitoring the progress—that is, the level of intellectual development—of a growing student body in the time-consuming, idiosyncratic manner required of the purest form of teaching (think again of the mother monitoring her child's reading comprehension), then he might devise a system of testing tied to specific steps along the way in his lectures, and assign numerical value to the results as a shortcut means of providing something resembling a personal evaluation. It would be an ersatz evaluation, but it would allow him to teach more students than is strictly possible—thereby perhaps earning more money, a promotion, job security—while still maintaining some tenuous connection to his students qua students.

If this all seems too abstract and unrelated to any educational reality you can imagine, that may be because I am describing events that took place more than two centuries ago, when the West began its suicidal descent from Socrates—the archetypal teacher, and for that reason a definitive figure of the Western heritage—to "the education system."

Corruption usually begins as a small error. It invariably begins at the top. Thus it was that in 1785, Yale College abandoned the age-old pass/fail evaluation method and initiated the practice of ranking its students' examinations on a primitive version of a four-point scale: Optimi, Second Optimi, Inferiores and Pejores.[6]

Let us stop right there for a moment, and consider one implication of this historical fact that might seem almost inconceivable today: Prior to 1785, Yale, like every other school, was teaching and examining its students without assigning them any official score or rank at all. Was this lack of formal, permanent ranking a shortcoming that needed correction? It may seem so now, after two centuries of development along these lines. An unreflective person would probably be inclined to answer, "If we don't rank the exams, how can we know who is the best student?"

My reply: Why do we *need* to know who is the best student? More to the point: What principle shall we apply in determining which of the theoretically infinite ranking systems we shall use to stipulate what "best student" will mean for our purposes? Even more to the point: *Who is meant by "we"?*

Aside from the questionable justification for introducing this best-to-worst ranking system at Yale in the first place, remember that this system was, by necessity, completely internal. That is, being ranked Optimi on your Yale examination had no objective

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[6] Durm, Mark, "An A Is Not An A Is Not An A: A History of Grading," in *The Educational Forum*, vol. 57 (Spring 1993), available online at http://www.indiana.edu/~educy520/sec6342/week_07/durm93.pdf.

meaning or value outside of Yale, as no other school was using such an evaluation system. If Mom crazily decides to score little Johnny's reading effort this year, and to award him a big blue A+ for his birthday, we might wonder what she was hoping to accomplish, or what standard she could possibly be applying, but it would never occur to us to conclude that this arbitrary, pseudo-objective evaluation had any real world value, or that it could be used to compare Johnny to other children. In case you are thinking that I am criticizing the inapplicability of Yale's ranking system to the world beyond its walls as a shortcoming of the system, let me assure you that my point is exactly the opposite: The system's complete lack of broader social utility was its only saving grace.

A few years after Yale began its four-category ranking system, legend has it that one William Farish, a chemist at Cambridge University, had a bright idea of his own. As a Cambridge instructor's pay was dependent on his enrolment, there was an obvious incentive to invent practical methods of accommodating larger numbers of students. The story goes that in 1792 Farish devised a system of quantitative assessment—scores assigned for each answer on examinations—to substitute for individualized student evaluations, thus sparing himself some of the more challenging and time-consuming duties of a university instructor: personal engagement, mentoring, and judgment. This was the symbolic beginning of education transformed into a mass production industry, and hence of minds reconceived as artificial products.

In a fascinating article on that period of momentous transition at Cambridge, Oxford, and Trinity College, Christopher Stray disputes the common identification of this great leap in the

development of grades with Farish in particular,[7] though he confirms that increasing student numbers were a major factor in the move toward generic standards.[8] What is clear, however, is that up to the late eighteenth century, graduating examinations had been primarily oral (though perhaps including the public reading of written arguments), and that while they were feisty affairs involving "several participants, since students were disputing with one another and with any graduates who might choose to intervene,"[9] nevertheless assessment was strictly pass or fail. Initially, all candidates were examined and assessed personally, and without any preliminary ranking into high and low groups. Even the later, questionable practice of assigning candidates to pre-ranked examination groups according to anticipated performance was still based on personal assessments of individual students, not on any generic quantitative system of measurement.[10]

Cambridge's growing fascination with Newtonian scientific method and quantifiability, however, along with the increasing, practically convenient emphasis on group examinations, seems to have spawned the first full-fledged model of standardized higher education. Stray unearths a letter written in 1808 in defense of the Cambridge reforms, by one Benjamin Newton, who assails rival Oxford's method of examining students in a most telling fashion:

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[7] Christopher Stray, "From oral to written examinations: Cambridge, Oxford and Dublin 1700-1914," *History of Universities*, October 2005, 20/2: 76-130, https://www.academia.edu/7596135/From_oral_to_written_examination_Oxford_Cambridge_and_Dublin_1700-1914.

[8] Ibid. 110.

[9] Ibid. 80.

[10] Ibid. 86-87.

> His main charges against Oxford are (1) that candidates are allowed to choose books on which to be examined—and so they direct the University, rather than the University directing them; (2) candidates are not examined all at the same time, but in separate groups in January, April and June, hence there is no chance to assess comparative merits; (3) candidates offering different numbers of books are examined according to different standards—again, proper comparison is impossible; and finally (4) 'the not hanging up publicly the names of all who take their degrees, from the highest to the lowest, as is done in Cambridge, and greatly encourages the assiduity of the industrious, disgracing, at the same time, laziness, stupidity, and irregularity.'[11]

In sum, the criticism was that Oxford lacked uniformity of study content, universality of target learning outcomes, and direct comparison and public rank-ordering of students evaluated under identical (i.e., impersonal) conditions. This was an early iteration of what is now a common refrain of standardization advocates: Individual teaching and assessment in the true sense are *unfair*. Stray astutely highlights the competing notions of fairness represented by the traditional method of assessment ascribed to Oxford and the new methods then being developed at Cambridge:

> For the Oxonian examiners, fairness consisted in treating each candidate according to his own lights.... Comparison with other candidates was inevitable, but the ranking of an individual in relation to the whole body of candidates was unnecessary....
>
> [T]he competing conception of fairness [at Cambridge] was that all candidates received exactly the same treatment.... The

[11] Ibid. 90.

> contrast between the two conceptions is clearly closely linked to, though not identical with, the contrast between oral and written examinations.[12]

The aim of giving all students "exactly the same treatment," out of a misapplied infatuation with scientific method, and in the name of fairness, signaled the conceptual shift toward the quantification of learning and mental development, and the universal rank-ordering of humans on the basis of this quantification system.

Is this a lot of concern about a mere streamlining of teaching and assessment methods forced upon educators by the desire to expand educational opportunities to a broader population? What is the fundamental difference, one might ask, between a quantitative evaluation such as the grades or categories of rank developed at Cambridge or Yale, and what teachers did before such simplifying methods were introduced? Is not the former merely a more objective, albeit perhaps less nuanced, version of the latter?

As I work on this chapter, I am interrupted by a knock at my office door. It is one of my students, a diligent young woman who transferred late to the English department from another major, and whose language skills are therefore a little behind those of some of her classmates, so much so that she has confessed that she often cannot understand my lectures very well. We recently exchanged e-mails about the Korean public school system, and now she has printed out her own half of the exchange—more than a page of writing—and wants me to check her grammar and vocabulary. Though her missive's meaning is quite comprehensible, there are significant errors of word order and verb form in most sentences. Rather than correcting the errors, and then showing her what I have done, I decide to use the opportunity to

[12] Ibid. 90-91.

see how much English grammar she really knows, by challenging her to self-correct. Line by line, I show her the ungrammatical passages in her letter, sometimes reading a clause or sentence back to her to help her hear what she might not see. I ask leading questions such as, "What's the complete subject of this sentence?" to cue her analytical skills. Occasionally, when she is unable to follow my lead, she asks for "a hint." Each time she makes a correction, I ask her why, and she tries to explain. After editing the whole letter in this fashion, I emphasize to her that all I did was point out the problem areas, whereas she made all the actual corrections herself. We chat about the content of the e-mail for a few minutes, and about her plans for study during the vacation period. As she gets up to leave, after roughly an hour, she declares proudly, "I understood everything you said today."

There is nothing inherently special about the episode I have just recounted, except precisely that: It is *not* a special episode. It exemplifies the normal and proper relationship between a teacher and a student as that relationship has existed throughout the history of civilization, from Socrates questioning Simmias about the immortality of the soul to every father who has invited his son to play catch. In short, this is teaching. Everything else that happens between teacher and student, *including the classroom lectures*, is a mere addendum to this essential educational experience.

And what is that essential experience? Through shared speech, a teacher coaxes a student's soul into activation, into rummaging around inside herself in search of things she did not know she had, i.e., self-discovery. This is the experience that Socrates, in Plato's *Meno*, offers in support of his claim that learning is recollection, and that he demonstrates by teaching geometry to Meno's slave boy. This is a strikingly appealing account of learning, a subject on which Socrates is our most profound expert

(with apologies to today's theory-laden professors of education). Our loosely bound experiences of things always prefigure our understanding. To learn is to bring those experiences into a unity, to comprehend them at last under a principle, as it were—leaving us to wonder, if we are inclined to notice miracles, where this unity comes from. In any case, it is clear that a person who seeks this unifying experience is a student. A person who seeks to facilitate this effort in another, by guiding the process of gathering those bits of information strewn around the student's mind, is a teacher. Socrates' famous comparison of teaching to midwifery captures the point most aptly. The teacher will, at times, provide information; he does not provide understanding. The latter task is entirely up to the student, although a good teacher can help us through the process.

It is obvious how a personal evaluation or consultation may contribute to this process. How, on the other hand, does a grade contribute to it? The best defense, I suppose, would be that it serves as a kind of shorthand progress report. On this optimistic view, a grade would be a compromised approximation of what a teacher *should* be providing for his students by way of guidance. And that, in all likelihood, is exactly what the men popularly composited as "William Farish" were intending when they introduced examination and evaluation reforms at Cambridge. They were not trying to dispense with the proper duties of a teacher outright, but merely to "cheat" on those duties, by creating a shortcut method of evaluation that would allow them to teach—or rather lecture to—far more students than could properly be guided and evaluated on a truly individual basis.

Decades later, the father of America's common school movement, Horace Mann, echoed this rationalization for uniformity most amusingly. Complaining of the fact that children were coming to the public schools with textbooks of their parents' own

choosing, produced by various writers and publishers not previously vetted and approved by the state, he illustrates the result as follows:

> Where a diversity of books prevails in a school, there will necessarily be unfitness and maladjustment in the classification of scholars. Those who ought to recite together are separated by a difference of books. If eight or ten scholars, in geography for instance, have eight or ten different books, as has sometimes happened, instead of one recitation for all, there must be eight or ten recitations. Thus the teacher's time is crumbled into dust and dissipated. Put a question to a class of ten scholars, and wait a moment for each one to prepare an answer in his own mind, and then name the one to give the answer, and there are ten mental operations going on simultaneously; and each one of the scholars will profit more by this social recitation, than he would by a solitary one of the same length. But if there must be ten recitations, instead of one, the teacher is, as it were, divided by ten, and reduced to the tenth part of a teacher. Nine tenths of his usefulness is destroyed.[13]

By "ten mental operations going on simultaneously," Mann really means *one* mental operation mass produced in ten minds—"exactly the same treatment," to use Benjamin Newton's phraseology in defense of the Cambridge notion of fairness. How this uniform "social recitation" would be more profitable to the students than solitary recitations remains a bit of a mystery. By contrast, Mann is wonderfully exact concerning the calculation of the fraction of a teacher that remains when students' minds are *not* subject to mass production. "Nine tenths of his usefulness is

[13] Horace Mann, "First Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board," in Massachusetts Board of Education, *Annual Report of the Board of Education* (Boston: Dutton and Wentworth, 1838), 34.

destroyed." Even aside from its specious arithmetic, this claim most purely typifies the mentality of standardized schooling not in its details, but in its unstated presupposition: If teachers have less control over the students' time and mental space, this means they are teaching less, which in turn means that students must be *learning* less. This is not the reasoning of a conscientious educator so much as of a control freak, a.k.a. a "benevolent despot." The real concern Mann is voicing here is: How are students to be homogenized and classified (ranked) in a system that dilutes the control of the teacher and the uniformity of instruction?

The early experimenters with standardized evaluation were quite right, of course, from a purely practical perspective. Consider again my little consultation with the student who knocked on my door. The session lasted an hour, during which we were merely talking about the contents of a personal correspondence. Imagine if I tried to teach her that way—that is, really to *teach her*—regarding all of her actual class work and assignments on a regular weekly basis. How many hours would it take each week to do this properly? (But how much progress would she make in her understanding!) Now multiply that process by a hundred or more students. Utterly impossible—so much easier just to assign a grade, and give a few perfunctory written comments here and there. True, the grade is meaningless in real terms, as the scale of assessment is inherently arbitrary, and its application about as scientific as interrupting a conversation every ten minutes to assign a score to what has been said so far. But, given the number of students, it's the closest thing to a real assessment that time permits, so it's better than nothing, isn't it?

Or is it? In fact, the difference between a grade and a personal consultation is more than a matter of degree; it is fundamental. Learning is not a series of discrete stages existing in isolation from one another. It is a continuum, one without a natural end

point for all practical purposes. The purpose of teaching is to feed the engine that drives the student along on that continuum, at least until he has learned how to carry on fruitfully without further assistance or prodding. A personal consultation is, as I have explained, the true heart of teaching, and far more valuable to the student than any classroom lecture.

Teaching is a spiritual flight of stairs; a grade is an artificial ceiling. Teaching is encouragement to face up to what one lacks without false bravado, and an invitation to carry on without fear; a grade instills delusional pride or the illusion of defeat—hubris or premature surrender. Teaching is a (sometimes rough) wave that carries the student forward on his journey; a grade is a frozen judgment, a single frame of a motion picture captured in isolation from the ongoing film and treated as a complete story unto itself. That isolated judgment then follows the student throughout his subsequent education, giving a provisional achievement or a momentary "deficiency" exaggerated and thoroughly unproductive significance beyond the transitory context from which it was snatched.

Let us reconsider, then, why this cheat, the grade, seemed attractive in the first place. It allowed an instructor to lecture to increasing numbers of students—so many that he would never be able to know, assess, and guide each of them personally as a teacher should. If we are honest, then, we may dispense right off the bat with the argument for grades as an enhancement of education; grades in the modern sense were developed as a workable compromise for the practical (non-educational) benefit of teachers and schools, and nothing more. That is, grades were an acknowledgment that the ratio of teachers to students had been allowed to get out of hand, such that the instructor could no longer confidently vouch for his students, or the university for its degrees. A mechanism was needed to judge the students' efforts

impersonally, thereby allowing the instructor to focus on his lectures, *rather than on the individual students*. This mechanism, by being inherently generic ("objective"), propelled the historic transition toward conceiving of students' minds as measuring cups being filled with liquid and periodically checked to determine whether a certain measure has been reached on time, or as products from an assembly line passing through Quality Control. In other words, it was a brave and momentous step away from education, and toward *schooling*.

In the initial instantiations of academic grading, the standards were still, at least in principle, idiosyncratic to the teachers, rather than conforming to any broader generic protocols—although the Yale system, for example, being college-wide, was already tending away from such personal standards. However, the institution of formal grading upset the professional balance between teaching as many students as possible on the one hand, and teaching as *well* as possible on the other. Instructors could now accommodate far more students than before, while maintaining the illusion that those students were "getting what they paid for," namely an education. Grades provided cover for an educational establishment that was itching to forsake its defining task—the improvement of souls, to state it plainly—in favor of the monetary, career, and prestige gains entailed by drawing more students. (Anyone who has ever taught in a classroom setting in which attendance was not compulsory has experienced this tug of war within himself: desiring small classes for the sake of education, but simultaneously desiring high enrolment, popularity, for the sake of job security and professional advancement.) The university's turn toward the modern revival of Socrates' old archrivals, the sophists, may be traced in part to this practical shift away from the teacher as personal

guide, challenger, or even torturer, and toward the teacher as grade-dispenser.

The practical advantage of grading systems—larger classes, requiring less personal interaction with students—was bound to make the idea popular throughout the academic world quickly. The development is so logical that it is difficult to see how it could have been stopped once set in motion. Standardized grading allows for more students, and therefore more money, either in the form of direct class fees or of school funding, career development, and the like. Other instructors, and then other schools, will naturally wish to gain a piece of this action. Teachers or institutions that do not join the game risk branding themselves as failed or outdated.

Once the practice has spread to various competing institutions, however, allowing grade standards to remain observably idiosyncratic becomes more difficult. While it is not necessary to achieve absolute uniformity of standards horizontally—that is, between schools teaching at the same level—there is a natural impetus even here to produce at least an informal consistency of standards. If I am the only teacher assigning formal grades (like the early Cambridge experimenters, for example), then those grades may be understood as representing my peculiar opinion, based on my unique (albeit illegitimately generic) expectations. As soon as other teachers are implementing their own similar systems, a completely personal standard becomes a problem. That is, if my A grade in no way corresponds to the A grade offered for the equivalent course taught at another university, then both grade standards are exposed as objectively meaningless, or as the purely idiosyncratic assessments they really are, leaving the reasonable observer to wonder what *educational* function they serve. It therefore becomes desirable, and practically necessary, for competing schools to harmonize their stan-

dards, which in fact means merely to produce roughly the same proportion of high, middle, and low grades. If this standardization has never become complete at the university level, that is because universities have never been fully incorporated into an overarching system, although they have been, and remain, the chief source of such systems. Still, the broadly similar ranges and proportions of grades clearly indicate a conscious effort among schools to align their standards somewhat, at least optically. The latter-day prevalence of relative or "bell curve" grading policies only reinforces this.

The real catastrophe, however, begins when this new standardization of expectations and outcomes ceases to apply merely horizontally between competing institutions, and goes vertical. If universities are aiming to accept increasing numbers of students, and if they are increasingly assessing their students' work on graded scales, then a standardized vetting system to determine who is suited to university study in the first place becomes just as important as the standardized system within the university, and for the same reason: There are too many students and applicants to be monitored and assessed personally. We need standardized scores to make this volume manageable. In other words, the quantification has now reached beyond the university itself, to infect the educational models and priorities of the institutions that feed students to the universities. This is trickle-down standardization.

Historically, this shift at the end of the eighteenth century toward making formal education a contest of skill-testing questions, with points for the winners, coincided with the growth of political movements advocating universal education, i.e., forced schooling for the "common man." The new model of generic assessment was a perfect match for the new social policy impetus to make schooling universally accessible (read inescap-

able), not only in the sense that it made universal schooling practically manageable, but also in a politically expedient sense. The case for education as a public enterprise is immeasurably strengthened, rhetorically speaking, by the advent of schooling as an implicit societal ranking system. Put simply, if points are being awarded, and used as measures of men's social value, is it just that only a minority of young men should be allowed to compete for these points? From a democratic point of view, the moral argument seems compelling, *if* we grant the desirability of this new model of formal education as ranking system. In ultimate effect, however, what these universal schooling advocates were striving for, wittingly or unwittingly, was not so much education for everyone, but rather social utility for everyone, which means education reconceived as a societal elite's own personal tool, laboratory, and training facility—a goal which lined up perfectly with standardized grading. Genuine *education* for everyone is, in fact, exactly the dream that freedom and the Industrial Revolution might have provided, had that development not been intercepted and undone by universal *schooling*.[14]

In its early stages, this enveloping standardization and quantification of learning would have been merely a superfluous and somewhat distorting adjunct to one of the traditional methods of prejudging incoming or outgoing students, namely by reference to the reputation and recommendation of their teachers. Prior to standardized grading, an accomplished teacher with a good track record of promoting well-rounded students was all the "qualification" you needed; a high score in some generic, arbitrary grading system is obviously a paltry substitute for

[14] This point is made quite eloquently by the General Education Board, which complains of the abundance of privately operated schools throughout the southern U.S., but gleefully notes that those numbers have quickly dwindled since the centralization of the states' public systems. Cf. *G.E.B.*, 74-75.

having personally studied with a good teacher. Philip of Macedon did not enlist Aristotle as his son's private tutor because he hoped young Alexander would get a good grade in math class. The Philosopher *himself* was the grade. And I doubt Alexander the Great ever wished he could have traded his personal instruction from the man who invented biology and formal logic in exchange for a perfect score on a government examination.

From the point of view of education's progressive elite—two centuries of paternalistic busybodies—this informal reputation-and-word-of-mouth method of recommending teachers and their students has an insuperable and unconscionable flaw: *It presumes that private citizens are competent to form their own judgments* about the value of a teacher's or school's work and the trustworthiness of a teacher's or school's promotion of students, without any overarching, bureaucratically approved system of assessment. The ability of parents, higher educators, tradesmen seeking an apprentice, business owners seeking intelligent employees, and even students, to decide for themselves which teachers they should trust, just drives the busybodies crazy. We are back to the old canard about private education leaving us at the mercy of charlatans; in fact, the greatest charlatans in the history of education were the men most responsible for designing the modern paradigm of government schooling. It was formerly assumed that private citizens were, or bloody well should be, sufficiently intelligent and responsible to decide for themselves what constituted good teaching, based on their own personal standards regarding what they wanted their children to learn, or what background knowledge they wanted their incoming students or employees to have. Errant judgments are a perpetual risk, of course, in this as in every arena of life without a nanny state to decide for you. But in the realms of child-rearing, character development, and intellectual growth—in short, the

arena of the soul and its care—history and common sense fall heavily on the side of risking an individualized (though possibly errant) judgment.

Numbers, however, have a way of taking over. Quantitative judgments have an air of objectivity, almost of science, about them that appeals to something in the modern mind. Natural science has displaced the science of being as our idea of the highest knowledge. Thus, all modernity feels ashamed of the irreducibility of human life to accurate mathematical formulae, as though this indicates something unworthy about our species, or at least something sloppy about our reasoning. As a result, we are endlessly concocting illusory ways of quantifying and collectivizing the mental realm, imagining that such pseudoscience, if pursued with sufficient fervor, will produce real knowledge.[15] This modern instantiation of alchemy, when applied to education theory, is exemplified by such seemingly disparate notions as Dewey's Laboratory School, instituted more than a century ago, and the preprogrammed essay-grading computers of today.[16] It belongs to the same intellectual paradigm as eugenics, and has

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[15] Consider, for a pedestrian example, our historically unprecedented fascination with "Top Ten" lists, whereby we seek to establish relative rankings and quantifiable assessments of virtually everything in the human realm, from literature and music to physical beauty and romantic appeal. "You are the most beautiful woman in the world" is no longer an expression of love and devotion; it is an analyzable judgment subject to counterexample and re-evaluation based on empirical evidence or a poll of experts.

[16] Cf. David Perrin, "What Would Mark Twain Have Thought of Common Core Testing?" in *The Atlantic* (July 9, 2014), http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/07/what-would-mark-twain-have-thought-of-the-common-core/374114/; and Michael Winerip, "Facing a Robo-Grader? Just Keep Obfuscating Mellifluously," *The New York Times* (April 22, 2012), http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/23/education/robo-readers-used-to-grade-test-essays.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&.

been very helpful in validating the most anti-human conceptions of education ever devised.

As for grades, they are *less* objective than traditional personal assessments, not more so, in part because they allow students to be judged and promoted without reference to the elements that are, and should be, essential: genuine understanding, potential to build on what has been learned, and seriousness of character. The appearance of objectivity represented by grades arises, once again, from the late modern taste for illegitimate universalization—universalization based on abstracting an object from its determining context, as a communist universalizes communal sharing after abstracting it from its proper context of family and friendship. The Cambridge notion of fairness—everyone receiving "exactly the same treatment"—was an early mission statement in the growth of what may be called intellectual communism, more commonly known as universal schooling.

The pseudoscientific quantitative assessment, once normalized, has its own logic. From the principle that a generic (non-individual) standard is needed to determine university student rankings proceeds the application of this principle to determining who belongs in university. Then comes the analogous application of the same reasoning with regard to each stage of schooling in relation to the preceding stage, right down to the nursery, in theory. The trajectory is toward standardized rank-ordering of the population from the earliest possible moment. Each stage of school is inexorably reduced to a mere vetting process for the next stage. And since grades are increasingly the exclusive means of vetting, it follows that the means to grades, namely tests (and to a lesser degree other methods of static assessment) become the main purpose and focus of schooling at each level. This is the dialectical self-revelation of the Absolute Idea of modernity's corruption—the dialectic of the *school system*.

Generic academic standards, though inherently illusory, both in intentions and in results,[17] need not entail the kind of uniformity that completely undermines the idiosyncratic thinking of real teachers in a proper teaching environment, as long as both the nature and goals of the community's educational establishment are unspecified, beyond the broad notion of producing educated citizens—that is, as long as the educational establishment is a loose, informal entity, rather than a unified, bureaucratized one.[18] Once these idiosyncratic, practically convenient grades become socially useful, in the sense of being subsumed within the mission of a centralized, hierarchical grading system, the nexus of teaching and learning—the complex intimacy between teacher and student grounded in the shared aim of the student's self-development, the satisfaction of matter's innate desire for form—is more deeply compromised, if not mortally

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[17] Cf. Marita Moll, "A Brief History of Grading," in *Teacher Newsmagazine* (Vol. 11, No. 3, Nov.-Dec. 1998), a publication of the BC Teachers' Federation, http://www.bctf.ca/publications/NewsmagArticle.aspx?id=13110. Moll notes:

> In North America, as the population shift to large urban centers spelled the demise of the one-room schoolhouse in the early 1900s, one of the "efficiencies" created by the new administrative bureaucracies was the neatly printed, uniform report card. In 1911, researchers testing the reliability of the marks entered on the cards showed that the same material could be assigned widely different marks, depending on the markers. But those findings changed nothing because the graded report card had taken firm root.

[18] Cf. G.E.B. p. 105, where the problem with private education is identified as the lack of a "general purpose," and the solution of this problem is expressed as the need for a "strong and symmetrical [i.e., nationalized] university as the crown of a public school system." The lack of general purpose vs. the strong and symmetrical system: the shifting balance from the former condition to the latter may be traced historically in the gradual deterioration of literacy, general knowledge, practical skills acquisition, and sound character in late-modern civilization.

wounded. And do not be fooled by apparent exceptions. Instances of the victim (the teacher-student relationship) sometimes managing to struggle on in a contorted, pain-ridden approximation of its natural glory cannot be adduced as evidence against the damage that has been done. These are rather a melancholy reminder of the human spirit's capacity to fight for breath against even the most powerful pair of hands squeezing its throat.

For the teachers, this death struggle finds expression in John Taylor Gatto's explanation of his decision to quit public school teaching after thirty years: "If you hear of a job where I don't have to hurt kids to make a living, let me know." For the students, the expression is more involuntary: successive generations of increasing aimlessness, moral dependency, and abstraction from human nature, and of decreasing general knowledge, practical skills, and sense of mature preparedness for the risks and responsibilities of life as an adult.

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iii. Soft Despotism from A to D

> *One had to cram all this stuff into one's mind for the examinations, whether one liked it or not. This coercion had such a deterring effect on me that, after I had passed the final examination, I found the consideration of any scientific problems distasteful to me for an entire year.*[19]
>
> Albert Einstein

Making grades and the tests that produce them the primary, self-perpetuating function of formal education is a radically transformative societal development in at least two ways. First of all, it effectively turns education into a labyrinthine game with its own peculiar rules that detach learning both from the proper educational goal of natural self-development, and from ordinary life outside of the school, thereby leaving the victim hopelessly unprepared for that life outside—and all too prepared, therefore, to submit to any authority that promises protection and assistance. Secondly, it prods a society toward an ever-greater uniformity of schooling methods, and eventually toward a single, unified system, which ultimately means a single, homogenized soul.

Regarding the first point, consider again the real world meaninglessness of grades. One thing everyone knows about grades, even without serious reflection, is that they measure testing skills, not understanding. (Think of the successful "cram" studier who is able to absorb substantial amounts of material in order to write the test, only to forget all of it after the

[19] Quoted in Leonard Mlodinow, *Euclid's Window: The Story of Geometry from Parallel Lines to Hyperspace* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 179.

examination period.) Thus, the Honor Roll will invariably be peopled with a more or less random mix of mediocre learners and genuinely bright students who all just happen to be good test-takers. The system rewards people who are *good at the system*, without regard for natural intelligence, seriousness of thought, or long-term potential for spiritual growth. And of course this problem is exacerbated over time, as intelligent and original minds are alienated by a school system increasingly focused on content, methods, and results unrelated to anything of great interest to a thoughtful young person. This is not a problem that can be corrected within the system of standardized schooling, any more than a factory assembly line can be recalibrated to begin producing ingenious new inventions at regular intervals. Design in, product out, without exception. And of course the chief creators and overseers of the system would have no desire to correct it, for accommodating oneself to the requirements of the vetting process dulls thought and trains the mind to a conformism of aspirations, which are the implicit aims of the process.

Furthermore, the cumulative element of grading punishes people for learning things at different rates, as though you are a less capable and less worthy person if you do not evolve in your thinking according to the manner, order, and pace prescribed by the universal standard, which thus becomes a substitute not only for a proper teacher-student relationship, but for Truth and Nature themselves. In the aggregate, learning at a different rate, or focusing on different interests or pursuits from those prescribed by the system, gets you branded as mentally inferior, and treated as a weaker student throughout the remainder of the process. (Or the reverse, if you succeed early, regardless of actual subsequent development.) Needless to say, this effectively codifies a societal rank-ordering based on nothing to do with real

intellectual potential or genuine learning. In advanced education systems—meaning those in which the government schooling establishment is woven into the social fabric as it is throughout the nations of the developed world today—this rank follows you, and you know it, so that you either become even more immersed in the artificiality of the system in a demeaning attempt to save your official public record, reputation, and pride, or you learn to accept yourself as "not very smart"—i.e., you give up on your own mind, which means on your own spiritual life—and become resigned to life as a cog in the societal wheel.

(I cannot count the number of interesting and talented children and young adults I have discovered in Korea, products of the nation's internationally admired education establishment, who are hardened into immobility under the volcanic ash of standardized testing and public ranking. Before long, like the victims of Pompeii, all that will be left of their individual existence will be their hollowed-out shapes in the rock, shapes contorted into permanent records of desperation. This is especially true of the most serious and mature among them, who know that Korea's unsurpassed standardization "success" has left them lacking something at their cores. These young adults are some of the most lovable and pitiable people I know. The great secret of life has been systematically sealed off from them forever, but they have the innate intelligence to intuit this fact. They must therefore stare at that magic box for their whole lives, wishing they had been permitted a glimpse inside back when their mental processes and habits were being formed.)

In a universal compulsory schooling system, this permanently shrunken pride is the inevitable result for the majority of the population, and hence must be regarded as an ultimate goal of public education. The school-promulgated mass resignation to mediocrity—the self-belittlement that America, in her consub-

stantial optimism, has cheerfully represented to herself as the dream of the "white picket fence"—becomes fatal to representative government in the long run. For a nation whose majority reaches voting age persuaded that it has already attained its intellectual peak—or rather, run up against *its limit*—is a nation prepared to leave the deep thinking, including the political thinking, to the "experts." Thus universal academic standardization, which some conservatives imagine will magically restore a failing society, actually undermines the only solid ground of representative government, namely popular adherence to the founding "self-evident truth" of a free republic, as enunciated in the Preamble to the Declaration of Independence: "that all men are created equal." Natural equality, perhaps the modern political concept most susceptible to misrepresentation and misuse under the best of circumstances, is directly contradicted, in spirit and in purpose, by an allegedly scientific system of child-rearing which imposes a public rank on all children, thereby establishing an official, state-sanctioned social hierarchy based (supposedly) on intellectual capacity. The danger of such an entrenched public hierarchy, though almost self-explanatory, may be highlighted by considering the political meaning of natural equality, as indicated in Locke's statement that in the state of nature,

> there [is] nothing more evident, than that creatures of the same species and rank, promiscuously born to all the same advantages of nature, and the use of the same faculties, should also be equal one amongst another without subordination or subjection; unless the lord and master of them all should, by any manifest declaration of his will, set one above another,

> and confer on him, by an evident and clear appointment, an undoubted right to dominion and sovereignty.[20]

One truth that, if not self-evident, is certainly easily deduced, is that when the government declares itself the official interpreter of the will of the lord and master of us all, claiming the authority to enforce a "manifest declaration" against natural equality by publicly ranking fellow citizens from earliest childhood, the foundations of practical freedom—the natural rights to self-ownership (non-subordination) and self-government (non-subjection)—are bound to crumble.

In short, a popular majority that is reared to see itself as *objectively* limited relative to others—that no longer finds practical merit in the idea of natural equality—will be less resistant to a government that sees itself as *un*limited. Academic standardization therefore runs directly counter to the essence of modern liberty, namely limited, representative government. As with our example of communism, applying the progressive principle of abstract universalization to a naturally beneficial idea leads to the very opposite of the good results we get from applying that idea on the individual level. The universalization of "standards" leads, not to an educated public better prepared for self-determination, but to a majority consigned and resigned to second class humanity, and therefore condemned to a fate worse than being fundamentally unprepared to govern itself: a deep-seated feeling of being *unworthy* of self-government.

In the end, does standardization achieve a different goal from the leftists' socialization, creativity, and whatnot? It may result in more absorption of factual information and the kinds of things that can be learned by rote, or by direct mimicry, such as manual

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[20] John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (London: C. and J. Rivington [etc.], 1824, originally published 1690), Bk. II §4, 132.

or technical skills—precisely the things that can and will be learned elsewhere, as needed, by youngsters with adults prepared to train them, and which therefore require no formal schooling at all, let alone compulsory schooling. Beyond that, standardization is an impediment to the intellectual and character growth that is the heart and soul of anything worthy of the name education. At best, it produces competent but soulless citizens, men and women able to perform assigned tasks, but unable to conceive of a reason to live. That is, a compulsory schooling system built on a foundation of generic standards—standardized curriculum, age-grades, uniform scoring according to non-individualized methods of evaluation—will be most effective at producing good worker units for an authoritarian elite. In the process, it removes children ever further from their natural role as self-developing humans, and teachers ever further from their defining role as mentors and guides.

As evidence of the progressive-utilitarian essence of standardized schooling, as well as of the profundity of progressivism's hold on the modern mind, I ask you to try to imagine the whole complex of standardized grading, from international comparisons of student outcomes to any given child's report card, outside the context of compulsory government-regulated education. I suggest that you will find you cannot. In fact, a fully developed academic standardization—as opposed to genuine standards, which are by definition individual and unquantifiable—is inconceivable apart from overarching coercive control. Therefore, to defend the use of uniform grading systems, or to advocate ways of improving a nation's performance on standardized tests, is to accept, wittingly or unwittingly, the principle of state-controlled child-rearing, and specifically child-rearing undertaken as a social engineering project. To the compulsory school

advocate, the phrase "universal standards" may seem redundant. In real educational terms, it is self-contradictory.

One of the most common concerns these days among people who would be called educational conservatives is the issue of so-called grade inflation. There was a time when people worried, reasonably, that students were not learning as much of real practical and spiritual value as had their counterparts in previous generations. More and more, however, the problem of grade inflation is framed in terms of a lack of uniformity in grade distributions—"This course (or program or university) is producing too many A grades"—as though the grades themselves, rather than course content, were the concern.[21] The issue of grade inflation, understood in this way, only demonstrates how much of an elephant in the room the notion of grading has become.

To clarify, please indulge me in a little thought experiment. Let us imagine I teach a course, "World History," at the end of which I have distributed the entire class within the grade range A-plus to A-minus. The next semester, I teach the same course, to the same number of students, but this time, having been called on the mat for my inordinately high grades last semester, I squeeze all the students into the range from D-plus to D-minus. Am I a "hard marker" or an "easy marker"? Are my grades too high in one case and too low in the other? Shouldn't I have a wider range of grades in each class? Should employers judge the quality of my

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[21] See, for example, Cory Koedel, "Grade inflation for education majors and low standards for teachers" (*American Enterprise Institute*, August 22, 2011), http://www.aei.org/publication/grade-inflation-for-education-majors-and-low-standards-for-teachers/, and also Sita Slavov, "How to Fix College Grade Inflation" (*U.S. News & World Report*, December 26, 2013), http://www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/economic-intelligence/2013/12/26/why-college-grade-inflation-is-a-real-problem-and-how-to-fix-it.

students, or should the students judge themselves for that matter, as inadequate or unsatisfactory compared to classes with more typical grade distributions? In fact, there is no way to answer these questions based on the information I have provided—and this is, in most cases, all the information on which the people complaining of grade inflation are basing their judgments. For what is missing from the information I have provided is in fact the only thing that matters: What did I teach the students, and how much did they learn?

Now let us imagine, further, that in the first class, the "A" group, my only graded assignment was to perform the refrain of your favorite song on the kazoo, whereas in the second class, the "D" group, I assigned three eighty-page research papers about the relationship between economic conditions and political stability in various historical eras. Now, surely, you can answer the questions about my grade standards with more certainty, right? In fact, you cannot, because you still do not know anything about the two factors that ultimately determine the *educational* results of my class: the content and quality of my teaching, and the intellectual and motivational levels of my students.

A distribution of scores or grades, as such, *means absolutely nothing*, and tells the outside observer less than nothing, about how much students have learned, or how well they were taught. A disproportionate number of high (or low) grades, compared to other classes, other departments, or other schools, is meaningless as a yardstick for measuring quality or value of education, unless we have simply allowed the numbers to take over, and have lost all grounding in the relevant questions: Did the students learn anything worthwhile during the class, and did the teacher prepare and motivate them to take further steps in developing themselves beyond the class itself? Those who become fixated on achieving consistency of grade distributions, recommend target

class averages, enforce bell curve grading, and so on, are losing the essence of education in their obsession with mere optics.[22] In Yale College's original evaluation system, there were only four categories of rank. Today's typical grading system employs at

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[22] Even leading libertarians, who oppose public education, are susceptible to this "grades-as-fairness" delusion. For example:

> The [progressive] plan is to abolish grades, by which better and worse children know the extent of their progress, and instead to grade "subjectively" or not at all. Subjective grading is a monstrous scheme to grade each student on the basis of what the teacher thinks the capacities of the child are, the grading to be rated on the extent to which the child fulfills these capacities. This places a terrible handicap on the bright students and grants special privileges to the moronic ones.... [Murray Rothbard, *Education: Free and Compulsory* (Auburn, Alabama: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 1999), 54.]

According to this account, the alternative to "subjective grading" would have the teacher scoring each student's non-subjective "progress" on a scale set independently of the capacities of individual students, as is the norm today. Questions: Progress toward what? Determined by whom? Does this not make grades purely relative rankings? If so, and if their purpose is to allow children to "know the extent of their progress," then how informative are they if the teacher alone determines the standard of rating for his small group of students? If the standard is to be made informative and meaningful, will it not have to be determined more broadly than the classroom level? If so, who will determine it? How broad will be broad enough to make the relative ranking system truly informative? How will uniformity in the application of this standard be enforced across teachers or schools? By whom?

At a more obvious level: If a child wants to know the extent of his "progress," can't he ask his teacher personally? If a parent, university administrator, or employer wants to know whether a particular student has a high intellectual capacity or is a "moron," can't he ask that student's teacher directly? Has our obsession with the pseudoscience of "objective" grading killed our common sense? The dream of objective intellectual quantification through standardized grading is not the cure for our falling educational standards; it is one of the *causes* of those falling standards.

To be fair, I know what motivates Rothbard's argument: He means "subjective grading" is unfair in a world that has come to rely on school grades as the chief determinant and measure of a graduating student's socio-economic worth. Seen in that light, I couldn't agree more. What he fails to ask, however, is, "How and why have we arrived at such a world?" and "Is such a world rational and just?"

least eight categories, and often twelve. Do Yale's four ranks divide evenly into today's eight (or twelve) letter grades? Is Yale's Pejores class of 1785 equivalent to today's D range student? That the two categories are equivalent in the abstract is easy enough to see; we can map them neatly onto one another and say with certainty that "Today's D range is yesteryear's Pejores. But that this entails any kind of equivalence or overlap between the *human beings* in those respective categories is far from obvious. Is the learning outcome represented by the two ranks equivalent? Equivalent in what sense? For example, I would guess that the content of their respective classes—even where the class titles are identical—would often be different to the point of seeming almost unrelated. The class assignments, instructors' expectations, and presumed background knowledge would be vastly different. Certainly the criteria for determining whether the students understand what they have been taught would be extremely dissimilar, as would the specific practical means of evaluating students for placement in the various ranks. None of this matters, however, if all we are looking for is abstract consistency of *grades*, rather than of learning. The same, in fact, applies to my two hypothetical World History classes, the "all As" class and the "all Ds" class. In those two classes, it is perfectly obvious that the A-plusses of one class map easily onto the D-plusses of the other, and so on. And what does this prove, other than that consistency of grade distributions per se is strictly relative and abstract, and has no direct relation to student achievement?

Consider another example, this one quite common to the experience of many teachers. I regularly teach two sections of a course, which is to say two different groups of students studying the same material at the same level. I use the same textbook, present the material in roughly the same way, and set almost identical assignments and exams in the two classes. For the

convenience of my teaching schedule, I even choose to teach these two classes on the same days of the week, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. And yet it may happen—it *has* happened—that one of these classes has a disproportionate number of exceedingly diligent and/or talented students, such that judging the two groups on the same generic standard naturally produces a much greater number of high grades in one class. I know, because I happen to be the teacher in both classes, that the disparity in their respective grade distributions is entirely attributable to a disparity in the students. If these same results appeared in two classes taught by different teachers, however, alarm bell curves would immediately be sounding throughout the land: "We need to bring these grade distributions into line!" In other words, the impulse would be to take remedial action that would in reality—granting our global adherence to the charade of standardized grading—undervalue the performance of the high achievers, and overvalue the performance of the low achievers, ostensibly in the name of fairness.

Let us look at this from yet another angle. The first time I taught in a government-accredited master's degree program in education—that is, an advanced degree program for professional teachers—I was startled to learn how lax the school was in certain respects. I was confused, for example, during the first week of class, when students, some of whom I knew well, expressed surprise upon realizing that I planned to meet every week during the semester. Several classes, I learned, met only sporadically, had few real academic requirements, and were taught by people who did not really take the courses or the program seriously. The graduates of this program would nevertheless receive master's degrees, and in some cases teaching certification, and would therefore be eligible for salary increases and professional advancement within the public education establishment, in

addition to having won the prestige and bragging rights that a graduate degree confers.

Yet I have no reason to believe the average grades awarded in this program were out of line with the typical graduate school grades in any other program at the university, or with equivalent programs at other schools. In other words, on paper this program looked perfectly normal. People who examine the issue of grade inflation by hunting down anomalous class averages or red-flagging unusual grade distributions would notice nothing curious or troublesome about it.

The upshot of all this, in short, is that grades, class averages, and grade distributions tell us nothing at all about learning. They tell us only how a particular teacher ranks his students relative to one another—*and nothing more*. And to reiterate, this fact should represent no problem in education whatsoever. How I choose to differentiate my students' performances from one another has no bearing on, and implies nothing at all about, any other teacher's method of differentiating his students—unless we have arbitrarily agreed to distribute our grades identically. But even in that case all we have done is manufacture the optical illusion of uniformity by aligning our students relative to one another using the same letter grades (or numerical scores), and hoping that no one notices that our respective A grades, B grades, and so on, have no objective value to establish them as representing identical *education*. It is entirely possible, for example, that two students who receive A grades in their respective courses on World War I, taught by two teachers with different interpretations and biases regarding the events of the period, will have acquired very different factual and theoretical content, and possess completely inconsistent ideas about the causes and progression of the war, in spite of their "identical" grades. (The same

basic scenario, incidentally, could easily be adapted to compare courses in the sciences, with similar results.)

People who consider inconsistent grade distributions an educational problem have fallen for the big lie that grades are, or should be, an objective means of determining intellectual achievement or ability. They implicitly assume that "A" and "B" represent cognitive measures as quantitatively accurate and true as the numbers on a blood pressure gauge, such that awarding an A for "B-level work" is equivalent to telling a man with low blood pressure that his pressure is in the healthy range.

And this is where disaster strikes. For, falsely perceiving an inconsistency in quantitative evaluation methods as a social problem, our economists of the mind set out to eradicate the appearance of irregularity, particularly in the vetting process leading up to post-secondary study, by universalizing educational standards, i.e., establishing, as far as possible, a uniformity of teaching content and method that, when tested for "outcomes," should produce an inescapable identity of grades. That is, these experts become obsessed with eradicating the essential meaninglessness of grades—which is embarrassing to them, although, as I have explained, it is in truth the only *saving grace* of grades—by assessing all students according to universally standardized tests. This impulse to take the idiosyncrasy, personal style, local interests, and unquantifiability out of education only makes sense if uniformity of quantifiable outcomes has become the primary goal, which is to say if real learning and spiritual development have been discarded in favor of genuine education's nemesis, the lowest common denominator. And I emphasize the equally essential adjectives in that phrase: *lowest* and *common*.

Standardization undermines proper intellectual development and human excellence more subtly than socialization, creativity, and the rest of the squishier elements of progressive schooling,

but it does so nonetheless. And in any case, one principle remains operative: With universal result standards come, inevitably, universal teaching method standards. This is the meaning of teaching certification. Teacher's college and teaching certification exams intentionally establish a vetting process to guarantee, as far as humanly possible, that no one gains access to a classroom without having been trained in, and having acquiesced to, the models of teaching approved by the self-proclaimed experts—the self-important university professors, power-hungry bureaucrats, and self-serving corporate "philanthropists" with the most influence over education policy. Conservative proposals to tie teachers' salaries, or schools' funding, to their students' results on standardized tests merely reinforce the uniformity and utilitarian collectivism of the system. For, once again, they presume that we understand exactly what any student of a certain age should "know," and what a teacher of such a student should be trying to accomplish, such that any accomplishment not encompassed by the standardized test is educationally worthless, superfluous, and a distraction from the pursuit of the results we have deemed necessary. Again I ask: Who is this "we," exactly?

Once specific goals are set for each age group, and specific means of reaching and measuring those goals enforced as the rule, we have effectively tethered children to the mental life conceived of by the experts—the factory managers, if you will. That is what is so wrong with the logic of even the most innocently intended notion of academic standardization. Standards, in the misguided sense of uniform goals, teaching methods, and means of measuring success, are advocated as a way of assuring specific levels of achievement. And in a paradoxical sense, they are exactly that: They are a way of establishing a *hard ceiling* of achievement, one which in the name of pulling everyone up actually holds everyone down.

For a simple example, if we select *The Old Man and the Sea* as the most challenging reading material for the cohort of sixteen-year-olds, and furthermore set assignments, tests, and grading standards related to that novel according to *our* conception of the proper reading comprehension level of a sixteen-year-old—keeping in mind that it must be a standard any "normal" sixteen-year-old can meet—then, whatever we think we are doing, what we are actually doing is predetermining the level of seriousness and understanding to which we intend to take the students. In the process, we are implicitly restricting anyone from exceeding our conception of the "proper" or "realistic" level of thought for a sixteen-year-old. We are effectively declaring that our catch-all standard of reading comprehension is *far enough*. At the very least we are determining that anyone who does exceed our prescribed level is applying himself superfluously, and the sense of superfluity is a great barrier to effort in anyone, let alone in a sixteen-year-old who has been discouraged in myriad ways from imagining that any of his school work has any real world value. The only hope is that the student feels a passion to think and learn from somewhere beyond the realm of these stultifying "standards." The likelihood of this, however, is inversely proportional to the extent to which the public school world and curriculum dominate his time and energy.

Is this last concern much ado about nothing? Will the really exceptional minds find their way to fruition regardless of the lowest common denominator standards of the schools? Education theorists since at least Rousseau have operated on the principle that methods of general education are required for the good of the ordinary citizenry, but that somehow innate greatness, the exceptional case, will take care of itself. In other words, so the hypothesis goes, natural intelligence, whether it excels in the education system or not, will inevitably find a way to fulfill its

potential in spite of its unsuitability to the generic methods. Of course, there is no way to prove this, in as much as we can never know whether every exceptional talent in our midst has in fact actualized itself; this would require some sort of testing mechanism to determine where such talent may lie, and follow-up observation and testing to determine whether the potential was fully actualized—that is, a standardized method of finding and evaluating the non-standard.

(I know there are people who actually believe they are developing such methods, with their IQ tests and whatnot. To put it slightly impolitely, this is exactly how ordinary minds should be expected to try to categorize and quantify the extraordinary. "Oh look! I just got the same score as Einstein—let's go out for dinner with some other geniuses to celebrate.")

For what it's worth, I would like to agree with Rousseau in assuming that the truly great mind will develop regardless of the manner of its upbringing. But I cannot help suspecting that this is wishful thinking in the extreme. Perhaps it would seem less so in the educational world of Rousseau's time, where it still made sense for a philosopher to write *Emile*, an "idealistic" speculation about how a personal governor would educate a normal child if he had daily and exclusive access to the child for many years, could remove any undesirable influences, and was given complete authority to teach the boy in whatever manner he saw fit. The improperly educated child of great potential could, at that time, reasonably be expected to wend his way from natural curiosity to specific enthusiasms to general wonder, largely powered by his own innate energies, as long as no one was actively hindering such a private evolution. In today's world of government-mandated schooling, however, with its years of imprisonment in state indoctrination centers, teachers trained and vetted according to anti-individual government specifications, and the con-

stant psychological hammering of "standards"—both those of politically correct purity and those of academic achievement—wishful thinking becomes pure fantasy.

At an absolute minimum, untold numbers of boys and girls of exceptional ability are being restrained and stalled in their early development, just like everyone else, wasting valuable and irrecoverable time and energy studying for the test, trying to make the grade.

In fact, our crime is much worse than this. Let us return for a moment to 1808, and Benjamin Newton's letter revealing the rival conceptions of fairness adhered to at Oxford and Cambridge. You will recall that fairness at Oxford consisted in assessing examination candidates according to their own talents and interests, even according to books on which they themselves had chosen to be examined, and without direct reference to anyone else's skills or achievements. Meanwhile, at Cambridge fairness meant assessing everyone on the same prescribed material, according to a direct comparison of their scores on standardized examinations.

The latter concept of fairness, the Cambridge Principle, in addition to being consistent with education viewed as a scientific experiment, is also the notion typically associated with the plea for "equal opportunity," in that it supposedly gives every student what we today call a fair chance or level playing field. Equal opportunity, however, is merely our euphemism for equalized achievement and uniform horizons. For consider what the Cambridge Principle means in practice: At the end of their university careers, everyone should have learned the same things as all others within their area of specialization, i.e., should have had the same intellectual influences and developed the same mental content, attitudes, and predilections, and then been permanently ranked against all other students according to this

homogenizing standard. This "equality" of input in no way ensures equality of opportunity, or of anything else, from the student's point of view. What it ensures is that every student will have a distinct and permanent position in a closed, relative ranking system as arbitrary as it is intellectually limiting.

Now apply this principle to the first eighteen years of life—as we do in fact apply it today—so that it includes not just advanced academic content (the world of theory and higher learning), but also the basic building block experiences in mental and emotional development. The Cambridge Principle applied to child-rearing from preschool to high school ensures that at age eighteen every person in a society will have had, in essence, the same intellectual experiences, encountered the same ideas, and had those ideas and experiences presented and interpreted to him in more or less the same way, in the same sequence, and at the same rate of progress as everyone else. Furthermore, everyone will have had his character development and understanding of himself guided and determined by his absorption of, and response to, the same emotional input and social experiences as everyone else. There will be no "choosing your own books," so to speak; you will be a success or a failure according to the only standard, and regarding the only content, available. This only looks like fairness if you assume that there can be only one legitimate (and quantifiable) standard for evaluating growth, thought, and understanding for every human being, one intellectual context suitable for every person's proper development—and that the current educational establishment *knows* what that standard is, and how to measure children correctly in accordance with it. But a standard entails a projection of ultimate purposes—in short, a theory of human nature and its proper completion. The great theorists of public education, Plato and Aristotle, offer detailed accounts of their (unquantifiable) educational standards—the

wise man and the virtuous man, respectively. What kind of answer do you think you would get if you asked a modern school principal, administrator, education ministry bureaucrat, or professor of pedagogy what conception of human nature he is aiming to realize through his education model, and how the model is suited to realizing that conception? His answer is what you have tacitly agreed to universalize, coercively, as the method of child-rearing for your entire society.

Consider an analogy. Imagine that the state has determined that basketball is the only sport that is suited to the human body, or socially acceptable, and therefore that in the name of "fairness," every child should have his physical activities standardized with success in basketball as the prescribed and exclusive goal. Every boy and girl will henceforth be taught how to shoot and dribble a basketball, and tested at predetermined intervals for vertical jumping, but no athletic or physical skills unrelated to basketball will be taught or rewarded. Children will be vetted only in accordance with the various positions required on a basketball team, and gradually streamed into the categories of "starters," "bench players," and those who fail to make the cut. Tall children and those who can jump high will be regarded as athletically inclined, and all others as unathletic.

In this condition, we could never know which children might have alternative physical talents, and the children themselves would never know, because no other skills would be cultivated—these would be discouraged by the practical fact that every child's time and energy would be preoccupied with developing his basketball talent as far as possible. The sports world would be circumscribed as the basketball world—indeed, the words "sport" and "basketball" would be coextensive, until one of them disappeared from common usage altogether. All athletes would by definition be basketball players, good, bad, or indifferent. In this

world, Babe Ruth and Sandy Koufax, Wayne Gretzky and Gordie Howe, Joe Louis and Sugar Ray Robinson, Emil Zatopek and Sebastian Coe, Sonja Henie and Dick Button, Billie Jean King and Bjorn Borg would be dismissed as third-rate athletes, and either give up on sports, or spend their adult lives playing pick-up basketball games and wistfully reflecting on themselves as athletically untalented—as sporting failures. After all, weren't they given the same opportunities as everyone else, and judged on the same standard as others? Wasn't the system fair?

A world that systematically raises its children along such lines can never know what potential achievement it has thwarted or stifled through the arbitrary limitation of real opportunity, the artificial circumscription of life's horizons, and the psychological ceiling of standardized, quantifiable expectations that weaken natural motivation and productive effort by declaring, "This is far enough." That this world *is* stifling potential achievement is beyond question.

And so we return to where we began, with the so-called liberals and conservatives arguing over which form of collectivist degradation ought to be imposed on the general public, while alternative voices, who would dismantle the entire apparatus of this soft slavery a civilization has created to grease the wheels of its soft despotism, are dismissed by both sides as extremists or crackpots. We are extremists for wishing to return to education as it was pursued throughout most of the history of civilization before the progressives took over: the rough, slightly disorderly patchwork of alternative pursuits, with specific goals and methods set by various alliances of families, churches, private teachers, employers, and philosophers, and with the needs and well-being of individual children, rather than a utilitarian social ranking system, as its impetus. We are crackpots for hoping to return to the non-standardized, competing, malleable education

"establishments" comprised, at heart, of man's natural desire for knowledge and our natural impulse to show one another the way—the non-system, if you will, that produced Athens, Jerusalem, Rome, the Italian Renaissance, Elizabethan England, the Industrial Revolution, and modern liberty as embodied most fully in the American founding.

The liberal versus conservative quarrel actually unites the two factions in a happy tension. The liberals say we need more creative group work, gender experimentation, moral relativism, and interdependency training, along with lower academic standards; the conservatives say we need more "marketable skills" and "tougher standards," leaving the field of positive spiritual development—education proper—to the progressive manipulators, the popular culture, and chance. Both factions are convinced that we need to universalize their respective goals; that parents are merely to be appealed to as voters, rather than as people who ultimately ought to have primary control over their children's upbringing; and that state micromanagement of one sort or another is the only sure way to achieve "society's," i.e., the government's, aims.

Neither faction has much time for the individual souls being extinguished in this process.

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A Summary of Our Shame

> *[Periander] had sent a herald to Thrasybulus and inquired in what way he would best and most safely govern his city. Thrasybulus led the man who had come from Periander outside the town, and entered into a sown field. As he walked through the corn, continually asking why the messenger had come to him from Corinth, he kept cutting off all the tallest ears of corn which he could see, and throwing them away, until he had destroyed the best and richest part of the crop. Then, after passing through the place and speaking no word of counsel, he sent the herald away. When the herald returned to Corinth, Periander desired to hear what counsel he brought, but the man said that Thrasybulus had given him none. The herald added that it was a strange man to whom he had been sent, a madman and a destroyer of his own possessions, telling Periander what he had seen Thrasybulus do. Periander, however, understood what had been done, and perceived that Thrasybulus had counseled him to slay those of his townsmen who were outstanding in influence or ability; with that he began to deal with his citizens in an evil manner.*[1]
>
> Herodotus

The modern public school establishment—unthinkable two centuries ago, universal today—is industrial civilization's wrong turn, our monument to mass production gone awry. We have created a forced retardation factory. If this still sounds hyperbolic,

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[1] Herodotus, *The Histories*, translated by A. D. Godley (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920) Bk. 5, 92F-G.

I remind you of Allan Bloom's warning about the defining outrages of an age. I would also suggest that the difficulty in appreciating the full immorality of what we have done is in part a measure of our detachment from any reasonable conception of human nature and its needs; most of us simply know not what we do.

Addressing the widespread immaturity, amorality, and lack of personal honor which typify our late modern world, a good friend once asked me the most essential question:

> But how has this been accomplished? How can a whole society be discouraged from maturing, a process that ought to be as natural as the ripening of fruit on the tree or wheat in the field? What can induce adults to think and act like children?

In other words, if what men used to call mature adulthood—self-reliance, personal responsibility, the honoring of obligations, self-restraint, and self-governance in accordance with rational principle—is truly natural to us, then how are we to explain the general failure of this maturation process throughout a civilization?

Let us begin with the obvious. If an outcome is natural, then the means to preventing it constitute a deliberate thwarting of nature. Specifically, if you want to prevent the results of a natural process, then you must prevent the process from occurring in the first place. This is actually not so difficult to do, if you are deranged enough to want to do it. Public education is our nice name for precisely this deranged endeavor.

The first step is to recognize that the inclination to mature is a deep-seated desire—perhaps the defining desire—of every child, and therefore that this desire itself is your enemy, and must be uprooted and recast as a vice. The development of one's know-

ledge and character in the direction of self-reliance and independence must be debunked as immoral and regressive. There must be no room in the new morality for any fulfillment but the social, any achievement but submission to the collective.

The second step is to supply this new morality of self-destruction with a rationalization ostensibly grounded in "the welfare of the child." Dewey is emphatic that traditional approaches to childhood education were guilty of focusing exclusively on adulthood as the standard determining what ought to be done, rather than focusing on the nature of childhood itself. This may sound benign, or even vaguely reasonable. What it means in progressive educational theory and practice is actively fostering and reinforcing the weaknesses and provisional dependencies of childhood as the proper *ends* of education, rather than as stages of incompleteness to be outgrown. The intended result? "Adults" who never overcome their dependence on the group, their fundamental reliance on authority and experts (the grown-ups), their desire for approval at all costs, their fear of being excluded or rebuked, and their tendency to distrust and dislike people who "don't fit in." In short, the result is a society of people who have been taught, and who have accepted, that they do not fully exist independently of their social relations, and who therefore regard the idea of self-reliance (emotional or intellectual) as not merely illusory, but morally suspect.

As we shall see in detail in Part Two, the two great philosophers of modern public schooling, Fichte and Dewey, were dogmatic socialists, abhorred private property, and made the curtailing of private and independent thought by any means necessary a central tenet of their respective theories of education. They advocated compulsory schooling because—and they were very open about this—they wanted to undermine private family influences, and immerse children in a carefully circumscribed

social environment in which all early character formation would be directed toward the annihilation of any thoughts or inclinations not useful to collective authority.

But wishes do not give birth to horses, even for progressive powermongers. It is one thing to seek means of thwarting nature's impulse toward completion, but quite another to achieve this corrupt design in practice.

Let us, therefore, begin again, and pursue the question from the point of view of a craftsman, rather than an architect.

The primary purpose of *all* government-controlled education, regardless of how this is expressed by particular defenders of the enterprise, is to produce the kind of citizens the state sees as best suited to its established form of governance. By "the state," I mean those people and factions within the political infrastructure who are in a position to use regulation and coercion to determine the long-term direction of the community as a whole. Since public education, in the modern sense of government-run schools employing government-trained teachers, is a project that would likely only be undertaken in the first place by people who believe the state can manage people's private affairs better than they can do for themselves, it is all but inevitable that the kind of citizen such a system will produce will be one who believes implicitly in the role of government as a direct social and moral regulator, and for whom the superior understanding of government in determining the proper course of an individual's life is generally presumed. This inevitable result, however innocent in its nascent phases, is one reason I insist upon referring to government schooling as an entitlement program. Like all such programs, it fosters reliance upon government for something regarded as a need, and hence expands the scope of expectations from government—which, of course, really means that it causes a tacit submission to broader government authority over one's life and

choices, and a psychological relinquishing of part of one's own moral authority to choose.

Thus far, I am assuming a relatively benign government, with semi-reasonable, if presumptuous, goals. What happens, however, when the decision-making hierarchy is infiltrated by men with less noble intentions, amoral manipulators who crave more authority than their predecessors considered acceptable, and who seek to promote attitudes and customs designed to expand and perpetuate their control over the power centers of the community—wealth and material production, the permanent regulatory bureaucracy, the institutions of moral influence, and/or the levers of legislative authority? In a community that retained any semblance of its dignity, its moral substance, and its thirst for self-determination, these manipulators would be recognized immediately and rejected outright, whether by vote or by violence—unless they were to conduct their civilizational ambush under the protective cover of rationalizing theory.

Fortunately for Satan, modernity has produced plenty of self-styled "education theorists," men and women of the intellectual class whose minds have become unmoored from what they dismissively label "traditional morality," and who are certain they could design the perfectly ordered community, if only they had the means to universal social control. These education theorists are the real life mad scientists, disregarding all moral and rational limits in pursuit of that self-vindicating, immortalizing moment when they can see their artificial creature in motion and exclaim, "It's alive!"

Such pseudo-scientists are the perfect tools of the corrupt ruling class, as the two groups' goals are complementary. The wealthy and manipulative power-brokers seek a veneer of "new methods" and "social progress" to mask and justify their urge to control the mind and machinery of society for their own

perceived advantage; the intellectuals would happily sell their souls for a chance to see their grand schemes put into practice. This symbiotic relationship is enhanced by the two factions' awareness of a common enemy: the thoughtful, self-reliant man of character. Such an individual is a threat to the power-brokers because he will recognize what is behind their mask, and refuse to submit to their social manipulations. He is a threat to the mad scientists, because their need to be right has overwhelmed their interest in the truth, and hence their greatest fear is the appearance of living counterexamples, whose presence would refute their life's work. The undermining of such thoughtful, self-reliant men is therefore a central goal of both the power-brokers and their intellectual lapdogs.

What becomes of the always dubious project of government-controlled education in the hands of such ignobly-motivated men? First of all, these men will need to alter the social aspects of the school environment, using every child's earliest social learning methods—imitation and checking for approval—to inculcate a new mentality, one both useful to, and accepting of, the state's gradual encroachments into the territory previously fenced off for freedom, privacy, and moral choice. Intellectual independence and so-called ethical individualism are the natural enemies of this system, and must therefore be discouraged in every way.

At the political level, this means government schooling must be compulsory, so that no family's children may entirely escape its influence, and it must tend toward ever-increasing standardization of methods and outcomes, to mitigate the effect of any stray free thinkers or plain decent human beings who may find their way into the teaching profession in spite of the various hoops and obstacles set in place to prevent such good people from infiltrating the classroom. At the theoretical level, the goal is to weed out and crush the impulse toward independent

thought and action from the earliest stages of child development, and to reinforce the child's bondage to the collective and dependence upon authority, through methods of rearing so contrary to the true needs of human nature that the entire fraudulent system would be immediately recognizable as pure evil, had that system not also raised every person in the community to doubt the ultimate reality of such old-fashioned notions as good, evil, nature, and truth.

But "weed out" and "crush" are mere metaphors. How exactly does the mass education project of the mad scientists and their political puppet-masters undo curiosity and independence? Adhering to the ancient wisdom of the true philosophers of education, the modern theorists know that the key lies not in verbal rules, lessons, or memorized slogans; those will be spoon-fed later, as reinforcement for the well-laid foundations. Rather, one must begin by educating the feelings—fostering, or in this case stifling, the natural emotional states that drive children to seek understanding and mastery over themselves and their circumstances.

Children must be taken from the home as early as possible, in order to prevent families from instilling habits of private curiosity and enthusiasm for knowledge that would be difficult for the state to undo. (Hence today's constant push for "universal pre-school.") They must spend the bulk of their waking hours throughout their young lives within the government's educational environment, in order to minimize alternative influences. This environment, the primary spiritual force in every publicly educated child's life—whatever fairytales parents may wish to believe—is calibrated on every level to undermine the development of the child's understanding of himself as a separate entity capable of knowing his surroundings, projecting his imagination into the future, and contriving means of applying his growing

knowledge to his environment to achieve the goals he has projected.

Let us consider a few of the specific means of undermining natural development which may be found in all public school environments.

Where nature gives the child a basic need to begin recognizing the distinction between himself and his surroundings, in order to clarify his sense of being an individual living thing with a mind of his own, the mad scientists of public education lock him in a room full of children, with a teacher whose primary job is to make sure the children move as one, play as one, and study as one. Separating oneself from the group is discouraged. On the contrary, the conditions are designed to foster a desire for "belonging"—a most apt word, as it plainly designates the child's proper status within the progressive world: He "belongs" to his social group, which, in adult terms, means he is property of the collective. The primacy of the urge to "belong," in the sense of submitting, which is so essential to popular progressive psychology, runs counter to every earlier ideal of humanity—the brave hero, the founder, the adventurer, the explorer, the theoretical man, the innovative artist, the man of intransigent faith. Against all such archetypes, public education asks the child, "Why risk getting thrown in with the lions, when you could be part of the cheering crowd?"

Where his whole being cries out for mature exemplars of human behavior and understanding, for older children and especially for adults—in short, for evidence and models of his natural completion—public school gives him "peers," children his own age, as incomplete and ignorant as he is. Worse yet, the universality of this arrangement and its coercive social dynamic force-feed him the sense that this is as it should be, and that there is something wrong with children wanting to be with adults

who behave as adults—as opposed to public school teachers, who are trained to play to the child's sensibility, as though the purpose of childhood education were to learn *how to be a child*, rather than how to be an adult. ("Let kids be kids.")

Public education exaggerates democracy's innate weakness for novelty and youth into a virtual moral doctrine unto itself, with the progressive educational establishment increasingly inclined to stand with the children and childish young adults, pointing at and mocking the old folks with their hopelessly outdated calls for moderation, self-discipline, and rationality. The continual immersion in public school's alternative reality through one's formative years is difficult to overcome, and entrenches an immature, less than fully human sensibility (though nothing clear enough to be called a "belief"). Childlike "virtues"—moral dependency, blind trust of superiors, feelings and instinct over reason, protective togetherness over self-reliance—become immovably rooted in the soul of one who has been largely prevented from seeking natural alternatives and ideals.

Where nature gives him practical needs, concrete interests arising from his surroundings, and the urge to develop the knowledge required to meet those needs and pursue those interests, the progressive controllers knowingly drag him away from his real world by force, trapping him for years in an abstract simulacrum of "preparing" for reality, an artificial realm of learning *for* real life, rather than *from* real life. This abstraction from the everyday, lost in the stultifying maze of public school Pretend Land, kills his natural impulse to seek knowledge, by removing him from any normal sense of a practical need to know. That is one reason why children learn less and less, while spending more and more years in school. This is no paradox, but a simple matter of cause and effect. The further the mind is removed from personal experience of practical needs and "idle

curiosities," the less inclined it will be to try to grasp things. ("Grasping" is one of our most precise metaphors for learning; it emphasizes the essential role of active will, of rationally directed *desire*.) Ignorance, dependency, lack of intellectual initiative, and a dearth of simple human curiosity are the necessary results of raising children in abstraction from the world of natural needs and enthusiasms for their entire lives up to voting age. Is it any wonder that the products of such forced abstraction, when they *are* allowed to vote, consistently choose the candidates (of whichever party) who promise to take care of them and protect them from the daunting world of personal responsibility? They have rarely seen that world, and hence perceive it only as a threat to their comfort.

This thought-stunting abstraction of the soul from life and nature is intrinsic to the entire structure of public schooling, but let us take a moment to consider one of its most ubiquitous and representative instantiations: the bell. The school bell functions on a timer set to promote "regularity" (of what?) independently of the concerns or needs of any of the human beings it controls. Its defining purpose is to cut off each train of thought with arbitrary abruptness, ordering everyone in the school, adult and child alike, to start and stop thinking about the day's assigned problems at fixed, predetermined times, regardless of where anyone may be in his thought process, or what else he might be inclined to work on at that moment. Compare this to real-life thinking and problem-solving, and you will immediately see the pedagogic significance of the bell. In real life, when something captures our interest, we continue thinking about it until we have exhausted either the topic or our enthusiasm, or until some other pressing concern or interest temporarily distracts us from it. If you smell smoke in your house, you search for the source until you find it; no alarm clock orders you to think about something

else while that smoke remains a concern. If you are planning a vacation, no one arbitrarily stops you at the moment of booking your flight and forces you to run outside and play. If you *were* interrupted in such situations, even once, you would most likely be annoyed and unresponsive. In school, by contrast, a lifeless noise repeatedly and unceremoniously announces that the child must stop thinking about whatever he has been working on and suddenly begin thinking about something else instead, teaching him that nothing he learns at school is important enough to warrant continuing on with it uninterrupted—that is, teaching him not to see any practical purpose or benefit in continuous mental effort.

The emotional message this repeated and systematic derailing of thought delivers to a child's mind is simple: *None of these subjects really matter*. This conditions the child to regard learning as a lifeless chore, a burden, and a nuisance. Paradoxically, as a result of this conditioned identification of thought with boredom, the physical mechanism used to separate the mind from its natural functioning—that godforsaken bell—gradually becomes the child's dearest friend and most ardent hope, as it alone can save him from the daily monotony of the *pointless thinking* imposed on him by the adults in his life. Rather than feeling interrupted or disturbed by the bell, one learns to crave it as a means of escape. Escape from what? From the task of *learning*, which ought to be the child's greatest natural pleasure, but which, thanks to the abstraction from life imposed by school, has instead become odious to him, as palpably unimportant tasks tend to do. The school bell—nothing could represent more perfectly the twin purposes of public schooling: the retarding of intellectual development and the inculcation of moral submissiveness.

Where nature, to use Aristotelian language, fills the potential being with a craving for actuality, i.e., for the fully developed soul

of a rational and moral agent, public education deliberately dulls that craving, and ultimately smothers it, diverting him into blind alleys with collectivist social pressures, interminable boredom, meaningless competition for scores and ranks unrelated to real mental development, and a hundred distractions and amusements intended to heighten the most tyrannical of his emotional drives in detachment from any clear purposes or moral considerations. After spending the first quarter of his natural life—the years of his greatest intellectual growth potential and largest reserves of emotional fuel—in this thought-killing, character-thwarting environment, the normal child emerges exactly as he was intended to emerge: dependent upon the collective; incapable of complex reasoning about concrete human concerns (politics, morality); dismissive, cynical, and simple-minded regarding fundamental theoretical questions (God, freedom, immortality); ignorant of all previous human eras, ideas, and art; and incapable of conceiving of any principle or plan of living broader than this moment, or nobler than his ruling desires for physical gratification and an infant's notion of "security."

The greatest of the mad scientists and their acolytes throughout the world's education establishment have demonstrated that this forced retardation machinery may be realized with such a degree of comprehensiveness that only through an unusual combination of natural desire, lucky circumstances, and years of suffering as a fringe-dweller in the public school social apparatus, may a young person have any chance of withstanding the deadening effects of progressive schooling with much of his spirit intact. As for whether anyone may survive this spiritual thresher *completely* unscathed, my answer—based on experience, reflection, and observation of children from widely different backgrounds, including those I have taught myself—is a firm and unequivocal No.

One of the great successes of modern public education is that, being universal and compulsory, it virtually obliterates nature's counterexamples, thereby creating vastly reduced expectations and standards in the minds of even the most reasonable parents. It is now, remarkably, a project of theoretical speculation and historical research to discover what a normal human child, having been raised in the real world by his own family, and having learned how to function as an independent person by *being* one, might look like. That bizarre fact reveals the extent of our catastrophe, of the triumph of the totalitarian impulse over modern liberty, and of mankind's greatest shame.

We must now refine our mission and ask not merely how tyrannical aspirations have subverted education, but why these aspirations met a world so ill-prepared to resist them effectively. While a complete solution to this mystery may be impossible, the need for at least an outline of an answer demands that we take a detour in our inquiry into the mechanics of civilization's demise, and climb the misty peaks of late modern thought. For it is there that tyranny was at last unleashed from its post within our traditional moral order and set free to destroy the promise of modernity.

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PART TWO: FROM FREE WILL TO FREE LOVE

[T]he rulers' interest in the welfare of their own nation instead of in what is best for humanity, will make them, if they give money for the schools, wish to draw their plans. We have in this view an express statement of the points characteristic of the eighteenth-century individualistic cosmopolitanism. The full development of private personality is identified with the aims of humanity as a whole and with the idea of progress. In addition we have an explicit fear of the hampering influence of a state-conducted and state-regulated education upon the attainment of these ideas. But in less than two decades after this time, Kant's philosophical successors, Fichte and Hegel, elaborated the idea that the chief function of the state is educational; that in particular the regeneration of Germany is to be accomplished by an education carried on in the interests of the state, and that the private individual is of necessity an egoistic, irrational being, enslaved to his appetites and to circumstances unless he submits voluntarily to the educative discipline of state institutions and laws. In this spirit, Germany was the first country to undertake a public, universal, and compulsory system of education extending from the primary school through the university, and to submit to jealous state regulation and supervision all private educational enterprises.[1]

John Dewey

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[1] Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1916, reprinted 1930), 111-112.

Meet the *Real* Father of Modern Education

> *[Egerton] Ryerson from Canada, Horace Mann from Massachusetts, Sir [James] Kay Shuttleworth [sic] from England, besides many others, about this time paid visits to Prussia, and went home to recommend the adoption of much that they saw. These men were acute observers. They recognized that the Germans had learned something that was not generally known by other teachers. How are we to explain it? Had the German teachers by accident blundered upon better methods of teaching than were practised by other nations? Not so. The German methods were the natural result of the German philosophy.*[1]

i. Prussophilia

Public education is the modern world's single most subversive and tyrannical institution, not due to recent corruption, or slow deterioration, but *according to its original design*. If this statement still seems unnecessarily extreme, then perhaps you have not yet taken the first step toward understanding the history, sources, and seminal voices in the evolution of the totalitarian spirit's education model. Let us take that step together right now.

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[1] John Harold Putnam, *Egerton Ryerson and Education in Upper Canada* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1912), 115.

In 1834, J. Orville Taylor published his influential manifesto for the development of U.S. government-controlled schooling, *The District School*.[2] The book's preface was written by New York jurist John Duer, the son of Columbia University president William Duer. Duer lavishes praise on Taylor's detailed recommendations for what would evolve into American compulsory schooling, exhorting the reader to accept the premise that America must strive to live up to the educational standards attained in the compulsory schools instituted under the Prussian monarchy—a government, Duer asserts, "despotic in its form, but in its present administration most enlightened and paternal."[3] If it strikes you as odd that an early eighteenth century American jurist should be lauding the virtues of paternalistic despotism, it should. Further, and consistent with this sensibility, Duer contends that to achieve the standards of the Prussian schools, American education must be reined in with "regulations far more extensive than have yet been introduced,—a control far more enlightened and constant than has yet been exercised,—and fiscal aid far more ample than has yet been afforded."[4]

This "enlightened control" must focus particularly on the teachers, who, Duer asserts, must be "properly *trained*, and properly *examined*, and *watched*, and *controlled*, and, above all, properly *rewarded*."[5] (Duer's own emphasis.) That is, teachers must be trained, tested, carefully controlled, and mollified with material rewards by the government. To say the same thing another way, all parameters of purpose, teaching method, and

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[2] J. Orville Taylor, *The District School* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1834). Hereafter *TDS*. Available online at http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc2.ark:/13960/t89g5jm63;view=2up;seq=10.

[3] Ibid., iv.

[4] Ibid., v.

[5] Ibid. v.

curriculum must be strictly determined and monitored by the state, and the teachers must be compensated for the sacrifice of their judgment and initiative, i.e., of their minds. (Reread the first sentence of this paragraph if you still cannot understand why today's teachers, the most "educated" and "professionally trained" in the history of mankind, also seem to be, on the whole, the most incompetent, lazy, intellectually incurious, and pettily selfish in the history of mankind. That is what socialism does.) Needless to say, the unstated premise here is that government education experts will necessarily know best how to establish and meet the proper, universalizable goals of childhood education, and must therefore be granted full coercive authority to develop the "extensive regulations" required to meet those goals.

And what goals did Duer and Taylor have in mind? Duer's preface to Taylor's book ends with this: "All that has been done in Prussia, and is about to be done in France, may be done here, and neither the patriot, the philanthropist, nor the Christian can desire more."[6]

Two years later, in 1836, Taylor published another important book, *Digest of M. Victor Cousin's Report on the State of Public Instruction in Prussia*.[7] This was a synoptic version of the major work that had influenced Taylor's own theories in *The District School*, and that was having a similar effect among British compulsory schooling advocates, thanks to Sarah Austin's English translation and enthusiastic advocacy.[8] French intellectual Victor Cousin, a keen student of German idealism and a friend of

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[6] Ibid. viii.

[7] J. Orville Taylor, *Digest of M. Victor Cousin's Report on the State of Public Instruction in Prussia* (Albany: Packard and Benthuysen, 1936). Hereafter *Digest*.

[8] David Phillips, *The German Example: English Interest in Educational Provision in Germany Since 1800* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 35.

Hegel,[9] had presented his recommendations for public school development to the French government, in the form of a detailed study of, or rather paean to, the Prussian school system. Due to his thoroughness, his scholarly acumen, and his personal connections to some of the giants of German philosophy, his work became the go-to reference point for Western paternalists seeking to overturn traditional family- and church-based moral development in favor of state child-rearing.

As is typical when looking back to the early moments in the history of a devolutionary process, reading Cousin's study today, nearly two centuries after his work effectively torpedoed the Western liberal ship of state, is an exercise in imaginative paradigm-shifting. We must retrain our vision, through intellectual restorations of historical context, to perceive what is outrageous and tyrannical in Cousin's boring litany of arcane details about the Prussian schools. In other words, having now far exceeded all the controlling urges and authoritarian impositions espoused so soberly by the scholarly Cousin, we must not so much *read* his work as struggle to *experience its force* as his contemporaries must have experienced it, by peeling away the layers of subsequent societal deterioration to reveal what now appears all too commonplace as startling once more, to perceive the stone age of progressivism's advance as the cutting edge that it once was, and to feel his now quaintly schoolma'amish proposals as the radical thrust they would have represented in their time.

Hence it may be with initial bemusement that today's progressivism-overloaded reader encounters Cousin's enthusiastic praise of the near-perfections of the Prussian system's

[9] For a good summary of Cousin's relationship with Hegel, see Stephen Cowley's "Cousin and Hegel" (June 9, 2013), online at http://scottish-hegelian.blogspot.kr/2013/06/victor-cousin-and-hegel.html.

approach to centralized control, in which the Christian churches (particularly the Lutheran) are appealed to as allies in the dissemination of universal schooling, and allowed to pursue this education somewhat according to their own lights, though with the guiding hand of the central planners being applied judiciously to ensure that the proper aims of the system are being adhered to. Those aims, which of course include government-regulated teacher training, age-graded classes, a social utility-based vetting and ranking process, and the rest of the rudiments of public schooling, are neatly summarized in this charming statement of intent:

> We have abundant proof that the well-being of an individual, like that of a people, is nowise secured by extraordinary intellectual powers or very refined civilization. The true happiness of an individual, as of a people, is founded on strict morality, self-government, humility, and moderation; on the willing performance of all duties to God, his superiors, and his neighbors.[10]

Intellectual development may be given its due, but only once the child has been trained to submit to his duty. That is, the child's will is to be bent to the service of "God" and "his neighbors" without reference to any guiding intellectual principles or understanding apart from the need for obedience itself. What this means, in practice, is that submission to authority as such, rather than to truth, is to be the essence of moral training. In other words, "God" and "his neighbors" are convenient rhetorical bookends for the real focus of the child's moral duty: "his superiors." Cousin's use of the term "self-government" must be understood in this light; "self-government" and "moderation" here refer pri-

[10] Taylor, *Digest*, 39.

marily to the citizen's humility before his superiors, which is to say his deference to authority and his overriding willingness to keep to his proper place.

Cousin's hope in recommending the Prussian system to his own nation's leaders was to achieve in France the great dream of nineteenth century state schooling advocates everywhere, namely compulsoriness, i.e., the force of law to determine the manner of raising all children within and *for* the nation, rather than the mere provision of education for the poor, which is sometimes falsely cited today as the goal of the early education reformers. Toward this end, Cousin promoted an incrementalism which would exploit educational conditions *already existing* in France as an opportunity to introduce new laws making those very conditions mandatory. This might seem to be a superfluous and unjustified imposition of state coercion, since on his own account local municipalities and churches were already doing what was supposedly needed; but the superimposition of laws precisely in such areas is useful, as Cousin teaches his powerful readers, in that it will effectively but almost painlessly turn the legislative ratchet ever closer to the dream of universal compulsion schooling, which Cousin admits is not yet "rooted in the habits and the mind" of France.[11] For this reason, the primary school laws he recommends must be "provisional and not definitive law," and "must of necessity be re-constructed at the end of ten years."[12]

In other words, anything people are doing freely, but which seems consistent with the aspirations of compulsory schooling advocates, should immediately be made mandatory. Henceforward, the state will be able to claim this social function—originally achieved voluntarily by free men—as the product of its

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[11] Victor Cousin, *Report on the State of Instruction in Prussia*, translated by Sarah Austin (London: Effington Wilson, Royal Exchange, 1836), 112-114.
[12] Ibid., p. 112.

legislation, thereby entrenching the fallacious principle that government was always essential to any general provision of education, which in turn will strengthen the public case for further legislation.

This incrementalism—the common strategy of progressives up to the present day—provides the simple answer to those who seek to pooh-pooh claims that these "reformers" were driven by authoritarian impulses by arguing that the policies they actually implemented often seem so moderate compared to the degraded schools of today. Put simply, these reformers were seeking to revolutionize their societies from within, and therefore had no choice but to work within the accepted social structures and public opinion of their time. Deterioration is gradual; so is active destruction, when undertaken through non-violent means.

Horace Mann, "the Father of the Common School Movement," was one of many who sought to import the Prussian model to his nation. In practical fact, he was "merely" the first Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education (1837), established a version of universal Prussian schooling in his state,[13] and encouraged the coercive homogenization of teachers and textbooks [14] — achievements which might almost appear a step in the right direction to Americans, when seen from today's perspective of the national Common Core standards and the orchestrated breakdown of civil society by means of compulsory schooling. Looked at in the light of the world in which Mann operated, however, his practical achievements must be understood as having paved the way toward subsequent, more extreme cor-

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[13] M. Yvette Turner, "Age Grading," in Thomas C. Hunt, James C. Carper, Thomas J. Lasley II, C. Daniel Raisch, *Encyclopedia of Educational Reform and Dissent* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2010), 33.

[14] Massachusetts Board of Education, *Annual Report of the Board of Education* (Boston: Dutton and Wentworth, 1838) 10-12, 14-15.

ruptions of the purpose and methods of education. And it is important to note that many of the subsequent corruptions were in part products of Mann's early advocacy, though he was unable to achieve them fully all at once, due to the resistance of a citizenry that still valued its freedom: compulsory schooling conceived as a means to forced social reformation, and learning redefined as the coercive regimentation of the mind in preparation for a life of social submission.

"Few men," Mann wrote, "have battles to fight, or senates to persuade, or kingdoms to rule; but all have a spirit to be controlled, and to be brought into subjection to the social and divine law."[15] "Subjection to the social law" may be an acceptable goal as an expression of the aims of education in general. As a description of the aims of *government-mandated* schooling, only our lifelong universal habituation to state social manipulation could prevent us from seeing its dangerous implications.

Meanwhile, in Canada, a prominent Methodist minister and politician, Egerton Ryerson, led the movement for universal "free schools." He traveled Europe in search of examples of government schooling to bring to Canada, and also frequently cited the New York and Massachusetts systems—Taylor's and Mann's Prussia-inspired efforts—as desirable goals for Upper Canada (comprising most of what is now southern Ontario).[16] The major reforms he instigated during the 1840s included government-supervised teacher training facilities, government textbook

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[15] Horace Mann, *Third Annual Report of the Board of Education Together with the Third Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board* (Boston: Dutton and Wentworth, 1840), p. 35, 93-100.

[16] Putnam, *Egerton Ryerson*, 110ff. See also Ryerson's own first official report to government on his plans, Egerton Ryerson, *Report on a System of Public Elementary Instruction for Upper Canada* (Montreal: Lovell and Gibson, 1847). This report is comprised mainly of quotations from Mann, Cousin, Taylor, et al.

authorization and production, and of course the strengthening of the "free schools" movement itself.[17]

I have only noted a few examples to establish a pattern, although these examples represent some of the most influential education reformers in the histories of their respective nations. Others have developed more comprehensive accounts of the many players involved in this global dissemination of Prussia's educational philosophy.[18] The key point for our purposes is that the theme of emulating the methods, and matching the achievements, of the Prussian compulsory school system—the modern West's first—predominates throughout nineteenth century European and North American public school advocacy. The major players in the evolution of the early public schools toward fully regulated compulsory public education all studied the Prussian system—established in law during the mid-1700s but "perfected" in practice and principle in the aftermath of the Napoleonic occupation—and vehemently advocated its adoption at home. Running through the various iterations of this global advocacy of Prussian schooling, one notices a common proviso with which the praise of this system is almost invariably prefaced, as for example by Taylor: "Many parts of this system of public instruction are not adapted to the spirit of the American people, nor to their form of civil government. Yet from the results of this great experiment in giving the *whole people* that *kind* and *degree*

[17] Putnam (1912), 110-122.

[18] For the best outline of the details of this nineteenth century effective takeover of Western education by the original schoolma'amish busybodies, their self-serving philanthropic supporters, and their legislative enforcers—along with the warnings of their early critics, long forgotten voices in the wilderness, who saw where all of this was tending—I refer you to Gatto's *Underground History of American Education*.

of instruction which they need, some of the most useful and practical lessons may be obtained."[19]

"*Yet*...." This proviso, in all its variations, amounts to this: "The Prussian school model was developed under an authoritarian regime, by supporters and bureaucrats of that regime, and for the express purpose of subduing and homogenizing a population by forcing everyone through a uniform moral training system with the welfare of the state (i.e., the ruling class) as its ultimate aim—but there is no reason to fear that adopting such a system here at home should lead to any loss of freedom or entail any weakening of moral independence among our citizens."

I leave it to others to judge whether the international proponents of this view were cynical and disingenuous or merely disastrously naïve. It seems noteworthy, however, that the document which inspired so much of the general enthusiasm for the Prussian model throughout Europe, Britain, and North America, Cousin's *Report*, was, to put it politely, somewhat deceptive.

Though this may not be discussed in standard accounts of his *Report*, the systematic structure and administrative methods he claims to have observed in Prussia, and which form the basis of his recommendations for applying the same system in France, *never existed*. In a recent work on the Prussian influence on British education, David Phillips explains that what Cousin actually outlined was the contents of a proposed law that was never enacted; and yet Cousin—who would have to have known this, given his intimacy with Prussian intellectuals and his time spent observing Prussian schools themselves—explicitly and repeatedly portrayed these contents as established educational

[19] Taylor, *Digest*, 9. And just what *kind* and *degree* of education does a "whole people" need? Don't you worry about that; your government apparently knows the answer.

practice, even though his book was published many years after the draft bill he was describing had been shelved.[20]

Furthermore, Phillips observes that even in its own time "the renowned German educationist Adolf Diesterweg noted inaccuracies in Cousin's report and felt that he 'perceived only the brighter side of the German system.'"[21] This latter shortcoming, the rose-colored glasses worn when viewing the Prussian model, remained a consistent trend throughout subsequent compulsory school advocacy of the period. "Pollyanna" does not begin to describe the tone of Mann's, Taylor's, or Ryerson's accounts of daily life in the Prussian schools, for example. One word that *does* begin to describe their accounts, on the other hand, is "messianic." These men were on a sacred mission, as they saw it, to transform their societies in the name of Righteousness. In Mann's words:

> If ever there was a cause, if ever there can be a cause, worthy to be upheld by all the toil or sacrifice that the human heart can endure, it is the cause of education.... The common school is the greatest discovery ever made by man.[22]

Nothing would stand in their way—no law, no public sentiment, no personal humility, and certainly no peccadilloes about the dangers of adopting the methods and social structures of a despotic regime. Messianic men, caught in the fever of social change, are just the sort of men likely to "perceive only the brighter side of the German system." In other words, like Cousin,

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[20] Phillips, *The German Example*, 36.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Horace Mann, quoted in John Boli, *New Citizens for a New Society: The Institutional Origins of Mass Schooling in Sweden* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1989), 46.

they saw what they wished to see in Prussia, and only that. (As we shall see in a subsequent chapter, this "end justifies the means" school of nineteenth century educational messianism was child's play compared to what was coming in the twentieth.)

What exactly did all of this Prussophilia indicate? What did it entail for the growth of modern public education? The answers may be found through an examination of the Prussian model itself. But just as Taylor, Cousin, Ryerson, or any other reform-minded man, must be judged not only according to his practical accomplishments, which are always contingent upon many factors beyond his control, but also, and perhaps primarily, according to his stated intentions, so the Prussian schools as they existed in practice tell us only a partial story. (In this sense, Cousin's approach, though dishonest, was not entirely wrong.) The surest way to grasp the essence of the Prussian establishment at whose feet Western education reformers were groveling is to examine the man who, above all others, defined the *goals* and *spirit* of the post-occupation Prussian compulsory school apparatus. For the man in question was no busybody or intellectual lightweight with a bureaucratic powermonger's personal agenda. Rather, he was one of the most influential of all German philosophers, one of the major transitional figures in the development of German idealism, and the thinker most commonly and correctly associated with the nationalistic fervor for the German fatherland that has led that nation down the path to its ugliest excesses: Johann Gottlieb Fichte.

The chief forerunner of German idealism, Immanuel Kant, was almost a caricature of the oddball professor, with his strange habits, idiosyncratic self-discipline, and strict adherence to a routine in which deviations seem to have been perceived as cheating, while idealism's full bloom, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, was the prototype of the celebrity lecturer, a kind of

academic Paganini, composing works that he alone could play properly, demanding that all subsequent knowledge be sought through him, and that all previous ideas be understood as mere precursors to himself. Through all its developments, however, at the core of German idealism is its implicit rejection of the presupposition—the basis of most prior Western thought—that philosophy must reason from everyday experience to its underlying causes, in favor of the premise that philosophy must in effect *explain away* that experience, which the idealists accomplished first by cutting human reason off from the so-called "external world," and later by reducing that world to so much sawdust on the floor of the creative philosopher's workshop.

It is extremely noteworthy that this was history's first major philosophical movement to be conceived largely within and for the ivory tower. The development of idealism was essentially a discussion among professors, paid scholars, many of whom knew one another personally, and whose primary occupation was as university lecturers. This was something new. These thinkers were not simply men who philosophized. They were *professional* philosophers, theoretical salesmen if you will. Wowing the audience, overwhelming the world with dizzying flights of novelty, was part of their stock in trade. German idealism—a movement sprung from the problem produced by Kant's insuperable boundary separating human reason from the world "in itself," and resolved in Hegel's ingenious reduction of the world *to* himself—gave birth to the modern idea of the intellectual who not only fails to explain life as we experience it, but proudly proclaims himself to be above such naïve concerns as compatibility with experience, preferring instead to be its *creator* or *regulator*.

George Santayana summarizes the movement similarly:

> German Idealism, when we study it as a product of its own age and country, is a most engaging phenomenon; it is full of afflatus, sweep, and deep searchings of the heart; but it is essentially romantic and egotistical, and all in it that is not soliloquy is mere system-making and sophistry. Therefore when it is taught by unromantic people *ex cathedra*, in stentorian tones, and represented as the rational foundation of science and religion, with neither of which it has any honest sympathy, it becomes positively odious—one of the worst impostures and blights to which a youthful imagination could be subjected.[23]

One great social effect of this world-changing philosophical movement was that it engendered the peculiar modern subspecies that we might call "experts without portfolio," men whose claim to the non-academic public's ear is based on little more than their socially respected position as professional intellectuals and their generally acknowledged (and frequently self-proclaimed) brilliance, and who are therefore permitted to influence practical societal decision-making processes without offering a justification of their proposals grounded in practical reality, or tested against their human implications. By sheer dint of their audacity in claiming to have uncovered ultimate truths of which no previous thinkers—let alone ordinary Germans—had even begun to conceive, the idealists struck (and still strike) intellectual terror and awe into the hearts of otherwise reasonable human beings. From their lofty perch, they have effectively ruled the academy—and hence, in most essential ways, the modern world—for two hundred years.

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[23] George Santayana, *Winds of Doctrine: Studies in Contemporary Opinion* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 110-111.

No such public intellectual has ever cashed in his "great thinker" chips in the name of a specific practical outcome more effectively than Fichte, the most influential idealist philosopher spanning the historical moment between Kant, his teacher, and Hegel, his spiritual offspring. Part soothsayer, part metaphysical poet, part nationalist rabble-rouser, Fichte retrenched Kantianism as a specifically German movement, in opposition to Kant's own instinct for cosmopolitanism. In the process, he also reconfigured idealist social policy, dispensing with the one-world musings of Kant's *Perpetual Peace* in deference to authoritarian manipulation of the population in the name of creating a national collectivist dream world. Where his teacher had enjoined men to treat others as ends in themselves, and never as means to one's own ends, Fichte sought to dissolve all men, and all individual ends, into the nation, such that the collective itself would be the only end, and all men the mere means. Such was the force of his rhetoric along these lines that the late eighteenth century liberal ripples within German intellectual life were quickly swept away in a wave of nationalistic statism.

Case in point: Wilhelm von Humboldt—thinker, diplomat, man of letters, and founder of the University of Berlin (1810), which became the spiritual home of German idealism. Humboldt won notice and praise from John Stuart Mill as an advocate of liberty. His book, *The Sphere and Duties of Government*[24]—written in 1791, but only published posthumously in 1852—seeks to define the terms upon which the government may properly claim a role in the life of a people. This work includes an examination of the case for a national education system. Considering the prospects for modern spiritual development, and whether it requires any kind of state-directed moral training, he argues:

[24] Wilhelm von Humboldt, *The Sphere and Duties of Government*, translated by Joseph Coulthard (London, John Chapman, 1854).

> [M]en have now arrived at a far higher pitch of civilization, beyond which it seems they cannot aspire to still loftier heights save through the development of individuals; and hence it is to be inferred that all institutions which act in any way to obstruct or thwart this development, and compress men together into vast uniform masses, are now far more hurtful than in earlier ages of the world.[25]

To "compress men together into vast uniform masses" is about as pithy a description of the nature of government education as can be conceived. To those among his German readers who suppose that national education is the only way to ensure the desirable harmony of interests between the private man and his sense of citizenship, Humboldt objects:

> The happiest result must follow, it is true, when the relations of man and citizen coincide as far as possible but this coincidence is only to be realized when those of the citizen presuppose so few distinct peculiarities that the man may preserve his natural form without any sacrifice [of self to state]; and it is to the expediency of securing this perfect harmony between the requirements of man and citizen that all the ideas I have in view in this inquiry directly converge. For, although the immediately hurtful consequences of such a misrelation as that to which we have referred would be removed when the citizens of a State were expressly trained up with a view to their political character, still the very object would be sacrificed which the association of human beings in a community was designed to secure. Whence I conclude, that the freest development of human nature, directed as little as

[25] Ibid., 65.

> possible to ulterior civil relations, should always be regarded as paramount in importance with respect to the culture of man in society. He who has been thus freely developed should then attach himself to the State.[26]

In other words, coercive state indoctrination undermines the essence of citizenship—voluntary association for the improvement of life for all—and is therefore self-contradictory. Strange as it may be to our ears to hear a prominent academic and education policy expert arguing against the concept of state-directed schooling, such was the nature of modern intellectual debate before the academy demeaned itself as the handmaiden of progressive authoritarianism. Humboldt punctuates his case with a clear and unequivocal statement. Responding to the argument that a national education system is needed to strengthen the institutions of society, he notes, on the contrary, that only the developed "energies" of individual men could hope to overcome such a poor social institution as a national education system, and concludes:

> For how extraordinary must those efforts be which were adequate to maintain and exalt those energies, when even from the period of youth they were bound down and enfeebled by such oppressive fetters! Now all systems of national education, inasmuch as they afford room for the manifestation of a governmental spirit, tend to impose a definite form on civic development, and therefore to repress those vital energies of the nation.[27]

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[26] Ibid., 66-7.
[27] Ibid., 67.

That is, if the improvement of modern society requires individual men of advanced spiritual development, and if such men can only survive a national education system through a monumental battle to preserve their vital energies against governmental fetters, it follows that state education is directly harmful to the only good which would have justified it, namely the strengthening of society.

We must note two weaknesses in Humboldt's defense of educational freedom, however. First, he leaves open, at least in theory, the possibility of a national education system that does *not* "afford room for the manifestation of a governmental spirit." In other words, his concern is primarily that no particular monarchical regime be granted direct control of the curriculum; a system of government education which somehow kept the particularities of this or that ruling faction at arm's length would apparently be less repugnant to him, although he never explains how a monolithic system maintained under *any* broad coercive authority—no matter how theoretically detached from the rulers per se—would be immune to the corruptive effects he describes.

Secondly, his argument, though offered with passion, is ultimately utilitarian, as it emphasizes the self-defeating nature of national education programs, rather than their unjust oppressiveness as such. The utilitarian mind is always open to new considerations, however, which can transform yesterday's ineffective notions into tomorrow's necessary reforms—everything depends on judgments of social usefulness, rather than inviolable principle. So it was to be, unfortunately, with Wilhelm von Humboldt. (As with his admirer Mill, who died a socialist.) Put simply, Humboldt was finally persuaded, contrary to his earlier liberalism (in the classical sense), that the compression of men into vast uniform masses was more socially beneficial than the freedom of individuals to develop their energies toward the

betterment of civilization. Civilization did not need to reach for loftier heights, after all, as much as it needed uniformity.

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ii. Such Oppressive Fetters

> From a doctorate exam.—"*What is the task of all higher education?"—To turn man into a machine.—"By what means?"—He has to learn how to feel bored.—"How is that achieved?"—Through the concept of duty.—"Who is his model?"—The philologist: he teaches how to* grind.—"*Who is the perfect man?"—The civil servant.—"Which philosophy provides the best formula for the civil servant?"—Kant's: the civil servant as thing in itself set as judge over the civil servant as appearance.*[28]
>
> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

Old libertarians still shake their heads at Alan Greenspan, the laissez-faire economist, advocate of returning to the gold standard, and harsh critic of the concept of central banks, who finally spent almost two decades as Chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve. What happens in the heart of a man who is distrustful of centralized authority, when he himself is asked by his compatriots to assume that authority? Does he extend his principled distrust to himself, or does he exempt himself from his own objections on the grounds that he, of course, is honorably intentioned?

In 1809, Humboldt was appointed by the Prussian Ministry of the Interior as head of culture and education.[29] In this role, he

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[28] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, Translated by R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), "Expeditions" 29. (Hereafter *TI*.)

[29] "Wilhelm von Humboldt" (UNESCO: International Bureau of Education, 2000), 5, hereafter *Humboldt*. Available online at http://www.ibe.unesco.org/publications/ThinkersPdf/humbolde.PDF.

undertook to establish "schools to be paid for by the nation alone."[30] And when, only eighteen months later, he left his position due to personal conflicts within the ministry, he wrote to his wife:

> The internal administration of a country is beyond doubt far more important overall than its external relations; but the education of a nation over which I presided and which went ahead successfully under my administration is of incomparably greater importance still.... I had drawn up a general plan which covered everything from the smallest school to the university and in which all the component parts fitted together....[31]

A comprehensive national education program, with every element "fitted together" under centralized state control, from the man who had earlier described such a system as "oppressive fetters." What had happened to bring about such a radical change? In short, two things had happened: Jena and Fichte.

Napoleon's easy victory over the Prussian army in the battles of Jena and Auerstedt in October, 1806, resulting in the occupation of much of Prussia and the exile of the ruling class from Berlin, was a humiliating moment for a Prussian political and intellectual elite that regarded itself as the vanguard of modern civilization.[32] Suddenly, the academics were engaged in profound soul-searching: What had gone wrong? How could they foster the national pride and unity that would allow Prussia, and Germany in general, to rise again from this shame?

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[30] Ibid., 6.

[31] Ibid., 7.

[32] Cf. H.W. Koch, *A History of Prussia* (first published by Allison Wesley Longman Limited, 1978, sixth impression New York: Routledge, 1996), 163ff.

Of course, such moments of reckoning, in which fear and despair dominate, are a perfect window of opportunity for clever thinkers with an authoritarian inclination and agenda. Their diagnosis of a need for fundamental social renewal receives its most sympathetic hearing in a moment of defeat, and their grand designs for achieving such renewal are most likely to be embraced without sober reflection by a people in crisis.

Enter Fichte, an exemplary case of a "public intellectual," who sought to rally the German *Volk* around a new, stronger sense of unity and collective will in the face of disarray. In a series of polemical speeches delivered during 1807-8, collectively published as *Addresses to the German Nation*,[33] Fichte detailed his plan for national revival, or rather "salvation,"[34] consisting in the creation of "an entirely new self, which may have existed before perhaps in individuals as an exception, but never as a universal and national self, and in the education of the nation, whose former life has died out and become the supplement of an alien life, to a completely new life...."[35] The primary requirement of this "new self" was that it must, unlike the old, be related to the state not on the basis of "fear and hope"—that is, as an individual human being for whom the state is seen as a protector or guarantor of his interests—but rather as a self which is "conscious of itself only as part of the whole and can endure itself only when the whole is pleasing."[36] Note the word "only" in that sentence.

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[33] Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Addresses to the German Nation*, translated by R.F. Jones & G.H. Turnbull (Chicago and London: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1922), hereafter *Addresses*; citations from individual addresses will be cited as *Address*, accompanied by a specific address number. Full text available online at http://archive.org/stream/addressestothege00fichuoft#page/n9/mode/2up.

[34] *Address* 1.7, 12.

[35] *Address* 1.7, 13.

[36] *Address* 1.7, 12.

The new self is to recognize itself *only* as part of the whole, i.e., as *essentially* linked to the state. The "New Education," then, would be a set of proposals designed to achieve this aim of total submersion of the (former) individual human being into the state or collective will—proposals which laid the spiritual foundation for the updated Prussian school system that so captivated European and North American education reformers in subsequent decades.[37]

Humboldt, who had had some association with Fichte for years, now fell under his spell in Berlin. A striking indication of this is that an idiosyncratic education experimenter named Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, whose methods Humboldt had opposed, suddenly received Humboldt's "undivided support" as chief teaching methodologist for the new Prussian schools in 1809[38]—after Pestalozzi's work had been extolled by Fichte as consistent with the latter's radical theories of nationalist-idealist schooling. Humboldt may have been successful, as he claimed, in getting the administrative ball rolling on the new compulsory school system, but the societal impetus to do so, and the most profound intentions underlying the model, were sown within the Prussian political establishment and psyche primarily by Fichte.[39]

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[37] G.H. Turnbull, *Addresses*, Introduction xxi: "Nor is it possible here to do justice to [the *Addresses*'] tremendous effect on the development of education in Germany. Stein...became an ardent advocate of the reforms urged by Fichte, as the education schemes of his ministry testify."

[38] *Humboldt*, 5.

[39] G.H. Turnbull, *Addresses*, Introduction, xxi: "More important [than Fichte's influence on Stein] is the fact that the Addresses influenced Wilhelm von Humboldt, whose ideas and plans for German education were carried into effect in 1809 and 1810, and who selected Fichte to be Professor of Philosophy in the new University of Berlin in 1810."

All too often, critics of public schooling note this Prussian, or even Fichtean, influence without delving into exactly what would have made Fichte's model so appealing to the men who eagerly set about transporting it to the nations of the world. That it was compulsory and uniform would have been attractive on its face to bureaucratic minds bent on re-organizing society in their own image. But this is not enough to explain their profound and vehement devotion to the virtues of the specific form of compulsory schooling being instituted in Prussia. What underlay the system? What were the principles and aims that so attracted the world's universal schooling advocates? To answer these questions, it is necessary to examine Fichte's recommendations in detail, to understand his reasons for offering them, and to consider why they were so persuasive in rallying first a nation's, and then a civilization's, academic and political elite to attempt a radical new model of general education.

We must always remember that the reason compulsory education in our modern sense exists at all is because of the advocacy and political influence of the international admirers of the Prussian system. The degraded schools of today are specifically the degradation—or rather the fulfillment—of the early efforts to transpose the defining methods and aims of Fichte's dream to other nations. To overlook or diminish this fact as ancient history, and therefore of no importance in understanding today's schools, is to accept the conclusion of an argument without bothering to examine its premises. Furthermore, for those who assume that the truly subversive agenda of public education in a free society begins with John Dewey, a study of Fichte is most instructive; for it gradually becomes apparent that Dewey was a less original thinker on these matters than might be imagined—and than he wished to appear—and that his general principles regarding the purposes and methods

of educating children toward collectivist submission were merely Fichteanism tarted up with a cosmetic veneer of "democracy."

Thus we must turn to Fichte's influential *Addresses* in search of that heart of compulsory schooling which paternalistic Western reformers sought to transplant to their own nations, and which has long since been poisoning the bloodstream of modern civilization, perhaps fatally.

Let us begin with the Second Address, "The General Nature of the New Education," where Fichte offers the stark declaration of intent which might serve as a definitive synopsis of his theory:

> [T]he new education must be able surely and infallibly to mould and determine according to rules the real vital impulses and actions of its pupils.[40]

Addressing the likely objection that moral development depends on free will, and hence resists such authoritarian "moulding" and "determining," he responds that the acknowledgment of and deference to free will in the child is

> the first mistake of the old system and the clear confession of its impotence and futility. For, by confessing that after all its most powerful efforts the will still remains free, that is, hesitating undecided between good and evil, it confesses that it neither is able, nor wishes, nor longs to fashion the will.... On the other hand, the new education must consist essentially in this, *that it completely destroys freedom of will in the soil which it undertakes to cultivate*, and produces on the contrary

[40] *Address* 2, 13-14. [In all subsequent notes to this work, the first number represents the particular Address, and the next number(s) the paragraph(s) as numbered in this work.]

> strict necessity in the decisions of the will, the opposite being impossible.[41] (Emphasis added.)

So the essence of the new Prussian system, at least ideally, is the complete and universal destruction of free will. The first question we might ask is, how did the time-honored concept of free will fall into such disrepute as to be identifiable with the simple lack of firm moral character, which is how Fichte describes it here? The short answer might be "Lutheranism," but as Fichte's overall philosophy, while sometimes adopting an exoterically neo-Lutheran aspect, is hardly reducible to doctrinaire Protestantism of any kind, this answer seems an oversimplification. Furthermore, as a self-described Kantian, a certain conception of moral freedom is essential to his ethical thought, all neo-Lutheran posturing aside. Nevertheless, on his framing of the issue here, free will in a man simply indicates immorality, whereas a truly moral man has transcended freedom, and acts out of "strict necessity."

Here we have run smack into a seminal case of the progressive urge toward illogical universalization which I described in "The Standards Trap" in Part One. The notion of freedom of the will developed gradually in the wake of the classical, particularly Aristotelian, account of moral virtue as action springing from a disposition toward the moderate mean between excessive and deficient responses to circumstances involving choice. For example, courage as a state of character is the stable disposition to respond to threatening situations in a manner that displays neither excessive fear nor rashness, relative to the particular situation; but what the proper (i.e., courageous) response will be in a given situation cannot be determined in abstraction from the particular

[41] *Address* 2, 13-14.

context. "Stand and fight" may be the rational course of action in many situations; not necessarily so when you are alone in front of a thousand well-armed men, with three thousand of your own comrades due to arrive in ten minutes. Likewise, strategic retreat may be the best choice when faced with an overwhelming enemy and defending a worthless piece of land; not so when challenged for your dinner by a Chihuahua.

Thus, for most moral decisions in our lives—that is, decisions regarding the means of achieving the good—there can be no simple "rule" of behavior, as the correct course of action will be determined contextually. Indeed, this is precisely the reason individual moral character is essential. There are few universally applicable rules of behavior—the Ten Commandments just about sum them up, and even a few of those may admit of contextual interpretation—so a man must habituate the inclination to desire what is actually good in any context, i.e., the mean, as well as the reasoning ability to allow him to determine how best to realize it.

Free will is related to this contextual notion of virtue. We prove our virtue by making the best choices, for in most situations there is no universalizable rule defining the correct course of action. On this view, then, there can be no real virtue without free will, because it is only the freedom to choose that makes us moral agents at all, rather than machines. Machines, or in general those who act involuntarily, are blameless, as their "choice" is not their own.

Remember our earlier examples of illegitimate universalization, communism in political theory and standardization in education? This same problem was brought to the center of moral philosophy by Kant.

Free will, traditionally (and very broadly) understood, is the ability to choose a course of action in accordance with the faculty of practical reason. Hence moral freedom presupposes the capa-

city to reason about objects of desire. Irrational animals desire and act; humans desire, deliberate, and act. That is, we become properly human, and therefore virtuous, when reason in conjunction with established character, rather than instinctive bodily urge, determines our action. But this is, by necessity, reason applied to the individual, practical experience of humans, which means to a particular context. Freely willed action, in other words, is basically the voluntary application of rational principle to the circumstances of a particular situation, with the aim of securing the apparent good; and moral virtue as a permanent state of character is the emotional disposition to choose the *real* good, as defined relative to the circumstances. Therefore, we may say that the moral person is one whose actions are the voluntary products of rational choice directed by sound character responding to particular circumstances.

Kant, and following him Fichte, sought to eliminate individual context and feeling from morality proper by invoking reason generically, which is to say in abstraction from personal circumstances, just as communists seek to universalize the principle "all things in common" in abstraction from its natural qualifying context—"among friends."

Why? There was a strain of eighteenth century Enlightenment thought that was becoming concerned about the very possibility of moral choice in the cause-effect material world of modern physics.[42] Must we not, some wondered, view humans as entirely a part of that mechanistic world, and therefore unfree? And if this is so, then is all our moral philosophy built on mere appearances, which is to say on illusion?

Kant's strategy to overcome this perceived collapse of the moral realm was to isolate the desires, or more generally self-

[42] Cf. Frederick Copleston, S.J., *A History of Philosophy IV: Descartes to Leibniz* (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1958), 13-14.

interest, as being merely our way of experiencing and describing our participation in the mechanistic natural order. Actions motivated by interest, on this view, are consistent with the cause-effect mechanism of nature; they are how we perceive ourselves as mere parts of nature, and therefore as unfree. Kant's solution was that only "disinterested reason" could salvage human dignity in the face of the mechanistic nature of physics. For he believed it was only by regulating our will in abstraction from any individuating context—which means independently of our desires or interests in the situation—and therefore conforming to a law of reason outside of space and time, that we might understand ourselves as existing beyond that world of sense experience to which Newton's mechanistic laws always apply. This disinterested moral motivation, then, would be the only means by which we might view ourselves as free.[43]

Kant's argument constituted a radical break in the history of moral philosophy, as he had leapt from the traditional emphasis on the habituation of virtuous character in the soul—that is, educating the passions—to a new focus on following generic rules regardless of context. In effect, this meant shifting the locus of ethics from the particular to the universal.

The fallout of this moral revolution, however, was far graver than Kant had likely foreseen. Practical wisdom and properly developed emotional responses—the essence of classical morality—are precisely what Kant was rejecting. On the classical view, we must perfect ourselves in habit and practical reasoning in order to be virtuous, and we must be virtuous *in order to be happy*. Hence moral philosophy pursued in the traditional way is, as the ancients taught us, the examination of the meaning of, and means to, happiness. Happiness is the ultimate moral motivation.

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[43] Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, translated by Lewis White Beck (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), v, 43, pp. 153-4.

On Kant's view, by contrast, the individual agent's desire to be happy, which is to say his self-interest, confines him to his mere participation in mechanistic nature, and hence cannot be a moral (i.e., free) motive. Kant therefore concludes that in moral reasoning we must leave our desire for happiness aside as essentially non-moral. The moral man is he whose actions are regulated by disinterested reasoning, which means according to universalizable maxims, without regard for any interest in his own personal well-being.

Kant himself does not condemn personal happiness as an immoral concern, but merely bars it from the realm of moral motivation. In one of the most convoluted and cryptic elements of his practical philosophy, he tries to salvage a place for happiness as a human goal, albeit only a natural, which is to say *non-moral*, goal. In this effort, he shows himself to be less radically disconnected from human experience and history than his successors. He does not wish to declare that all previous men were essentially immoral; he does, however, wish to claim that their motives for action were *a*moral. Happiness, which Kant often conflates with pleasure, may, he argues, include the delight we experience when we observe ourselves acting in accordance with the universal moral law. We must arrive at universalizable moral maxims without reference to our individual well-being, but the action that instantiates a moral maxim (e.g., telling the truth) returns us to the world of empirical experience, as it were, and may therefore be a source of pleasure.[44] ("I acted well.") That is, happiness may be a *result* of acting morally, but it may never be a

[44] Cf. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, translated by James Creed Meredith (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), section 5:49.

motive for so acting, for this would violate Kant's defining but precarious conception of moral freedom as disinterestedness.[45]

Through all the contortions, then, the basic thrust of Kant's break with all previous moral theories lies in his declaration that the moral man, as such, never considers his own interest in a situation, or what might be "good for him" in the sense of being conducive to his happiness. This declaration, however, provoked Kant's successors to a blunter position, dismissing the desire to be happy as selfishness, and the natural desire for self-preservation and self-perpetuation as materialism. This stronger position would categorize all pre-Kantian moral theories as mere rationalizations of selfishness and materialism. Consequently, since seeking personal happiness through living well according to our nature as rational animals would now be considered immoral, true morality would henceforth be indistinguishable from *the renunciation of human nature*, which is to say self-immolation.

It is neither difficult to see how the Kantian model of morality lends itself to being reconfigured as the support structure of authoritarianism, nor surprising that this is exactly the use to which it was put by the most political and influential of the first generation Kantians.

Two extremely important results follow from this redefinition of morality as disinterested obedience to "the moral law" without regard for one's own happiness, rather than (as had previously been believed) as the ability to delineate and choose the good in any context with a view to *attaining* happiness.

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[45] Cf. Allen Wood, "Kant vs. Eudaimonism" in Predrag Cicovacki (ed.), *Kant's Legacy: Essays Dedicated to Lewis White Beck* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2000), for an excellent summary of the quagmire, and a sympathetic attempt to negotiate it. Essay available online in pre-publication form at http://web.stanford.edu/~allenw/recentpapers.htm.

First, the separation of moral freedom from "interest" leaves the moral value of the individual human will—which Kant tries to salvage with his notion of humanity as a "kingdom of ends"—on very shaky ground. Kant's "disinterested" compulsion to "act only in accordance with that maxim which can be willed to be a universal law" is a convenient abstraction which, however, may seem more reasonable than it really is. In brief, the underlying motive of Kant's project, namely his wish to preserve freedom by showing how moral reasoning can and must be context-free and "universal," in the sense of being detached from the interests of the individual agent, is suspect in the extreme, and perhaps inapplicable in practice. Is "I must deny my interest and act solely according to universalizable duty" a logically coherent statement? *Why* must you do this? Try to answer fully without recourse to self-interest.

The second result follows from and punctuates the first. Kantianism makes the moral world "objective" in one key sense, namely that which behavior shall count as the good is determinable universally, *a priori*, and *from the outside*. Hence we may in principle know exactly what everyone should do; all that is wanted, then, is the expert with a reliable method of indoctrinating them all to do it. Creating obedient machines does not, on this view, eliminate morality, but rather solidifies it. This is why Fichte identifies free will as the enemy of moral education right at the outset. The obedient machine is the *goal*; it is his idea of the good man. Voluntarism, the precondition of virtue-based ethics, is essentially irrelevant to duty-based ethics, once one dispenses with the old self-contradictory hang-ups about preserving individual dignity.

In practical terms, Fichte's mature (fully refurbished) Kantianism may therefore be regarded as a logical improvement. He sees that the quest for a new notion of individual freedom

which at the same time denies the individual and his interests is a fool's errand. The new morality must finally jettison all concern with preserving the "freedom" of obedience to the moral law, in favor of emphasizing the duty to obey. After all, if the abstract moral law, rather than personal virtue, is the good, and if the self-interested motive of personal happiness is to be dismissed from the realm of legitimate moral deliberation, then leaving men "free" to obey or disobey the moral law—which is all traditional free will *can* mean for a Kantian, having rejected context-based morality—serves no rational purpose. The moral good no longer exists *for* individuals, but *in spite of* them. Hence, Fichte's view is quite right in its way: The consistent Kantian (as Fichte saw himself) must finally reject the now contradictory rhetoric of free will in favor of the unfree—that is, perfectly trained—will. To put it in a manner more sympathetic to the idealist sensibility Fichte represents, we might say that political freedom and moral freedom (in the idealist sense) are essentially incompatible, and hence that if moral freedom is one's political goal, then tyranny is the road to freedom.

Moral education thus becomes indistinguishable from indoctrination, and as indoctrinating a portion of the population is obviously less socially effective than indoctrinating all of it, the best moral education program will be compulsory. In other words, the only effective way to manifest this morality of self-immolation in practical life is through politics, where the denial of self-interest out of "duty" becomes devotion to the collective, and where the collective, in turn, must be defined in terms of a concrete practical entity toward which to focus men's moral energies: the state.

Fichte proceeds to set the stage for his new moral indoctrination by outlining what is wrong with all previous education:

> [M]an can will only what he loves.... Hitherto, in its education of the social man the art of the State assumed, as a sure and infallible principle, that everyone loves and wills his own material welfare. To this natural love it artificially linked, by means of the motives of fear and hope, that good will which it desired, namely, interest in the common weal. Anyone who has become outwardly a harmless or even useful citizen as a result of such a system of education remains, nevertheless, inwardly a bad man; for badness consists essentially in loving solely one's own material welfare and in being influenced only by the motives of fear and hope for that welfare, whether in the present or in some future life.[46]

In the past, people raised their children to perceive their own lives, which they naturally love, as also encompassing the well-being of their community. Fichte reinterprets this traditional ladder of moral development as a mere "artificial" mimicry of true moral education, which in his view ought to begin not by assuming natural self-love, but by *abolishing* it. His condemnation of traditional morality, which had been grounded in human nature and experience, as a kind of trick or hypocrisy, is typical of the post-Kantian filter through which German philosophy inverted Western man's perception of his own heritage, a misrepresentation which has perpetuated its distorting effects to the present day, with catastrophic results. Every variant of political progressivism begins, explicitly or otherwise, with the idealist moral premise that rooting civic concern in self-concern is illegitimate, because self-concern itself is (supposedly) immoral.

(The early modern thinkers would, according to their character, work themselves into a lather here refuting this anti-

[46] *Address* 2, 16.

human premise; the ancients, according to theirs, would simply laugh at it. And yet, due to the coercive global dissemination of these Prussian distortions, it has become the universal moral premise of our age. There is a synopsis of the decline of the West in there, for anyone who wishes to pursue it.)

You will notice in the above passage that Fichte merely presupposes that a citizen's devotion to the state, and his usefulness to it, is identical with the "good will." He engages in a serious equivocation, using the moral good and the socially useful interchangeably. The good man sacrifices himself to the state; the "bad man" considers his own "material welfare." No argument is offered for this—it is taken as given. And by "material welfare," you must not imagine we are merely speaking of petty materialism or greed (i.e., of excess or defect, in the classical moral vernacular). Fichte speaks here of the bad man's concern for his material welfare "in some future life." Thus, even belief in some form of afterlife or immortality constitutes concern for one's material welfare. In other words, Fichte is designating nothing less than the desires for self-preservation, self-realization, and a glimpse of eternity—the chief motives of human nature as this was understood prior to Kant—as evidence of immorality. It is immoral to seek one's own survival, perpetuation, and salvation. In such a philosophical climate, does individual liberty stand a chance in the long run?

The collectivist presupposition of his argument is given further emphasis by his subsequent observation that "material love of self cannot be turned to our advantage in any way."[47] Why is "our advantage" (i.e., the good of the collective) the paramount moral concern? Simply because "the good" has been stipulated to mean submission to the state. The perspective of the state—"our

[47] Ibid.

advantage"—is intrinsically moral; that of the individual, intrinsically immoral.

It is one thing, however, to reject all previous methods of education, but quite another to propose an alternative. How is this new moral education in self-loathing to proceed? Here we arrive at the most important and, if you will allow the anachronism, Deweyesque element of Fichte's plans. The precise connection between early German idealism and today's illiterate high school graduates, thirty-year-old dependents, and elementary school transgender bathrooms may not be obvious, but it is intimate. The nineteenth century German elite's impulse to reject history and human nature in the names of progress and collectivism may be traced right into today's teaching methods and textbooks. And the source of that long downward arc may be found right here, in Fichte's Second Address. To ignore this is to fail to see how we got where we are, and thus to misunderstand the profound nature of our challenge, and what must be done to overcome it.

The centerpiece of Fichte's conception of childhood education is a concerted effort to detach the child from his physical reality, and indeed from the sensory world itself, as far as possible. This, he maintains, is essential to the whole molding process, because if the child is allowed to begin perceiving himself as an individual being standing in definite relations to his surroundings, then the ultimate moral goal (complete identification with and devotion to the collective) is compromised. The child must unlearn his *natural* awareness of himself as a separate entity as quickly as possible. This detachment of the child from himself is to be achieved in several ways, some of them highly speculative, others quite practical, and all of them relevant to today's educational norms.

The state's most important weapon in this subordination process is pleasure. A child naturally takes pleasure in the discovery of his surroundings. (This is the base meaning of the opening sentence of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: "All men by nature desire to know.") This natural pleasure, therefore, must be supplanted in favor of a new pleasure which can divert the mind from its traditional path of discovery, the path rooted in the individuating circumstances of real life.

Fichte turns for this soul-diverting pleasure to imagination, by which he ultimately means the capacity to "create spontaneously" ideals "which are independent of reality and not copies of it, but rather its prototypes."[48] In other words, he intends to displace the pleasures of understanding with those of creation, the natural joy of becoming fully human with the artificial joy of playing god.

In the initial stage of reorienting education away from the pursuit of understanding and toward imagination, the hope is to provoke children to produce images which give pleasure as products of active creation, rather than as "passive" discoveries of reality, and which inspire a desire to realize the creations in the external world.[49] Fichte intends that this activity of guided creation should eventually lead the child to imagine the laws of mental activity itself, such that he learns the universal conditions of all possible experience without direct reference to the world of sense which is conditioned by these universal laws. To clarify: According to Kantianism, the world as we experience it is produced by the mind's own innate categories. Learning, therefore, which begins at the level of experience, can produce only "knowledge" of the world as conditioned by our own mental activity. Fichte translates this view into a theory of education by

[48] *Address* 2, 17.
[49] *Address* 2, 17.

suggesting that an early step in learning must be the creative discovery of the pre-experiential laws of mental activity. In other words, rather than learning in the normal (natural) direction, from particulars to universals, he proposes to begin with the universal, thereby circumventing any deference to sense experience at any stage of learning.

However, it is important to emphasize, as Fichte himself does, that this coerced, unnatural flight from real experience into the imaginary world of *a priori* creation is not an end in itself. Rather, its purpose in education is to condition the young mind to disregard the material, practical, and sensory—that is, the world of individual existence—in preference for creative wish fulfillment at the universal and collective level.

> This method of mental training is...the immediate preparation for the moral; it completely destroys the root of immorality by never allowing sensuous enjoyment to become the motive. Formerly, that was the first motive to be stimulated and developed, because it was believed that otherwise the pupil could not be influenced or controlled at all.[50]

Remember that by such phrases as "sensuous enjoyment," Fichte merely means the pleasure we naturally take in noting our surroundings, in observing our relation to things, and especially in gaining knowledge as a means to our own well-being. On the traditional learning path, this pleasure in knowledge as a means may finally give way to pleasure in knowledge for its own sake. That is, the path to wisdom, in which our individual concerns are left somewhat behind, is rooted in our natural sense of individual existence and desire for happiness. (This, for example, is why Plato identifies the highest intelligible being as "the Good"—it is

[50] *Address* 2, 22.

the final step in an educational continuum that begins in the immediate pleasure of fulfilling earthly, practical interests.) In Fichte's view, by contrast, individual existence and the desire for well-being (happiness) are to be undermined at the very beginning of life, as a precondition for molding the child into a purely disinterested servant of the *state's* existence and well-being.

Of course, no real education system ever did or could proceed consistently according to this theoretical beginning. If you have a hard time picturing a six-year-old spontaneously creating *a priori* universal laws, let alone "imagining" the categories of the understanding, you are not alone. What is important here, however—and this *has* proved to be quite applicable in practice—is the basic principle of appealing to imagination as an alternative source of pleasure to trump reality, and to fantasies of "creativity" to short-circuit the desire for knowledge which, left to follow its natural course, roots the child's mind firmly in its individual existence, and fosters a pleasure that imaginary creation can never produce: the pleasure of practical efficacy.

Premature efficacy must be avoided, both in the child's psyche and in reality. Fichte, like his spiritual children from Lenin to Dewey to Mao, to every advocate of public school "socialization" today, is emphatic on this point. The child must not be permitted to experience himself as a functioning, organic whole existing independently of the schooling process. This mental conditioning is to be achieved by ensuring that the child remains "continuously and completely" under the state's influence, and is "separated altogether from the community," i.e., from his family.[51] If you doubt that Fichte could have intended this separation of the child's mind from its natural course of

[51] *Address* 2, 23.

development as radically as I am portraying it, here is Fichte's own summary of his program's moral aims:

> [The child] must not even hear that our vital impulses and actions can be directed towards our maintenance and welfare, nor that we may learn for that reason, nor that learning may be of some use for that purpose.[52]

In other words, the child must be fully habituated to serving the state's needs before he is even allowed to notice that he might have had needs of his own.

Imagination activated without meaningful connection to the sensible world, the world in which the child actually has to learn to live; indoctrination deliberately conducted apart from, or over the heads of, the intimates who ought to form the child's first and most natural community; "knowledge" presented in abstract form, without any discernible real world context or relation to practical needs or goals; the pleasures of an imaginary world, and of dreams of creation, that subvert the natural pleasures of mastering one's practical surroundings. These are the Fichtean means that have been retained, broadened, and adapted to account for contingencies of politics and national temperament, straight through to the compulsory schools of our day.

"The Fichtean means to what?" one might ask. Fichte answers this question forcefully, if not exactly clearly, in his Third Address. The simple answer: a new religion.

All previous religion, he insists, by emphasizing the private spiritual life and individual salvation, merely exploited the divine as an excuse for "self-seeking."[53]

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[52] *Address* 2, 23.
[53] *Address* 3, 29.

> Such a religion, which was obviously a servant of selfishness, shall indeed be borne to the grave along with the past age. In the new era eternity does not dawn first on yon side of the grave, but comes into the midst of the present life; while self-seeking is dismissed from serving and from ruling, and departs, taking its servants with it.[54]

The starting point of establishing this new religion through education, then, is to condemn all previous religious belief as a mere rationalization for "selfishness." Again, we are reminded that German idealism's rejection of the past is intended to be comprehensive. Seeking personal happiness, regardless of the terms or methods, is now inherently immoral. Religion is thus caught up in the wide net with which Fichte seeks to remove all evidence of human nature and its consubstantial impulses and goals, as these had been experienced, theorized about, and pursued throughout the prior history of civilization.

> Education to true religion is, therefore, the final task of the new education. Whether in the creation of the necessary image of the supersensuous world-order the pupil has really acted spontaneously, and whether the image created is absolutely correct and thoroughly clear and intelligible, education can easily judge in the same way as in the case of other objects of knowledge, for that, too, is in the domain of knowledge.[55]

Again, imagination, acting "spontaneously"—Fichte's euphemism for the carefully manufactured conditions of isolation from practical reality that he seeks to impose on children by force—is supposed to create images that contain genuine knowledge, this

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[54] *Address* 3, 29.
[55] *Address* 3, 29.

time of the "supersensuous world-order," i.e., the divine. Before we turn to the question of what this true religion's divine order consists in (as if you couldn't guess by now), it will be useful to follow Fichte's explanation of how the educational overseers may discern whether the pupil's religious knowledge is genuine, and as such completely devoid of selfish underpinnings.

The problem, as Fichte notes, is how the educator can be sure that this knowledge is not merely "dead and cold,"[56] but that it will actually be the pure motive of the student's life in the real world upon release from his imagination-indoctrination center. For as long as school life continues, all students will be held captive in a world without alternative motives and influences, so that there will, in principle, be no true tests of the success of a child's mental training until he leaves school.[57]

Fichte's solution to this problem is most revealing—or, to state this more correctly, it gives the game away. The only assurance of success in this education, he informs us, is the certainty that it has been designed to achieve "clearness" of understanding in perfect union with "purity" of will,[58] so that the pupil learns simultaneously to will, which is to say love, what he knows—that is, to love the true world he has "learned" through spontaneous creation.

To differentiate this true understanding from any previous claims to truth, Fichte now distinguishes two kinds of consciousness, which he names "dim feeling" and "clear knowledge."

> The first kind of consciousness, that which is the first in point of time to develop, is that of dim feeling. Where this feeling exists, the fundamental impulse is most usually and regularly

[56] *Address* 3, 30.
[57] *Address* 3, 31.
[58] *Address* 3, 32.

> comprehended as the individual's love of self; indeed, dim feeling shows this self at first only as something that wills to live and to prosper. Hence, material self-seeking arises as the real motive and developing power of such a life engrossed in translating its original impulse thus. So long as man continues to understand himself in this way, so long must he act selfishly, being unable to do otherwise.[59]

This first kind of consciousness, "dim feeling," is Fichte's denigration of *human nature* as we actually experience it. We are living individuals. We seek to preserve ourselves. Gradually, we come to understand that our preservation and prosperity entail an ever-widening sphere of concerns and possibilities. Our goals remain broadly the same, but with maturity comes a deepening of the sensibility and intellect regarding what these goals ultimately mean, and how they may best be attained. This is the maturation process of a rational animal, as it was perceived prior to Kant, and as it must be lived by anyone who wishes to achieve his birthright as a human being. On Fichte's account, this natural will to "live and prosper"—the starting point of every previous theory of human nature, or of education—is reducible to "material self-seeking," and is thus the impure will that his new education is designed to eradicate. (To his credit, the system seems well-designed to achieve its purpose in this respect.)

The second, higher kind of consciousness is the one resulting from Fichte's "New Education" method of abstraction and indoctrination, the kind he calls "clear knowledge," as opposed to the "dim feeling" of selfish (i.e., natural) man. His opening attempt to describe this clear knowledge, which he has previously said may be "easily judged" as to whether it has been fully

[59] *Address* 3, 33.

learned, is a classic of German idealism worthy of Hegel, and therefore deserves to be quoted at length:

> Clear knowledge is the second kind of consciousness, which does not, as a rule, develop of itself, but must be carefully fostered in the community. If the fundamental impulse of man were embraced in this principle, it would produce a second class of men quite different from the first [the natural, "dim feeling" type]. Such knowledge, which embraces fundamental love itself, does not leave us cold and indifferent, as indeed other knowledge can, but its object is loved above everything, for that object is but the interpretation and translation of our original love itself.... [T]his knowledge embraces the knower himself and his love, and he loves it.... Now, that such clear knowledge shall be a direct incentive in life, and shall be capable of being relied on with certainty depends, as has been said, on this, that the real true love of man is to be interpreted by it, that this is to be immediately clear to him, and that along with the interpretation the feeling of that love is to be stimulated in him and experienced by him.[60]

It is typical of German idealists to use adjectives such as "clear" to designate their most ornate ravings. Thus we have "clear knowledge," which transcends the dim feelings of human nature as hitherto experienced by being a love that embraces the knower himself as a lover of the translation of the love that he loves. (I may have missed a step there, but you get the point.)

If anything coherent is to be derived from all that—apart from its obvious presaging of the modern Left's cloying and disingenuous invocations of "Love, love, love"—it is the passing reference to the practical educational means to this "higher

[60] *Address* 3, 33.

consciousness." Clear knowledge "must be carefully fostered in the community." That is, the reason it has not been achieved before, during man's long, dark night of "dim feeling," is that this combination of clear understanding and pure will can only result from carefully manipulated and strictly enforced social conditioning within a closely monitored "community"—a re-education camp cut off from practical reality.

That is the original and ultimate case for modern compulsory public schools, as set down by the most important thinker in the development of the project, and echoed in a thousand forms to the present day. But what exactly is the goal of this endeavor, the true religion itself?

> Clear knowledge instead of dim feeling being thus made the first and true foundation and starting-point of life, self-seeking [read human nature] is avoided altogether and cheated of its development. For it is dim feeling alone that represents to man his ego as in need of pleasure and afraid of pain. [For "pleasure," read individual happiness; for "pain," read the denial of individual happiness.] The clear idea does not represent it thus to him, but shows it rather as a member of a moral order.[61]

That individuals living as independent men, seeking to improve their own lives through understanding, virtue, work, family, friendship, and citizenship constitutes the *absence* of a "moral order" is nowhere proved. It is merely asserted repeatedly. The only moral order Fichte acknowledges as possible is one that must be achieved exclusively through his strict education in self-destruction. On Fichte's terms, then, the individual man and the moral order of "clear knowledge," which is to say the natural

[61] *Address* 3, 34.

human being and the progressive Truth, are incompatible. Here we return to a point I make frequently, but which cannot be stated forcefully enough: Progressivism begins with a literal denial of the metaphysical primacy of the individual human being. The collective, on this view, is not a voluntary union of men; rather, men are merely the illusory facets of the collective. The collective is logically, essentially, prior to the individual humans who comprise it. Fichte's relentless attack on self-seeking, sensuous pleasure, and dim feeling, and his rallying cry to love, true religion, and clear knowledge—according to his peculiar definitions of all these terms—are intended to do no less than persuade you that *you do not exist*. This is neither a metaphor nor any other figure of speech. This has been the central, though frequently unstated, tenet of progressive philosophy from its founding moments in Germany at the beginning of the nineteenth century. You are an immoral illusion. "Society" (the state) is real and good.

What, then, is the big pay-off of this glorious promise of an education issuing in pure love of a clearly known moral order? In short, the hope is to transcend the kind of learning concerned with understanding the world as it is, in favor of a neo-mystical dream of never-ending collective creativity. In contrast to the learning path of human nature ("dim feeling"), Fichte's new "clear knowledge" is

> concerned with a world that is to be, an *a priori* world that exists in the future and remains in the future. The divine life, therefore, that underlies all appearance reveals itself never as a fixed and known entity, but as something that is to be; and after it has become what it was to be, it will reveal itself again to all eternity as something that is to be.[62]

[62] *Address* 3, 35.

It turns out that the clear knowledge which provides the object of love that inspires the pure will is merely the imagination itself, elevated to the level of a metaphysical principle. Specifically, what the race educated through Fichte's system will finally realize is that God is the Future, or rather *futurity as such*—not just any random future, but a future of mankind as a whole which we shall will into existence through our "original creative activity," but which at the same time can never be reached. This is a Zeno's Paradox conception of religion, which is meant to do for the social realm what Aristotle's Prime Mover does for the cosmos, namely sustain everlasting motion. The key difference and defining irrationality, however—and this is the essential divide between the heights of ancient thought and the depths of modern thought—is that the motion sustained by the Prime Mover is *circular*, whereas Fichte's dream of the nation as embodiment of the divine order chases its elusive God, Futurity, in an unending straight line, i.e., *forward*. Hence the radical dismissal of the past; hence the easy rejection of old wisdom; hence the lack of traditional moral qualms about the dignity of the individual, and the injustice of unlimited government authority. The past has no lessons for us, other than negatively: It shows us all the primitive follies of men less evolved than ourselves. This is the deepest source and meaning of progressivism. And this is my answer to all those who object to my use of that word, and insist I ought to replace it with "socialism," "communism," or "fascism." No; all those "isms" are huddled under one umbrella, the umbrella of History understood as the progress of man toward a collectively conscious self-erasing spirituality, otherwise known, among literal-minded non-adherents like me, as global totalitarianism.

But there is more. This imagined futurity—future in the abstract—though necessarily and perpetually unrealized "to all

eternity," can be revealed to us only through the "deliberate art of education,"[63] through which

> a totally new order of things and a new creation would begin. Now, in this new form, mankind would fashion itself by means of itself, for mankind considered as the present generation educates itself as the future generation; and mankind can do this only by means of knowledge, the one common true light and air of this world which can be freely imparted and which binds the spiritual world into a unity.[64]

By the spiritual world, Fichte means the non-sensuous world, which is to say the world achieved through his education, in which the material individual as such has been effectively eliminated from life. That is to say, the spiritual world as realized on Earth via the imagination is nothing less than what he has elsewhere called the "community," and at other times calls "the race," "the nation," or "Germany." Punctuating this fact, and highlighting its implications for the newly improved race's relationship to all previous humans, Fichte contends that prior to Germany's idealist rebirth and his own new education program aimed at undermining human nature and free will, humanity itself was little more than a collection of chance occurrences, and thus without value. Hence,

> where mankind has developed most it has become nothing. If it is not to remain in nothingness, it must henceforward make itself all that it is yet to become. The real destiny of the human race on earth...is in freedom to make itself what it really is originally. Now, this making of itself deliberately, and

[63] *Address* 3, 36.
[64] *Address* 3, 36.

> according to rule, must have a beginning somewhere and at some moment in space and time. We are of opinion that...this is the very time, and that now the race is exactly midway between the two great epochs of its life on earth. But, in regard to space, we believe that it is first of all the Germans who are called upon to begin the new era as pioneers and models for the rest of mankind.[65]

Now is the time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. Forward. And so on and on, to an imaginary infinity. This may be progressivism's first explicit mission statement. In its fundamental fantasies, the movement has changed very little since Fichte defined it two centuries ago:

Collective man will create a new spiritual reality fundamentally different from and vastly superior to all previous eras. (This is Fichte's "freedom.")

The enemy of the great god Futurity (a.k.a. Progress) is the man who thinks apart, who thinks of his own well-being, who believes he exists independently of the state.

Ultimate truth is not separate and un-changing—and therefore beyond human creativity—but is rather the ever-evolving product of collective will; not immortal nature, but socially malleable artifice. (See cultural relativism, moral pragmatism, radical feminism, and "gender identity.")

The realization of this new collective spiritual progress requires overcoming all previous moral principles and notions of freedom, including all strictures against compelling individual wills, against coercive universal indoctrination to annihilate old modes of thinking, and in general against any moral claims that individuals used to believe they could make against the state.

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[65] *Address* 3, 36.

Underlying all of this is an impenetrable mysticism of the collective, which exploits man's natural urge toward the spiritual as a means of destroying his connection to that very nature. Consider this rousing summary of intent from Fichte himself: "Formerly there lived in the majority naught but flesh, matter, and nature; through the new education spirit alone shall live in the majority, yea, very soon in all, and spur them on."[66]

At the end of this education program, the student-citizens will be "spirit alone," without "flesh, matter, and nature." Or rather, that is how they are meant to perceive themselves—as a collective consciousness sharing a creative dream, serving the whole, and leaving their natural individual existence, needs, and inclinations behind.

Of course, this dreamy perspective, appalling as it may be in its own right, is all the more so when one considers it from the point of view that Fichte, like all modern idealists, tries to pretend has no place in his theory, but which in fact is merely hidden in plain sight by the simple method of refusing to acknowledge its presence. That semi-obscured perspective is that of the brutal oppressor whose grand supersensuous promises ultimately, and by metaphysically inconvenient necessity, require a practical political manifestation, one inseparable from the world of mere "flesh, matter, and nature."

The reason the early addresses emphasize the exaltation of imagination, clear knowledge, and the love that loves itself as the lover of the interpretation of its love, is that Fichte needs the good will engendered by this nationalistic paean to the spiritual superiority of the German people as a shield for the physical and psychological means he will need to use to implement this indoctrination program. As these means are in essence the same ones we use today in each advanced nation's approximation of Fichte

[66] *Address* 9, 130.

Fun Land, and as I have addressed some of them in Part One, they need not all be explained in detail here. I outline them to complete our picture of the idol before which the world's public school vanguard—Cousin, Taylor, Mann, Ryerson, et al—were genuflecting when they began their respective propaganda campaigns for applying the Prussian school model back home.

(1) The schooling is to be uniform and universal, because there must be no dissenting voices or independent minds to question the social order, the love of which is, after all, the highest aim of this educational program.

(2) The precise, straightforward case for compulsory *schooling* is spelled out emphatically by Fichte, as surely as it is deliberately obscured by his heirs today: The private family is an intrinsically negative force in child development, the influence of which must therefore be mitigated, or preferably eliminated altogether, "especially among the working classes."[67]

> The hardship, the daily anxiety about making ends meet, the petty meanness and avarice, which occur here, would inevitably infect the children, drag them down, and prevent them from making a free flight into the world of thought.[68]

That is, the basic practical purpose of government schools is to give the state the means of separating children from their parents by force. Parents are dismissed as a hindrance to the "free flight into the world of thought," as the natural family community rivals the artificially designed and regulated social order which children must learn to love, as a precursor to that love for the national social order which must be their adult motivation in all they do. Little argument is given for the authority of the state to

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[67] *Address* 9, 138.
[68] *Address* 9, 138.

remove all children from their homes by force, aside from a purely government-centered pragmatism. Fichte's presupposition that the state's perspective is the only relevant one is apparent throughout the *Addresses*. Consider a few examples:

> If the new education we propose did not go further, it would at best train excellent men of learning, as in the past, *of whom only a few are needed*....[69] (Emphasis added.)

> The system of government [among the pupils in the school] must be arranged in such a way that the individual must not only abstain, but will also work and act, for the sake of the community.[70]

> Not until a generation has passed through the new education can the question be considered, as to what part of the national education shall be entrusted to the home.[71] ["Considered" by whom?]

And against those statesmen who question the government's authority to kidnap and indoctrinate children, Fichte simply posits that there will be others who "have educated themselves" in philosophy and science, and therefore see

> what is absolutely necessary for mankind at this time. If such men perceived...that education alone can save us from the barbarism and relapse into savagery that is otherwise bound to overwhelm us, if they had a vision of the *new human race* which would arise through this education, if they were themselves inwardly convinced of the *infallibility and*

[69] *Address* 2, 24.
[70] *Address* 2, 26.
[71] *Address* 9, 138.

> *certainty* of the proposed remedy, they might be expected to have realized at the same time that the State, as the supreme administrator of human affairs and the guardian of those who are its wards, *responsible only to God and to its own conscience*, has a perfect right even to compel the latter for their welfare.[72] (Emphasis added.)

To paraphrase this point—the closest thing to a logical argument offered for compulsory state education: "If you knew that education was vital to human beings, and you knew the complete and absolute truth, as I do, it would be obvious to you that the state has every right to compel its citizens to do exactly as I say, on my authority. Period." This is a particularly grand instantiation of the phenomenon I dubbed "experts without portfolio" earlier in this chapter.

(3) The primary adult contact in the daily life of the pupil is to be the teacher—that is, the government-trained-and-tested overseer—whose chief role is to see to it that children learn to regard the sacrifice of their interests, minds, and goals to the needs and priorities of the state as not only their highest moral obligation, but the only legitimate source of satisfaction. Teachers, the most carefully prepared and formally vetted of all government officers, are to replace parents as moral guides and sources of approval. It is not difficult to see how the motives of the two kinds of guides will differ, and who stands to gain from elevating the government officer over the parent as a force in the evolving character of the student. Indeed, as the moral element of the program is its ultimate aim, and as morality in this statist scheme means denying one's own existence and natural desires, Fichte's teacher must be trained to be the worst kind of psychological bully, using

[72] *Address* 11, 170.

emotional attachment to push the child into relinquishing himself to the collective will.

Read the following account of the positive role Fichte foresees for his certified government teacher in the school's mock community, relate it to a hundred examples from your own or your children's public school experience, and then try to prevent your head from exploding:

> Secondly [after learning to obey the school's moral laws], there is that subordination of the individual to the community which cannot be demanded but can only be given voluntarily, viz., the raising and advancing of the well-being of the community by self-sacrifice. In order to impress correctly upon the pupils from youth upwards the mutual relationship of mere legality and this higher virtue, it will be appropriate to allow him only, against whom for a certain period there has been no complaint in regard to legality, to make these voluntary sacrifices as the reward, so to speak, of legality, but to refuse this permission to him who is not yet quite sure of himself in regard to regularity and order.[73]

That is, the child must be manipulated into sacrificing his interests, privacy, or property, by being made to feel (a) that he *must* sacrifice these things to gain adult approval, but (b) that he will not be *permitted* to sacrifice them until he has proved himself perfectly obedient. This is how you train a dog to drown itself.

To continue:

> Let this kind of sacrifice receive active approbation and real recognition of its merits, not in public in the form of praise, which might corrupt the heart, make it vain, and turn it from

[73] *Address* 10, 151.

> its independence [independence = sense of duty], but in secret and with the pupil alone.... Where there are several male and female teachers...let each child choose freely, and as his feelings and confidence move him, one of them as a special friend and, as it were, adviser in matters of conscience. Let him seek advice whenever it is difficult for him to do right. Let the teacher help him by friendly exhortation; let him be the confidant of the voluntary acts which he undertakes; and, finally, let him be the person who crowns excellence with his approval.[74]

The psychological insight of this prescription shows Fichte to have been a brilliant man. The consciencelessness of his application of that insight shows him to have been a purveyor of genuine evil. The fact that his description sums up much of the socialization method used by the world's state-trained teachers to the present day is as profound an indictment of the history of public education as can be produced.

"Let the teacher help him by friendly exhortation." I would like to shortlist this command for Greatest Euphemism of All Time. Fichte is proposing to remove children from their families by force and deliver them into the hands of men and women who, having exploited the children's natural need for adult guidance to create an emotional attachment, will then use this intimacy to coax the children into committing spiritual suicide, stifling their own desire for personal well-being and the joys of human nature in favor of enslaving themselves to the interests of the state. *This is the primary moral function of public school teaching as conceived by its single most intellectually serious and sincere advocate.*

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[74] *Address* 10, 151.

(4) The public school environment and its rules and obligations both depend on and foster the weakening of the population's sense of "mine and thine." Sacrificing oneself to the community becomes less complicated as one loses any clear perception of one's "self," which is to say of one's personal claim on the time and energy one is giving to the world. The child should learn to cede his own independence and self-sufficiency in all ways, right down to relinquishing any claim to "his own property." In ultimate effect, "everyone should know that he is indebted absolutely to the community, and should eat or starve along with the community."[75]

You do not own your body, your work, or your thoughts. What you produce belongs to, and indeed is attributable to, the community. What you get can only come to you through the beneficence of the community. Without the community, you are, and have, nothing. "You didn't build that," as Barack Obama says. In a society reared on such principles, however subtly they may be conveyed, each succeeding generation will relinquish more of its sense of private property, private life, and private thought, in exchange for more entitlements, security, and moral dependency. Raised from earliest childhood in such an environment, there will simply be no moral or intellectual resources left with which the majority of men might resist this encroaching enslavement. Or rather, there will be no rational principle to ground the vague, natural feeling, which one has been taught is "selfish," that there must be *some* important arena in which self-reliance is permissible, in which personal self-sufficiency is admirable.

(5) Public education's main political function, the complement to its moral aim of inculcating unthinking devotion to the collective, is to sort everyone into ranks and roles determined and controlled by a permanent ruling class—the unnamed "we"

[75] *Address* 10, 160.

in all those abstract statements about what "we" need. (Recall Rockefeller's "Occasional Letter Number One.")

Fichte devotes some time to explaining this sorting system, or rather to speaking presumptively of social outcomes that depend on such a system, and especially on the state overseers who will do the sorting. In his Tenth Address, he outlines the bifurcation process at the end of the general education system, at which point a select few will move on to scholarly training in a university. First, regarding the practical labor element of the universal part of the curriculum, he notes:

> One reason [for this requirement] is that all who get through only the universal national education are *intended for the working class*, and training to be good workmen is undoubtedly part of their education.[76]

"Intended" by whom? On what basis? The answers, given the overall nature of the system, are obvious. The state is looking for champions of creative tyranny to serve as the intellectual infrastructure of the progressive regime. The rest of the population will be assigned to ("intended for") subservient positions as selfless worker bees within the industrial and agricultural collective.[77] There will be no outliers, no wandering poets and

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[76] *Address* 10, 157.

[77] The earliest importers of Prussian schooling, such as Cousin and Taylor, along with the second and third generation Prussophiles, from Mann and Ryerson to Rockefeller and Dewey, shared this impulse to assign people to their proper roles. Consider the opening paragraph of Taylor's *The Farmer's School Book*, in which he explains his aim:

> The King of Sparta being asked, "What things he thought most proper for boys to learn," answered, "Those things which they expect to do when they are men." The young farmer has not taken this advice. He has learned nothing of his profession, while receiving his education. The study of

dreamers, no public gadflies or "culture critics" creating doubt or suspicion about the ultimate legitimacy of the social order. You will work for the state—no demands for property or privacy, no selfish inclinations to happiness or self-development, no claims to authority over your own children (who of course must be submitted to the same compulsory absorption into the collective). You will do your "duty," and duty will always have but one, unquestioned, beneficiary.

Regarding the scholar class, who pass beyond the universal education, their role is equally clear and determined. Those judged promising by the national system will be permitted by the state to pursue the scholar's profession, "without exception and without regard to so-called difference of birth. For a man is not a scholar for his own convenience; every talent of that kind is a precious *possession of the nation*, and may not be taken from it."[78] (Emphasis added.)

Agriculture has not even been pursued in the District Schools! (Albany: Common School Depository, 1837, 1.)

The use of Sparta as a model is telling. Child-rearing should be aimed at preparing citizens for their appointed duties, i.e., for specialized roles—exactly the contrary of liberal education as that was understood from classical Athens to whenever modern man stopped caring about freedom and nature. When Taylor complains that "the young farmer" "has learned nothing of his profession," you must remember that he is talking about a child, who strictly speaking has no profession as yet. Rather than educate him to open his mind to the universe of possibilities, the hope is to raise him to see only one possibility—"to do in a perfect way the things their fathers and mothers are doing in an imperfect way," as Rockefeller's G.E.B. phrases the goal in Occasional Letter Number One. Early reformers such as Taylor may well have believed that this Spartan/Prussian educational concept could somehow be applied independently of the authoritarian governmental structure. In fact, this form of training in mass submission or resignation germinates as the *seed* of tyranny, no matter how rich in liberty the host soil may have been.

[78] Address 10, 161.

As for the hint of meritocracy in this proposal, granting "permission" to every boy "without regard to so-called difference of birth," we must remember that these differences are precisely what the general education has been designed to eliminate—not merely differences of family wealth, but also of natural inclination, personal enthusiasm, and character. Fichte's seeming liberality regarding class distinctions is only applicable within the world as reconfigured on his progressive authoritarian principles. This is the same man who wrote that he could only conceive of granting full civil rights to Jews if one could "cut off all their heads in one night and replace them with others in which there is not a single Jewish idea."[79] That, broadly speaking, is exactly what he was proposing to do to the entire German nation, and ideally the entire human race, through government-controlled education. A newly configured class system will be created and adhered to, but these classes will be based on something other than traditional family position.

By declaring all intellectual life the "possession of the nation," Fichte is justifying strict government controls to eliminate the possibility of dissenting ideas, or at least to cut off the access of such ideas to the nourishing environment that would allow them to grow to full power, so as to challenge the state's authority as the one and only instantiation of divine Truth.

Today, even where the universities have not quite been nationalized to this extreme, the public schools have effectively established Fichte's nationalization of the intellect tacitly. And anyone who has seen the modern, global university culture from the inside knows that it has evolved very much along Fichte's lines. The deliberate retarding process of primary and secondary school makes university the social threshold one must cross to be

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[79] LaVopa, Anthony J., *Fichte: The Self and the Calling of Philosophy, 1762-1799* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 132.

"permitted" to think, if one still can; and then the entire apparatus of standardized grading, graduate school, peer-reviewed journals, and the like is designed to ensure that no one becomes a legitimate, respectable intellectual without first having placed his shoes, his watch, and the contents of his brain onto the conveyor belt for security scanning.

The process is just public school socialization taken to another level: You may not develop an idea without taking into account everything every climbing career scholar of the past thirty years has published about the subject, and placing yourself humbly within one of the professionally sanctioned "schools of thought" on the issue, thus effectively stymieing any germ of non-establishment thinking that might appear. Consider the popular current example of climate change, a cottage industry that has become a sub-specialty of every branch of the university, from engineering and the sciences through to most of the social sciences, and even the literature and history departments, not to mention the la-la land of women's studies, LGBT studies, and such. The standard rejoinders offered by the purveyors of this global progressive propaganda campaign, any time you question their data or their methods, are that their work is peer-reviewed, whereas your critique is not, and furthermore that reason requires you to bow before the professional consensus. This is the "nyah, nyah" school of intellectual life, and of course comes straight out of public school socialization. ("Suzie doesn't seem to get along easily with the other children—*there must be something wrong with her*.")

And how is Fichte's bifurcation of the population through state schooling reflected in the communal life?

> The person who is not a scholar is destined to maintain the human race at the stage of culture it has reached, the scholar

> to advance it further according to a clear conception and deliberate art. The scholar with his conception must always be in advance of the present age, must understand the future, and be able to implant it in the present for its future development.... All this necessitates mental self-activity, without guidance from others...from the moment his profession is decided; it does not mean, as in the case of the person who is not a scholar, merely thinking under the eye of an ever-present teacher; it necessitates a great amount of subsidiary knowledge, which is quite useless in his vocation to the person who is not a scholar.[80]

Those permitted to think—those judged safe and useful for this activity by the state—will be remunerated by the state, and therefore exempt from other work.[81] The majority, who are not permitted to pursue knowledge beyond the standardized universal indoctrination, will, ideally, never have been allowed to think at all except "under the eye of an ever-present teacher." Wider knowledge is "useless" in their case—that is, useless (read dangerous) to the state—and they will therefore be prevented from seeking it.

In sum, self-development or solitary investigation of any kind will be carefully curtailed in every child. Those—"of whom only a few are needed"—who prove naturally intelligent and show a satisfactory level of intellectual and moral submission to the state, will be permitted to develop their love for the collective into practical dreams regarding new ways of promoting human progress toward the Future, i.e., of advancing the state's power. Those who have failed to show this proper combination of useful intelligence and moral submission will be indoctrinated to

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[80] *Address* 10, 162.
[81] *Address* 10, 162.

embrace a life of working to support their betters, and in general the state's material needs—and through this work will be diverted and discouraged from having any further thoughts about anything important, so that the ruling class will have effectively neutered them as potential threats to its power.

Sound familiar? If not, then please stop reading now; you are wasting valuable time that you ought to be spending in front of the TV, checking your stock portfolio, or getting your children to bed so they will be bright-eyed and bushy-tailed when the school bus arrives tomorrow. Which leads us to...

(6) The teaching of literacy is to be stalled as long as possible. The artificial community in which the prisoners of the government education system are to be raised is to function and develop as an oral, pre-literate culture.

Fichte rationalizes his proposal to forcibly prevent children from learning how to read and write by claiming that literacy is harmful to the universal, pre-university stages of education,

> because, as it has hitherto so often done, it may easily lead the pupil astray from direct perception to mere signs, and from attention, which knows that it grasps nothing if it does not grasp it now and here, to distraction, which consoles itself by writing things down and wants to learn some day from paper what it will probably never learn, and, in general, to dreaming which so often accompanies dealings with the letters of the alphabet. Not until the very end of education, and as its last gift for the journey, should these arts be imparted....[82]

Consider what this deprivation of literacy until the end of public school means in practice. The student has no access to any ideas or observations of reality other than those generated by his

[82] *Address* 10, 136.

own imagination, or imparted to him orally by government teachers and equally illiterate classmates. And this limitation will be far more significant for a child confined to a social setting in which society's natural rich variety of oral input—parents and grandparents, well-read uncles, travelling aunts, along with neighborhood storytellers, craftsmen, clerks, and business owners—has been systematically cut off from him.

The message is clear. In a proper national education establishment, the children must be raised under the moral and intellectual influence of the government-designed curriculum and social order—and under *only* that influence. The practical means of learning about the past, and more importantly learning *from* the past (or from an alternative view of the present), must be withheld until the child is so thoroughly immersed in the state's indoctrination to self-immolation that no outside influence could touch him any longer, or cause him to wonder.

(There is an alternative way to achieve this same result, so essential to progressive education: Teach children to read, in the sense of recognizing written words, but only in conjunction with a program of mental stultification that renders all but the driest practical information, and certainly any genuine alternative ideas, indecipherable to the young mind, or comprehensible only according to predetermined intellectual and moral categories which effectively nullify the true value of all literature that is not reducible to pre-established ideas, namely its *educational* value.)

This principle is consistent not only with the desire for uniformity and complete psychological control, but also with the progressive understanding of the past. Remember Fichte's depiction of humanity prior to Germany's moment of fundamental transformation: "where mankind has developed most it has become nothing." The past is nothing, failure, selfishness, dead ends. Its lessons are worthless. All that matters for the majority is

the Now; all that matters for the scholar is the creation of a more powerful and all-encompassing state in the Future.

A nation that sees itself and mankind's past this way—that has effectively lost access to its own traditions and past wisdom—has little defense against tyranny, irrationalism, and moral manipulation. A *civilization* that sees itself and its past this way—well, anyone can easily observe what that means, if he still has eyes to see.

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iii. Epilogue: Sleepwalking Through Fichte's Dream

Of course, the conditions that would be required to realize an authoritarian dream as grand as Fichte's are rarely, if ever, available. In reality, cutting a society off from its traditions is difficult to do, at least all at once. And practical contingencies make the complete disappearance of a generation of children impossible. They are loved by their parents, who do not perceive the philosopher's scheme with the "unselfish" objectivity he demands. They are needed at home, to care for sick grandmothers or little brothers; they are needed on family farms, to get produce to market on time; in short, the real miniature community into which they are born inevitably makes claims on their energies and affections that cannot be swept away as tidily as a German idealist might hope.

Fichte was dreaming well ahead of the social and technological means at his disposal. Hence the real public schools that existed in the nineteenth century, based on his ideals, never had such total control of the children. The school days and school years tended to be too short, for practical and financial reasons, to give the government educators primary moral authority over the students. Compulsoriness and universality were still largely pipe dreams, given the practical contingencies of life—the contingencies Fichte denigrates as the "petty meanness and avarice" involved in "making ends meet." And of course the teachers, even when hamstrung to varying degrees by certification requirements, were not all victims of compulsory education themselves, nor people devoid of deep family attachments and "selfish" hopes of their own, and were therefore highly imperfect replicas of

Fichte's model government teacher. Most of them would have had a soft spot for seeing their students succeed and develop their independence, rather than consistently "exhorting" their charges to the "pure will" of the self-sacrificial lamb, the way they were supposed to do. Furthermore, teachers in nations governed by non-authoritarian regimes would be more likely to incline toward the traditional notions of virtue so odious to Fichte, and the traditional ideas of teaching and learning so antithetical to his plans for a complete break with the past and with individual self-development.

There are, however, always men like Fichte and his international admirers and acolytes, who will repeatedly take up the cause, engage new supporters, co-opt mainstream scholarly venues, and see whether they cannot advance the dream a little further this time. John Dewey was merely the most systematic and serious of these men. They are the practical approximations of the progressive idealist scholar Fichte envisioned, focused always and mercilessly on the future prospects for greater social conformity for the benefit of the ruling elite. They are not, as a class, demons or evil wizards, just as Fichte himself was not. Some of them genuinely lack the moral rectitude and rationality to see that their hopes of "enlightened control" can lead only to the most unenlightened results. Some of them are opportunistic power-seekers or bootlickers, craving their own advancement or personal security, humanity be damned. Most of them are petty and self-important men of some cleverness, but little sober learning of the sort that teaches respect for one's fellow men, or resignation in the face of life's imperfections. What they all share is a desire for more government authority, and of course for a designing hand in the *use* of that authority.

And they are alike in one other way that is relevant to our current state of deterioration. As believers in the infinite malle-

ability of human beings—in humanity as the collectively willed product of a creative progressive imagination—these dreamers invariably short-change human nature, which has no place in their theories and schemes.

Fichte's dream was supposed to produce a well-oiled societal machine, strong men prepared to care for themselves with skill and independent spirit, while maintaining an abstract universal "moral order" that would render them harmless from the point of view of the ruling class, but competent and diligent enough to sustain the community against all challenges from within and without. And yet as the world has come ever closer to realizing Fichte's methods in practice—school as the primary moral force, lack of meaningful connection to the practical adult world, collectivist indoctrination, virtual illiteracy, and state-compliant, character-less teachers—the tangible results are quite different from his hopes: increasing dependency, emotional immaturity, lack of self-restraint, navel-gazing elevated to a philosophical pursuit, and the obsessive search for personal gratification of the pettiest sort. In short, Fichte's pupils are not growing up into adulthood, the way men normally did in the past, when non-school influences were the dominant ones.

Fichte's educational model, for all his talk of progressive creativity and societal advancement, was hopelessly bound to the specific socio-economic conditions of his time and place. The easy bifurcation of the population into ignorant but efficient workers and a tiny minority of scholar-manipulators may have seemed plausible in an economy based on factories and farms. (And Rockefeller's General Education Board was still clinging to that model in 1915.) But there was too much reality regarding the social fluidity of industrialization to allow Fichte's static, abstract design to take firm hold in its pure form anywhere in the industrialized world. New kinds of work would develop that would

create new societal needs—new kinds of "useful" citizen, to take the collectivist utilitarian position. And this is in addition to the more fundamental and inevitable problem of imagining one can smother human nature without any undesirable ramifications.

In spite of its practical inapplicability, however, and its being bound to fail on its own terms, the broad principles and ideals of Fichte's system have remained the basis of all public education theory, and all practical public school development, since the first wave of European and American intellectuals—the mad scientist's laboratory assistants—brought the Prussian model home to their nations, and set the West, and eventually the whole world, onto the slow, difficult, ever-evolving path to Fichte's anti-individual, anti-rational dream of the perfectly submissive authoritarian society. Though requiring modifications and frequent patches, and while facing much more internal and external resistance than Fichte would have tolerated, reasonable facsimiles of his system have now been implemented to a considerable degree everywhere in the modern world.

And his system has, though not without growing pains and frequent patience-testing compromises, largely achieved its chief aim, namely societies that obey. Societies that live for the permanent ruling class. Societies in which men regard property as a loan from the collective, and even their own physical survival and well-being as a gift to be freely given (or withheld) by the state. Societies that are easily riled up into mass anger or mass enthusiasm, but that never, never question the underlying Truth which need not be spoken aloud—and indeed would cease to be believable if it were spoken aloud—but which has been whispered constantly and hypnotically into the soul of every citizen from the time of his earliest memories: Collective social existence is reality itself, and therefore the state, which creates and governs this reality, is God.

One of the basic implicit questions, among people looking back at the Nazi nightmare, is "How could the world's most educated people have been reduced to that?" The correct question, I believe, would be "How could the world's 'most educated people' *not* be reduced to that, or to something like it?" Intellectual capacities are what they are, but real social outcomes will always be somewhat determined by the moral tenor of the individual soul. The targets of life, both theoretical and practical, will inevitably be in large measure the product of the process of aiming. Education is primarily the moral art of aiming the soul, as Fichte, like all previous philosophers of this art, taught.

Turning life and thought into a limitless game of creativity unrestrained by the ugly imperfections of the external world, while implicitly instilling the population with obedient devotion to the collective, to the land, to the idea of communal progress and collective perfectibility, and to the distrust of those who stand apart from this dream, should have been expected to produce exactly such a result. Germany got there first. That is, she was the first nation to build this mentality incrementally from the ground up (rather than through forced revolutionary upheaval, which is faster but less profound), and was therefore the first to reap the full harvest of such a purely "educational" initiative.

Learning from history entails understanding a societal disaster not by its particularized manifestation of collapse, which by necessity can never be duplicated anywhere else, but rather by its subtler, more philosophical impetus and arc. German idealism was a decisive and deliberate step away from the developing heritage of modern civilization. Its moral and political implications have rippled through our world, infecting even the most quotidian aspects of our societies and institutions. No instantiation of this influence is more universal, or more historically significant, than compulsory schooling. The deliberate detach-

ment of man from his natural well-being, from his natural moral limits, and from his civilizational inheritance, begins in kindergarten. The effects of this reality are all around us in the modern world. Sometimes collapse is noisy and overtly calamitous. Sometimes the fall is quiet, almost gentle, like a dead leaf slowly drifting to the ground.

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The Rise and Fall of the Didaskalocracy

i. The Teachers

One of the most remarkable episodes in the Gospels is John 20.11-16—the climactic and defining event of John's narrative:

> But Mary was standing without at the tomb weeping: so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; and she beholdeth two angels in white sitting, one at the head, and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. When she had thus said, she turned herself back, and beholdeth Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou hast borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turneth herself, and saith unto him in Hebrew, Rabboni; which is to say, Teacher.[1]

"Teacher." That word, spoken in any language, has a kind of magic, as captured so perfectly in St. John's Gospel. Used as an appellation, as by Mary Magdalene here, it has the power to define or redefine human relationships instantly. "Teacher"—in

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[1] Following the *American Standard Version* of the Holy Bible (1901).

John's Greek, *didaskalos*—means "master" (which is how the original *King James Version* translates it). Its use as a form of address expresses a respectful submission to a natural hierarchy in the realm of understanding; a teacher is superior to me, as one who *knows*.

The standard of rank ordering implied in this hierarchy is knowledge versus ignorance, wisdom versus the desire for wisdom. The world arranged according to this hierarchy is a realm of voluntarism, of spiritual and intellectual self-awareness and seeking. There is a great feat of self-understanding in calling someone "Teacher," not as a job title, but as an expression of relative rank, just as there is great humility in accepting that title without succumbing to the tyrannical temptations of authority.

Teaching and learning, knowledge and the search for knowledge—in a word, education—is the free, voluntary realm of what people used to call the spiritual aristocracy, which is to say the intellectual meritocracy.

For two thousand years, what we call Western civilization moved in the orbit of two supreme teachers, Socrates and Jesus. In identifying these two as the definitive figures in the specifically Western tradition, I am agreeing (as I usually do not) with Mill and (as I often do) with Nietzsche. A consideration of the West in which these two men are not central is inconceivable. Other peoples have educational hierarchies and wise men of their own, of course, but their definitive men and archetypes, their indispensable figures, are typically emperors and other earthly chieftains, i.e., men of political, and hence coercive, authority. What we call the West, by contrast, is defined by teachers.

Furthermore, real education is more than just a voluntary realm in itself. It also *promotes* freedom, implicitly, by holding truth higher than political authority, the mind higher than force. The history of Western civilization, seen in a certain light, is a

series of confrontations between education and authority, the individual soul and political power. The two archetypal teachers, Jesus and Socrates—both sentenced to death for their teaching—defined for all time the struggle of truth versus earthly power. And their stories define that struggle to the exaltation of truth, and the belittlement of power. This is why we must understand individual liberty as the definitive political goal of the West; Western man's historical arc, despite his many convulsions and regressive moments, reveals an innate, essential impulse toward freedom. This arc traces the long argument between the teachers and centuries of would-be emperors. For the longest time, the teachers won, even in death.

Now, however, in an alliance that, in light of what we have just seen, must be described as fundamentally anti-West—and, I would argue, anti-civilization simpliciter—our political and educational establishments have been joined as one. Compulsory and universal public schooling violates the principle of true education—voluntarism in the quest for truth—just as it contradicts the spirit of the true teacher, as represented by Jesus and Socrates. Both men were emphatic in expecting to be listened to and followed voluntarily; coerced "students" are antithetical to the teaching they offer, and in fact to teaching per se. To redefine education as primarily a state function is to break human thought to the saddle of political authority, to poison the definitive realm of human freedom—the search for self-knowledge—with the invasive weed of coerced indoctrination, and to make Socrates and Jesus pariahs even among those who nominally share their job title, the so-called professional educators. (Just ask any public school teacher who has tried to teach against the norms and goals of the established curriculum and methods.)

Jesus was a carpenter's son. This means that he too was by trade a carpenter. Socrates was a stonemason's son, and hence

also a tradesman himself. Childhood education for these men would have consisted of being trained in their fathers' crafts and family morals, along with basic literacy and numeracy. Socrates, in addition, was certainly introduced to music and poetry, Jesus to the Scriptures. Beyond this, they would have listened to or read what they could, when they could, compelled primarily by their own desire to learn.

And then, most importantly, they took their received notions to the mountains, as it were. They thought over what they had acquired and developed it into a world-changing education through private and solitary reflection. We have specific accounts, for both men, of their having had remarkable capacities for private concentration, for leaving society behind both physically and, more importantly, psychologically, while they contemplated how to proceed with their teaching. Through these sundry means of learning and this private self-examination, they developed the independence of thought and the originality of spirit that has made them the teachers for the ages, fountainheads of a civilization, and living monuments to the dignity of the individual soul.

They had no certification, no teachers college, were not union members, received no state funding, benefitted from no training in "advanced" methods of pedagogy, and worked without teachers' guides and answer keys. And yet, at his death in prison, Socrates was surrounded by his students, whom he gently chastised for weeping at his loss. And, on John's account, the resurrected Jesus appeared first to Mary, whose only word upon recognizing his voice was "Teacher," the ultimate expression of voluntary submission to spiritual, uncoercive authority.

A teacher is a person who places knowledge above power, and upholds the quest for the true and the good in a world forever endangered by coercive schemes that demand deference to the false and evil. In other words, education, in the sense defined for

us by Socrates and Jesus, is the spiritual realm in which, in defiance of all demands and dictums of temporal authority, individual men are free to seek truth. The fight to recover this heritage from today's authoritarian hordes is, at its base, the battle to save education from the clutches of political power. It is the battle to restore a remarkable revolution in human co-existence which made the teacher, rather than the emperor—wisdom rather than power—civilization's defining idea.

The question is, how has the teacher been usurped so thoroughly by the emperor? That is, how did a civilization grounded in education with its inherent voluntarism transmogrify itself, in such a brief span of time, into one grounded in indoctrination with its inherent coercion? The short answer, perhaps, is that this inclination was always present, but was, until recently, generally understood for what it was—the tyrannical impulse—and hence correctly judged as vice and a political danger, whereas today, the distinction between truth and power having been undone, there is nothing to prevent the displacement of education by propaganda.

We have already seen how the father of today's compulsory schooling, Fichte, proposed to train government educators to use their authority as an emotional wedge between the child and his parents, the child and the world, and, ultimately, the child and himself. This was a natural extension of the idealist impulse to reject the particularized world of sense in favor of the dream of a national or universal consciousness. Still, German idealism remained nominally within the philosophic tradition that purported to be seeking truth and wisdom. The idealists gradually killed that tradition, however, both through their direct assault on their own intellectual inheritance and through their subsequent critics who, repulsed by idealism's anti-human tenor, but unable or unwilling to find their way back to the fork in the road,

simply took idealism's implicit authoritarianism—the earthly and practical underside of the project—and ran with it.

This latter anti-idealist move toward a more direct form of human power which systematically dispenses with the pretenses of justifying wisdom altogether may be seen in Marx, of course. However, it is nowhere more profoundly expressed than in the philosophy of Nietzsche, who perhaps deserves the title of "last great philosopher in the Western tradition," not least because he effectively *ended* that tradition. It was Nietzsche, more than any other man, who officially—that is, as a matter of philosophical principle—returned civilization to the predominance of the emperor, and the denigration of the teacher. A brief outline of how he achieved this may serve as an autopsy report on the didaskalocracy that was once Western civilization.

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ii. The Will to Power vs. The Will to Truth

> *What has first to have itself proved is of little value. Wherever authority is still part of accepted usage and one does not "give reasons" but commands, the dialectician is a kind of buffoon: he is laughed at, he is not taken seriously.—Socrates was the buffoon who* got himself taken seriously*: what was really happening when that happened?*[2]
>
> Friedrich Nietzsche

Friedrich Nietzsche, though a great mind, was in some ways a weak man. He teaches us more about the darker reaches of the human spirit than perhaps any other thinker. The reason he is so revelatory on such matters, I suggest, is that his own life was one marked—we might even say marred—by a sense of failure, including, and especially, his failure *to disregard failure*, as even, or especially, the greatest men must learn to do. This weakness, and the sense of isolation it engendered, may have driven him to his greatest insights, but also, perhaps, to the delusions that increasingly typify his mature thought: that he was unique among Germans, alone among men, and superior as a god is superior to his creations. His feelings of hyperboreanism made him great. They also made him small, more "German" than he wished to be, and as such more destructive than he needed to be.

A chief theme of Nietzsche's mature thought is his concept of the will to power,[3] which he casts as the primary drive of man,

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[2] *TI*, "Socrates" 5.

[3] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, translated by Walter Kauffmann (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2010), § 36.

and depicts as the true meaning—and therefore the refutation—of what he calls the "will to truth," meaning philosophy in the traditional sense. Though the German idealists had already led modernity's deliberate turn away from the Socratic philosophical tradition, Nietzsche, idealism's most profound German critic, was the first important philosopher to go right to the heart of the matter and comprehensively reject Socrates himself. This rejection signaled the demise of Western civilization understood as the evolution of the science of being, eudaimonistic virtue ethics (happiness-based morals), and—most importantly for our purposes—the educational primacy of the Socratic opinion-into-ignorance-into-philosophy dialectic, with its corollary, the elevation of the teacher. In place of these things came a new kind of philosophy deeply rooted in psychology; not in the *psyche*—the old Greek soul with its natural aims and its struggle for control between reason and the passions—but in the notion of man as essentially a pool of drives without any natural goal other than to spend themselves.

These drives without natural purpose undergird Nietzsche's conception of man as a "creator of values." We cannot live without purpose, and yet the "truths" of Western civilization have, according to Nietzsche, played themselves out to the point of dissolution. The extent to which Nietzsche's view of the collapse of the metaphysical and rationalist tradition is colored by the idealist/Lutheran intellectual and educational context of his upbringing, is an important topic in itself, though one largely outside the scope of this book.[4] It may be noted, however, that

[4] Cf. Michael Allen Gillespie, *Nihilism Before Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). The author argues, interestingly: "The Dionysian will to power is thus in fact a further development of the idea of absolute will that first appeared in the nominalist notion of God and became a world-historical force with Fichte's notion of the absolute I." (xxi)

his reinterpretation of all previous devotion to the search for truth as mere manifestations of "will to power" is a perfectly German idea, in the sense that it is absolutely consistent with the core of idealism, which is not really any particular metaphysical view, but rather a psychological-moral state. Santayana, as we have seen, characterized this state as romantic egotism. In effect, German idealism is the desire to remake the universe in one's own image, to impose upon experience an idiosyncratic interpretation of life that is so systematically self-contained and internally consistent that one can almost believe one has recreated the world, that *one has the power to do so*. Nietzsche may have simply universalized this romantic egotism, under the name "will to power," in an attempt to reduce *all* great thinking, regardless of its claims about itself, to this same motive, perhaps the only motive a nineteenth century German thinker could understand: logical megalomania.

Nietzsche argues, however, that as the supposed truths of past philosophy have dissolved, and we see that nothing underlay them but the will to power—great men's efforts at civilizational persuasion, energy now spent—humanity is left with two fundamental options: nihilism or value creation. The latter option was Nietzsche's proposed solution to what he saw, correctly, as modernity's approaching collapse into nihilism.

However, contra the socialist-egalitarian movement, which Nietzsche despised (but which has since co-opted many of his ideas), his notion of value creation is not the flowery feel-good enterprise the phrase might imply today, after a century of Dewey-inspired schooling and self-esteem psychology. Not everyone, on Nietzsche's view, is a creator of values. On the contrary, the endeavor of value creation, which Nietzsche regarded as the gravest of concerns for the revitalization of humanity, was properly the project of only the greatest minds, those who have

had the courage to shake off the values they inherited, and to stand at the edge of the abyss—that is, to face the truth of life's nothingness—and then to overcome that profound emptiness through the sheer force of their will to restore meaning to life, by *creating* it.

Thus human life, for Nietzsche, should not be understood as a quest for the true and the good by means of reason. Rationalism, on his view, was the weaker party's jape, the attempt of men without creative force to undermine the true creators with the ironic trick of dialectic. Socrates was, in this view, the enemy of man's genuine "nature," as his entire method was nothing but a clever scheme to tear down a great and noble world that he himself could never have made, namely the Greek heritage of the warrior-hero, the poet, and the mystery cult—the world of immoderate passions, Dionysian creativity, and uncompromising power. In short, Nietzsche's opposition to the Socratic tradition lay primarily in his theory that Western rationalism (or Platonism, if you will) is an attempt to short-circuit the fluid power struggle of existence, and the human greatness this struggle encourages, in favor of the constraining lie of divine and eternal truth.

Nietzsche's famous degradation of Christianity as "Platonism for 'the people'" carries the all-important implication that Jesus is, in effect, *Socrates* for the people. This makes Socrates the defining figure of the entire intellectual and political tradition that Nietzsche—the self-proclaimed antichrist—believes must be overturned.

Socrates' teachings (of which, of course, he claimed to have none) are not his primary significance. In this sense he differs greatly from Jesus. Rather, his complete reconfiguration of philosophy to focus on human nature and how to abide in it, along with a reasoning method based on question and doubt

rather than dictum and deduction, stirred something in the Western political animal that has had the most profound effects. As Nietzsche teaches, with the special admiration of the archrival, Socrates' manner and method undermine power. Specifically, Socrates reduces the powerful to the stammering, blushing victims of dialectic, thus subordinating brute force and the persuasive personality to reason. In this way, he is like the Jew, who (Nietzsche contends) foisted Christianity, with its "slave morality," upon the Gentiles as the ultimate revenge of the weaker man.[5] Nietzsche goes so far as to blame Socrates for hastening the fall of Greece, and connects that effect to its modern echo in Europe.

In its essence, Nietzsche's analysis of Socrates is quite persuasive, and, for me, he is more profound in his crystallization of the tradition than either the self-aggrandizing Hegel or the self-serving Marx. Socrates is the anti-tyrant and even anti-aristocrat par excellence. He does something far more subversive than merely speak truth to power. He reveals the *ignorance* of powerful men. In so doing, he becomes the great leveler. And the mechanism whereby he levels—the definitive example of Socratic irony—is his subtle but radical shift of the societal standard of authority from power to understanding. Powerful men, and even powerful societies, insofar as their power is not identical to knowledge defensible through reason, are reduced by Socrates to shame and self-doubt.

This, for over two thousand years, was Western civilization: the world in which power must justify itself—must, in other

[5] "Dialectics can be only a *last-ditch weapon* in the hands of those who have no other weapon left. One must have to *enforce* one's rights: otherwise one makes no use of it. That is why the Jews were dialecticians; Reynard the Fox was a dialectician: what? and Socrates was a dialectician too?" (*TI* "Socrates" 6.)

words, give reasons for its rule. The simple assertion of power is never enough; a Western leader must prove he deserves to rule, rather than merely that he is stronger than you. The glory of this development in human social relations—which Nietzsche regarded as a curse—is that the imperative of giving reasons carries within it a natural tendency toward political forms of freedom, equality, and earthly justice.

The tacit understanding that a ruler must justify himself has a corollary, namely that his subjects may question him, may *demand* reasons. This creates an impetus among thinkers to develop the justifying reasons in advance, as it were. That is, the triumph of the wisdom standard over the power standard begat political philosophy itself, and defined its purpose for over two millennia, namely the attempt to work out the truest justifications for the establishment of practical power. The concept of limited government, with its checks and balances and its emphasis on the private citizen's range of freedom, rather than the government's range of authority, is a natural outflow from Socrates' stealth attack on the powerful families of Athens. Socrates' final words to the jury that convicted him presaged the civilizational trajectory that evolved in the wake of his death:

> And now, O men who have condemned me, I would fain prophesy to you; for I am about to die, and that is the hour in which men are gifted with prophetic power. And I prophesy to you who are my murderers, that immediately after my death punishment far heavier than you have inflicted on me will surely await you. Me you have killed because you wanted to escape the accuser, and not to give an account of your lives. But that will not be as you suppose: far otherwise. For I say that there will be more accusers of you than there are now; accusers whom hitherto I have restrained: and as they are younger they will be more severe with you, and you will be

> more offended at them. For if you think that by killing men you can avoid the accuser censuring your lives, you are mistaken; that is not a way of escape which is either possible or honorable; the easiest and noblest way is not to be crushing others, but to be improving yourselves.[6]

Political power that is infected with the need to "give an account" of itself is doomed, in the long run, to live within the limits of rational self-restraint, or to be judged illegitimate. Athenian philosophy—the culmination of Greek intellectual life, and therefore the defining hypothesis of Western man—infected power with the practical compulsion, if not the inner reservations, of a guilty conscience, an effect that lasted until only yesterday. To summarize the politics of Western civilization elliptically, Socrates died so that the United States of America might live.

The most important work in the history of political philosophy is Plato's *Republic*, the great radicalism of which—often overlooked by both liberals and conservatives today—was its proposal to make political power subservient to wisdom by making the *teachers*, of all people, the rulers. The antithesis of this radical assertion of reason's rights was defined in its ultimate form by Platonism's greatest critic, Nietzsche, who reasserted the claims of irrational power against the old Platonic "will to truth." We are now tabulating the full results of this great emancipation of the passions. The undermining of the Western intellectual tradition—that is, of the Socratic tradition of the teacher as gadfly to the powerful—exhibits its practical effects in every area of human activity, but nowhere as starkly or definitively as in this deliberate reversal of the proper relationship between the teacher and the ruler, reason and authority. When the teacher becomes essentially subservient to the ruler—which I offer as a simple

[6] Plato, *Apology*, Translated by Benjamin Jowett (1891), 39c-d.

definition of modern compulsory schooling—reason becomes a mere agent of power and handmaiden of the passions, philosophy degenerates into sophistry, and, as a result, *education becomes indistinguishable from propaganda*.

For more than a century, the world's personification of this new, anti-Socratic conception of teaching as a process of denaturing the rational animal—of education not as fertile soil, but as a scythe—has been Fichte's truest heir, John Dewey. German philosophers killed and wrote the obituary of the West understood as a didaskalocracy, the rule of the teachers, with its defining quest for human completion. But it took an American to put a smiley face on the post-Western replacement for genuine education. Fichte invented the first theoretical model of a re-education camp, and hence paved the way for authoritarian subversives of all stripes. Dewey, more than anyone else, made the re-education camp a marketable commodity in the (formerly) non-authoritarian world—and a universal reality.

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Soft Fichteanism

i. Stalin's Propagandist, the World's Teacher

Joseph Stalin had been General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party for six years in 1928, when John Dewey, in popular iconography "the father of progressive education," toured Russia with a group of educators. Later that year, *The New Republic* published Dewey's "Impressions of Soviet Russia and the Revolutionary World."[1] This series of essays stands as a remarkable testament to progressivism's disdain for mankind, reason, and truth. It is also Dewey's most honest and concise primer on the basic principles and purposes of progressive schooling. Anyone prepared to continue defending the idea of modern public education after reading this document is perhaps unreachable with rational argument.

It must be noted that no second-hand summary could capture the essence of what Dewey is attempting to do in this work. The summarizer would immediately be dismissed with a skeptical harrumph or an indignant pshaw; this level of mendacity simply fails to accord with our universal conception of a "major thinker." We are therefore compelled, in what follows, to let Dewey speak for himself to a large extent, in the name of believability.

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[1] Dewey, *Impressions of Soviet Russia and the Revolutionary World: Mexico-China-Turkey* (1928), in *The Later Works*, vol. 4, hereafter *ISR*.

Dewey's general assessment of the Stalinist Russia he claims to have encountered is unabashedly positive, not to say romantic. Here is a very typical example:

> But since the clamor of economic emphasis, coming...from both defenders and enemies of the Bolshevik scheme, may have confused others as it certainly confused me, I can hardly do better than record the impression, as overwhelming as it was unexpected, that the outstanding fact in Russia is a revolution, involving the release of human powers on such an unprecedented scale that it is of incalculable significance not only for that country, but for the world.[2]

Note the peculiar effect of combining the most understated, non-judgmental language to describe a murderous dictatorship ("the Bolshevik scheme") with the most unobjective hyperbole ("overwhelming," "unprecedented," "incalculable") to describe something as abstract and speculative as "the release of human powers" under communism. This passage, and indeed the entire document, written by a sixty-nine-year-old eminent intellectual, reads like the silly postcard effusions of a ten-year-old girl on her first trip to Disneyland.

Furthermore, notice Dewey's expression of surprise at the disparity between the Russia he claims to have encountered and the one he supposedly expected to find. Knowing that he is writing for American readers inclined to disapprove of the Soviet dictatorship, Dewey carefully peppers his reminiscences with expressions of shock. The pretense that he never expected to find Russia so wonderfully transformed by communism is this lifelong leftist's cynical reversal of Socratic irony—his feigned wide-eyed innocence is intended to entrap the unsuspecting reader in naïve

[2] *ISR*, 207.

acquiescence to irrationalism. The technique is used frequently to punctuate his most outrageous declarations of admiration for tyranny. One more of many possible examples:

> I am only too conscious, as I write, how strangely fantastic the idea of hope and creation in connection with Bolshevist Russia must appear to those whose beliefs about it were fixed, not to be changed, some seven or eight years ago. I certainly was not prepared for what I saw; it came as a shock.[3]

Is it possible to be shocked by one's own abstract interpretation? Did one of the West's leading socialists really go to Russia, in 1928, unprepared for what he saw? Or is his shock really just part of a predictable leftist apology for the brutality of Soviet communism, a sympathetic assessment that was never in doubt? You be the judge of passages such as this one:

> We all know a certain legend appropriate to the lips and pen of the European visitor to America: here is a land inhabited by a strangely young folk, with the buoyancy, energy, naïveté and immaturity of youth and inexperience. That is the way Moscow impressed me, and *very much more so than my own country*. There, indeed, was a life full of hope, confidence, almost hyperactive.... Freed from the load of subjection to the past, it seems charged with the ardor of creating a new world.[4] (Emphasis added.)

This charming notion of youthful "ardor," "hope," and "confidence," mere "legend" when applied to America, is, according to Dewey, "very much more" truly said of Stalin's Russia. Notice,

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[3] *ISR*, 217.
[4] *ISR*, 215-216.

moreover, the obvious echoes of Fichte's seminal declaration of the essential meaning of progressivism. ("If [mankind] is not to remain in nothingness," said Fichte, "it must henceforward make itself all that it is yet to become. The destiny of the human race on earth...is in freedom to make itself what it really is originally.")

Or consider this lyrical description of a totalitarian police state:

> The mass of the people is to learn the meaning of Communism not so much by induction into Marxian doctrines...but by what is done for the mass in freeing their life, in giving them a sense of security, safety, in opening to them access to recreation, leisure, new enjoyments and new cultivations of all sorts.[5]

The general judgment, then, is not only that Russians under Stalin are happier and more hopeful than they have ever been—than *any* people have ever been—but that the regime *desires* the people's happiness, that conditions under Stalin indicate the regime's devotion to the well-being of "the mass." Dewey makes this point explicit, telling us that the new government "is one as interested in giving them access to sources of happiness as the only other government with which they have any acquaintance was to keep them in misery."[6]

Consider the dishonesty of recasting the Marxist-Leninist program of forcibly undoing the traditions and religion of a nation as the glorious achievement of a people "creating a new world" after having been "freed from the load of subjection to the past." And lest anyone question Stalin's destructive means of freeing a nation from its past, Dewey insists that this alleged destructiveness is part of the West's false narrative about Stalinism.

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[5] *ISR*, 222.
[6] *ISR*, 226.

> All that has been said of the anti-clerical and atheistic tendencies of the Bolshevist is true enough. But the churches and their contents that were of artistic worth are not only intact, but taken care of with scrupulous and even scientific zeal. It is true that many have been converted into museums, but to all appearances there are still enough to meet the needs of would-be worshippers.[7]

No, you are not reading a clever update of Swift's *Modest Proposal*. This is the most influential American philosopher of the twentieth century, and at least the second most important man in the history of public education, whitewashing the Soviet crushing of religion as mere "atheistic tendencies," and admiring the violent confiscation of churches and art works on the grounds that the buildings and "their contents of artistic worth" are "intact," "taken care of," and "converted into museums." And take a moment to appreciate Dewey's dismissive swipe at persecuted believers as "would-be worshippers." He carries on, noting with stomach-turning delight that "The collections of ikons in museums in Leningrad and Moscow are an experience which repays the lover of art for a voyage to these cities." How, we might ask, were the previous owners of these artifacts repaid for their involuntary contributions to Dewey's cultural voyage?

Thus far we have established only that the sixty-nine-year-old Dewey still admired communism, and was prepared to say anything, no matter how vile or absurd, to defend the post-revolutionary Russia by which he so unconvincingly claims to have been delightfully surprised. But what of the primary purpose of his visit, namely the examination of Stalinist Russia's educational establishment? Here, Dewey's enthusiastic rhetoric

[7] *ISR*, 217-218.

carries him into rhapsodies of self-revelation that shed the light of frankness on his often disingenuous and manipulative philosophical writings.

One cannot miss the personal pride with which Dewey admires Soviet education. Far from being a disinterested observer, Dewey had a vested interest in providing a favorable review of both the methods and the results of the Soviet schools he observed, for they were fundamentally *his* methods, and the results, therefore, evidence for or against Deweyism. He is therefore predisposed to see noble intentions and great success in every use of public schools for purposes of social control, government indoctrination, and the propagandistic undermining of mankind's moral, political, and rational heritage—purposes that he himself advocates. Thus we get flourishes such as these:

> I have never seen anywhere in the world such a large proportion of intelligent, happy, and intelligently occupied children.[8] [Incidentally, must all devotees of progressive paternalism talk such hyperbolic mush? Compare Horace Mann's description of the teachers in the Prussian schools as "the finest collection of men I have ever seen, full of intelligence, dignity, benevolence, kindness, and bearing in their countenances and demeanor the impress of conscientiousness and fidelity to their trust."[9]]

> For while a revival of interest in artistic production, literary, musical, plastic, is characteristic of progressive schools all over the world, there is no country, unless it be possibly Mexico,

[8] *ISR*, 212.

[9] Horace Mann quoted in Mary Tyler Peabody Mann, *The Life of Horace Mann* (1895, reprint London: Forgotten Books, 2013), 201.

> where the esthetic aim and quality so dominates all things educational as in Russia today.[10]

Much of his polemic rides on what he calls the aesthetic element of the post-revolutionary period, and regards as more important than Marxist economic theory. This aesthetic element has to do with the production of a new emotional sensibility which, in turn, will engender a "new mentality," one suited to totalitarian collectivism—although Dewey is careful to avoid describing the social system so directly, preferring, for obvious reasons, to define it only negatively, as the antithesis of "the egoistic and private ideals and methods inculcated by the institution of private property, profit and acquisitive possession." In other words, the primary function of Soviet education, of which Dewey thoroughly approves, is the undoing of the "mentality" of individual liberty, free will, and self-determination.

Essential to achieving this new mentality is omnipresent communist propaganda—which Dewey not only defends, but identifies as *the heart of progressive education*.

> Indeed, it has taken on such importance and social dignity that the word propaganda hardly carries...the correct meaning. For we instinctively associate propaganda with the accomplishing of some special ends, more or less private to a particular class or group, and correspondingly concealed from others. But in Russia the propaganda is in behalf of a burning public faith. One may believe that the leaders are wholly mistaken in the object of their faith, but their sincerity is beyond question.[11]

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[10] *ISR*, 218.
[11] *ISR*, 221-222.

Once again, Dewey demands that we acknowledge the noble intentions of the Communist Party, which he specifies as "the universal good of universal humanity."[12] And from this premise, the "sincere" faith in universal communism, John Dewey—the most influential theorist behind *all* public education throughout the civilized world today—draws the following conclusion:

> In consequence, propaganda is education and education is propaganda. They are more than confounded; they are identified.[13]

The purpose of this propaganda/education is to inculcate a change in "the mental and moral disposition of a people,"[14] in favor of each individual identifying himself essentially with the collective, while regarding his own private interests as gratuitous and worthless. Frustratingly, however, the progressive educator's efforts are persistently "undone by the educative—or mis-educative—formation of disposition and mental habit proceeding from the environment,"[15] which is to say by natural impulses and social circumstances contrary to the teachings of communist self-immolation. The greatest enemy of communist education—the condition that inculcates belief in private property, and promotes the natural impulses to self-preservation and self-reliance, which Marxists reductively call "profit"—is *the private family*. The elimination of the family, therefore, is the most necessary means to the propagandistic purity of the progressive school.

The identical point, you will recall, was made by Fichte, right down to the specific threat represented by the family's influence,

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[12] *ISR*, 222.
[13] *ISR*, 222.
[14] *ISR*, 223.
[15] *ISR*, 227.

namely that it encourages the development of interests and mental habits which prevent the child from identifying himself utterly with the collective, and therefore from relinquishing his private, i.e., natural, needs and desires in favor of selfless devotion to the state. The main difference between Fichte's solution to this problem and Dewey's is stylistic, indicative of the general difference between these two fountainheads of progressive schooling, namely that Fichte, the more honest and serious of the two, proposes to do openly what Dewey instinctively prefers to do by stealth. Thus, whereas Fichte simply proposes to conduct childhood indoctrination in complete separation from the family, Dewey admires the Soviets' more insidious method.

> Hence the great task of the school is to counteract and transform those domestic and neighborhood tendencies that are still so strong, even in a nominally collectivistic regime. In order to accomplish this end, the teachers must in the first place know with great detail and accuracy just what the conditions are to which pupils are subject in the home, and thus be able to interpret the habits and acts of the pupil in the school in light of his environing conditions—and this, not just in some general way, but as definitely as a skilled physician diagnoses in the light of their causes the diseased conditions with which he is dealing.[16]

Here, Dewey defends the practice of having children spy on their parents, and report their parents' "diseased" (i.e., individualistic) behavior and attitudes, so that the state may undermine them more effectively. He regards this "social behaviorism" as "much more promising intellectually" than physiological behaviorism, as it "will enable schools to react favorably upon the undesirable

[16] *ISR*, 228.

conditions discovered, and to reinforce such desirable agencies as exist."[17] That is, families must be incorporated into the socialist indoctrination program where possible. When a family proves unhelpful in this regard, it is to be undermined and overwhelmed by the state's psychological warriors, with the battlefield, needless to say, being the child's soul.

He lingers over this all-important task of destroying the family—historically both the child's natural path into society *and* nature's buffer protecting the individual from complete absorption into the state—and thereby of bringing the child under the exclusive mental and moral control of the government. Nothing ever written, by the present author or others, to persuade parents of the folly of imagining they can undo the damage of public education at home, can make the point as clearly as Dewey himself, speaking as a general in the opposing army.

> It is obvious to any observer that in every western country the increase of importance of public schools has been at least coincident with a relaxation of older family ties. What is going on in Russia appears to be a planned acceleration of this process. For example, the earliest section of the school system, dealing with children from three to seven, aims...to keep children under its charge six, eight and ten hours per day, and in ultimate ideal...this procedure is to be universal and compulsory. When it is carried out, the effect on family life is too evident to need to be dwelt upon.[18]

Unfortunately, it seems that once this universal and compulsory ideal has been achieved, its effect on family life ceases to be so

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[17] *ISR*, 229.
[18] *ISR*, 230-231.

evident to parents whose children are currently being hollowed out by it, scoop by scoop. In the earlier stages of the spiritual enslaving of man, the perpetrators knew exactly what and whom they had to defeat, and saw the task as formidable. Their intellectual heirs of today have merely to complete the final clean-up of Satan's workshop—the hard work has already been done by Fichte, Dewey and other pioneers of compulsory public education.

Dewey, in identifying the hurdles on the path to complete social control, helps us to understand exactly what government educators are aiming at today, as they complete the progressive annihilation of mankind.

> I do not see how any honest educational reformer in western countries can deny that the greatest practical obstacle in the way of introducing into schools that connection with social life which he regards as desirable is the great part played by personal competition and desire for private profit in our economic life.... The Russian educational situation is enough to convert one to the idea that only in a society based upon the cooperative principle can the ideals of educational reformers be adequately carried into operation.[19]

In short, progressive schools, if they are to produce the desired psychological result, will do so most effectively within the broader societal context of communism. Hence:

> While an American visitor may feel a certain patriotic pride in noting in how many respects an initial impulse came from some progressive school in our own country, he is at once humiliated and stimulated to new endeavor to see how much

[19] *ISR*, 233-234.

> more organically that idea is incorporated in the Russian system than in our own.[20]

To restate this point for the sake of emphasis, Dewey is saying that the theoretical foundation of all compulsory schooling in the modern world is most "organically" suited to implementation in a communist dictatorship. It follows that the new endeavor to which Dewey says the Western reformer must be stimulated by the Soviet example is the effort to undermine property-based political systems directly, in favor of a communistic arrangement with which progressive schooling makes a more natural fit.

Lest anyone—probably a graduate of teacher's college or an advanced degree holder in education theory—object here that Dewey was an ardent democrat, and in no way inclined toward authoritarianism, I draw your attention to this:

> Perhaps the most significant thing in Russia, after all, is not the effort at economic transformation, but the will to use an economic change as the means of developing a popular cultivation...such as the world has never known.... The main effort is nobly heroic, evincing a faith in human nature which is democratic beyond the ambitions of the democracies of the past.[21]

For John Dewey—your teacher, your children's teacher, the *world's* teacher—Stalinist Russia was history's purest, noblest example of the democratic ideal. Remember this simple and revealing statement every time you hear Dewey extolled as a democrat, or read the word "democracy" in his own writings. He belongs to that school of Western apologists for whom commun-

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[20] *ISR*, 241.
[21] *ISR*, 213.

ism was the truest democracy. That he, like most of Stalin's other global propagandists, suddenly became a defender of Trotsky and critic of the Soviet regime when the dam of progressive lies burst, only reinforces his disingenuousness. Dewey lacked even the "honor among thieves" style of integrity represented by playwright Lillian Hellman, who continued to stand by the communist butcher for whom she, like Dewey, had lied, even after he had been fully exposed.[22] When he thought he could get away with it, however, Dewey's public stand was that Soviet education, most organically suited to communist "democracy," was the highest achievement in world schooling, and a great source of pride for him, as it was his own system, carried out more completely than social conditions in the West permitted at that time.

Times have changed. Dewey has won. Ethical individualism, defined as broadly as you please, is dead. Collectivist submission and Dewey's superficial display of infantilized individuality are the social norm. Private property and family are on their last legs. The West has largely been "freed from the load of subjection to the past." The aesthetic revolution of government education/propaganda has borne its deformed, inedible fruit.

The more brutally honest brand of progressives have always had faith that political subjugation would pave the way to educational revolution. Their subtler intellectual comrades have learned from history that the opposite nexus, pursued gradually,

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[22] Cf. Sarah Churchwell, "The Scandalous Lillian Hellman," in *The Guardian* (January 22, 2011), available online at http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/jan/22/lillian-hellman-childrens-hour-sarah-churchwell. "Many of her contemporaries found her later seizure of the moral high ground in her dealings with the [House Committee on Un-American Activities] understandably enraging, given her unrepentant Stalinism: she publicly supported the Moscow purge trials and continued to insist that Stalin had created 'the ideal democratic state.'"

may result at last in a more firmly rooted universal authoritarianism.

We are almost there.

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ii. Universal Kindergarten

> *CAPTAIN*: *They're children, Colonel. They're just like children.*
> *COLONEL*: *The majority of them are adults.*
> *CAPTAIN*: *Chronologically, yes. They range in age from six months to sixty years. But psychologically and socially they're children. Colonel Sloan, I've kept these people alive and together all these years, and when we get back to Earth, I will simply have to continue the process.*
> *COLONEL*: *Have you told them this?*
> *CAPTAIN*: *There's no need to tell them—they know it already.*[23]
>
> Rod Serling, *The Twilight Zone*

I have seen some try to absolve Dewey of responsibility for his shameless gushing on behalf of Stalin by claiming that the educational institutions Dewey and his fellow visiting educators were shown were not real Soviet schools, but an academic Potemkin village. In other words, the claim is that Dewey was not the purveyor, but rather the victim, of these lies. There are two obvious problems, however, with this attempt to expunge from Dewey's record his performance as *The New Republic's* philosophical Walter Duranty.

First, as we have seen, he is not merely praising the schools he visited, but rather the entire Bolshevik revolution, and he is praising it specifically for ending private property, forcibly reducing religious activity, and using propaganda to rally a

[23] Rod Serling, excerpt from "On Thursday We Leave for Home," *The Twilight Zone*, broadcast May 2, 1963.

society against its own history. Unless one wishes to claim that Stalin was in fact a classical liberal, a defender of property rights, and a protector of religious freedom, it is difficult to see what part of Dewey's factual presentation is untrue to the reality of Soviet Russia, and therefore evidence of his having been duped. On the contrary, the only elements of his account of Soviet society in general that ring false are his own enthusiastic defenses of the righteousness of all these oppressive acts, his tiptoeing around the bodies of the undeniable victims, and his casual pooh-poohing of all "confused" Western criticism; but those elements comprise Dewey's (favorable) personal assessment of communist oppression, and can hardly be attributed to his having been misled, unless we assume he went to Russia as the dumbest man alive.

Secondly, as for the schools themselves, he is overtly praising them as instantiations of his own methods. Thus, from the point of view of understanding the political implications of Dewey's theory of education, it matters not at all whether the Soviets really tried to implement Deweyism as faithfully as he seemed to believe. What matters is what Dewey himself thinks an education system ought to be. His praise of the Soviet schools *as he describes them*, whether they were authentic or Potemkin, clearly reveals Dewey's own hopes, preferences, and educational principles, which may be summarized as follows:

(i) Public schooling should be universal and compulsory, and teachers must see themselves as agents of state conformity.

(ii) The primary function of school is to prepare the child's mind for life in a socialist collective.

(iii) The school must root out feelings of self-interest, or any private inclinations that draw the individual away from his role as a submissive facet of the collective.

(iv) The parents' role in child-rearing must be subverted and counteracted until it has been reduced to an extension of the state indoctrination program.

(v) As the main aim of the educational apparatus is moral and psychological uniformity, and as the regulator and intended beneficiary of this aim is the state itself, education and propaganda become effectively interchangeable terms. (This is the necessary effect of collapsing wisdom into power, teaching into government, as we saw in the previous chapter.)

As is amply demonstrated throughout his apology for Stalinism, Dewey presents a special problem of interpretation not usually associated with an important philosopher, namely that he is palpably dishonest—not ironic in the Socratic sense, nor conveniently myopic in the Marxian sense, but simply given to misrepresentation and disingenuousness in the service of his political goals. This should not be particularly surprising, in light of his fondness for propaganda, but it means that in assessing his ideas we are continually faced with the double task of finding his full meaning, which he has deliberately fudged, and only then addressing the content of the ideas themselves.

Allow me to set the stage for the broad analysis of Dewey's education theory which is to follow by quoting a classic example of his style, in which he implicitly seeks to differentiate his goals from those of a tyrant, by directly tackling the issue of despotic vs. democratic education. In 1939, Dewey was elected president of the League for Industrial Democracy, a socialist advocacy organization he had helped to found in 1905. The 1960s leftist radical group Students for a Democratic Society, from which arose the Weatherman terrorists, was itself an outgrowth of the student

wing of the LID, alternately known as the John Dewey Discussion Club.[24]

In 1940, he delivered an "Address of Welcome" to the League,[25] in which, having asserted the necessity of conjoining politics and education in an "industrial democracy" (i.e., a socialist state), he then took a moment to qualify this assertion.

> Indeed, even totalitarian states differ from previous despotic states in history because they have learned that, under the conditions that exist today, even dictatorships must have a popular support which only some kind of education can furnish. The noble distinction of a democratic society lies in the kind of unity it establishes between education and politics. It is for the people to instruct their officials, not for a few officials to regulate the sentiments and ideas of the rest of the people; the final criterion and test of what is done by our legislative bodies...is what effect their actions have upon the ideas and emotions of the citizens of the country.[26]

So what distinguishes totalitarianism from democracy, with regard to the nexus between politics and education, is that in totalitarianism the regime uses education to "regulate the

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[24] "As the decade of the sixties began, the Student League for Industrial Democracy—SLID, as it was known—gave no sign that it would grow into the most important student organization into the country's history [i.e., SDS].... It had, at best, a few hundred members, most of whom were once-a-year activists and many of whom were well past their undergraduate years. It had only three chapters—at Columbia and Yale, where both were known as the 'John Dewey Discussion Club,' and at Michigan...." From Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS: The Rise and Development of the Students for a Democratic Society* (Vintage Books, 1973), 7.

[25] Dewey, *Address of Welcome to the League for Industrial Democracy*, (1940), in *Later Works*, vol. 14, 262-265.

[26] *Address of Welcome*, 262-263.

sentiments and ideas" of the population, whereas in democracy, the people "instruct their officials" based on their own "ideas and emotions." Having just examined the terms of Dewey's praise of Soviet education, particularly with respect to its careful monitoring and management of the mental life of the child, you are no doubt asking yourself the obvious question: How can Dewey argue that in his "industrial democracy" the ideas and emotions of the people control the government, when he believes that the government of such a democracy must educate the people to think and feel in ways supportive of the regime? In other words, isn't his contrast between the politics-education relationship in totalitarianism on the one hand, and in his notion of democracy on the other, a distinction without a difference? Is he not himself proposing that citizens be raised from early childhood in progressive government schools, trained out of any inclinations unfriendly to "industrial democracy," and *only then* set free to "instruct their officials"—in accordance with the ideas and emotions they have learned from the state?

The short answer to those questions is yes. But to understand why Dewey thinks he can get away with such sophistry, and what, in concrete terms, he and his devotees are trying to get away with, we must inquire more deeply into his philosophy of education. For if you really want to understand the heart of modern public schooling, in all its variations; if you want to know why our civilization is deteriorating in the particular way it is; and if you want a clear view at last of that elusive, nebulous web connecting Germany's early nineteenth century authoritarian idealism to today's global, trance-like march through the collective enslavement of soft despotism, you need only light a torch, descend the crumbling stairs into hell's library, and crack open the dusty tomes of John Dewey's *Collected Works*, the twentieth century's greatest treasure trove of democratic tyranny.

Let us begin our journey with Dewey's address to the National Council of Education in 1902, at the height of his academic ascent, during the initial period of developing the University of Chicago Laboratory School. I choose this work as a springboard into the murky depths of Dewey's philosophy partly because it is useful to hear how a known dissembler addresses an audience he perceives as likeminded and relatively exclusive. The speech, subsequently published under the title "The School as Social Centre,"[27] offers an excellent summary of Dewey's conception of the meaning and purpose of public education, and, given its vintage, is indicative of the kind of thinking and sensibility that led John D. Rockefeller himself, and later his General Education Board, to lend support to Dewey's research project and principles.[28]

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[27] John Dewey, "The School as Social Centre," in *The Elementary School Teacher*, vol.III No. 2 (1902), 73-76, hereafter *SSC*.

[28] Rockefeller, along with the progressive American Baptist Education Society, founded The University of Chicago in 1890. His main Baptist Society partner in this founding, Frederick T. Gates, later became Rockefeller's right hand man in the G.E.B. See "Frederick T. Gates," at *100 Years: The Rockefeller Foundation*, http://rockefeller100.org/biography/show/frederick-t—gates (accessed April 20, 2016). In 1894, John Dewey was chosen as head of Chicago's department of philosophy, psychology, and pedagogy, and soon opened the original Laboratory School (with Rockefeller start-up funding) in 1896. (Cf. Michael Knoll, "John Dewey as administrator: the inglorious end of the Laboratory School in Chicago," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* [Published online August 8, 2014], http://www.academia.edu/14351044/John_Dewey_as_administrator_the_inglorious_end_of_the_Laboratory_School_in_Chicago_2014_.)

In fact, the Rockefeller family's financial and ideological alliance with Deweyism has continued through the generations. Cf. Sam Blumenfeld, "Dyslexia and the Rockefellers," in *The New American* (February 28, 2012), http://www.thenewamerican.com/reviews/opinion/item/10929-dyslexia-and-the-rockefellers. Blumenfeld quotes David Rockefeller, son of John D. Rockefeller, Jr.: "Father was an ardent and generous supporter of John Dewey's educational methods and school reform efforts.... Teacher's College of

As the title of his address suggests, Dewey's concern is to promote the idea of public school as more than a locus of learning, in the sense of encouraging intellectual growth, or even of moral education, in the sense of instilling good citizenship. In fact he is insistent that both of these functions are mere antiquated remnants of the modern school's primordial past, and no longer of primary importance to the grander, more comprehensive sense of education he foresees. He conceives of school more as an idea than as an institution. The notion of "school as social centre" is therefore to be understood quite broadly. School should become the living hub or essence of the society as a whole, the nerve center through which all ideas and perceptions (including self-perceptions) are to be disseminated to the citizens. This applies first to the indoctrination of the young, of course. (And Dewey subscribed to the latest trend in developmental psychology at the time, which was the introduction of the convenient childhood-extending category, adolescence; he contended that this phase continues through approximately age twenty-four, thus providing the rationale for education methods aimed at prolonging dependence and emotional immaturity until they become hardened habits of the soul.) But the process of school socialization does not end with the onset of adulthood. For a classic of progressive paternalism, consider Dewey's explanation of the need for this social center throughout life. Addressing the place of the worker in society, he relies heavily on a neo-Marxist conception of alienation in the industrial age to ground his outline of the function of school in adult life:

Columbia University operated Lincoln [a progressive laboratory school], with considerable financial assistance in the early years from the General Education Board, as an experimental school designed to put Dewey's philosophy into practice."

> It must provide at least part of that training which is necessary to keep the individual properly adjusted to a rapidly changing environment. It must *interpret to him the intellectual and social meaning of the work in which he is engaged*: that is, must reveal its relations to the life and work of the world. It must make up to him in part for the decay of dogmatic and fixed methods of social discipline. It must supply him compensation for the loss of reverence and the influence of authority. And, finally, it must provide means for bringing people and their ideas and beliefs together, in such ways as will *lessen friction and instability*, and introduce deeper sympathy and wider understanding.[29] (Emphasis added.)

To paraphrase: A normal citizen cannot be expected to understand why he is alive. Having been "freed from the load of subjection to the past" under the newly developing proto-socialist regime, the lack of religious dogma and of authority deriving from now defunct traditions will leave him at quite a loss to grasp who or what he is. He will therefore desperately need the "social centre" to take his hand and explain his life's purpose to him, and how what he is doing is useful to the collective. This unifying function is not only, or even primarily, beneficial to the lowly workers themselves; it is also indispensible to the state, which must be vigilant in anticipating sources of dissent or dis-satisfaction, and take active steps to discourage "ideas and beliefs" which are not conducive to "stability," or which cause "friction." In short, school must prevent the growth of a frustrated

[29] *SSC*, 83.

underclass "clinging to their Bibles and their guns," as President Obama described a certain kind of conservative.[30]

Recall Dewey's summary of the aesthetic extension of the traditional notion of education under communism: "propaganda is education and education is propaganda." Here we see how the notion fits within Dewey's own theory of education. Remembering that school, in Dewey's account of the proper education system, means specifically and exclusively public school, one immediately sees that by defining school as a lifelong "social centre," he is really making the case for continual government manipulation of the population and its sentiments. And remembering that proper education for Dewey extends to any method of disseminating ideas or reinforcing attitudes with a view to social cohesion and collective purpose, we may infer that what he is proposing here is to reconceive of government itself as the permanent and sole source of all public perceptions, including moral perceptions.

If this seems far-fetched or unduly Orwellian, consider, at a matter-of-fact level, what compulsory public schooling necessarily means within the context of childhood education. To extend this reality to encompass the community as a whole, and throughout the course of life, is not only quite conceivable, but follows logically from the very idea of compulsory progressive

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[30] Hillary Clinton borrowed Dewey's concept of friendly socialist re-education in its literal form in 2015, proposing "camps for adults," where people with political differences would be forced to "work together" in an atmosphere of "fun." See John Nolte, "Hillary Clinton: 'We Really Need Camps for Adults,'" *Breitbart* (March 19, 2015), http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2015/03/19/hillary-clinton-proposes-we-really-need-camps-for-adults/.

But in fact, while lacking the direct behavior-modification component of literal camps, Dewey's wish is fulfilled far more satisfactorily and universally by ceding the attitude-adjustment function to a progressive university system and an agenda-compliant mass media.

education. If one accepts the premise that the state should be the single ultimate guide of intellectual and character development for an entire population, what would compel one to think this process ought to be discontinued once the subject has completed "adolescence"? Thus, when Dewey declares that the "social centre"—his euphemism for the state *qua* source of the society's "aesthetic" self-understanding—must "make up for the decay of dogmatic and fixed methods of social discipline," and "supply compensation" for the "loss of reverence and the influence of [obsolete, non-governmental] authority," he means nothing less than that the state itself must take the place formerly occupied by gods, traditional moral codes, and notions of family loyalty and continuity. (If you are convinced he could not mean anything so, shall we say, German, then you are welcome to cling to a more comforting interpretation.)

The question that naturally arises here—or would, had civilization not been living under the reign of the Deweyesque social center for so many decades—is whence derives the state's authority to assume such an all-encompassing role in men's lives in the first place? As you will recall, it was here that Fichte ran up against the limits of his reasoning, and was left to rely on the sheer force of his personality, in effect declaring that if only we could see what he could see, we would simply understand the necessity of ceding all authority over child-rearing, social hierarchy, and moral direction to the state. But Fichte had a major practical advantage over Dewey, namely an audience in the throes of despair and self-doubt, and craving a savior with answers for an hour of need. It is my contention that the main difference between Fichte's proposals and Dewey's is to be found not in basic political temperament or intentions—progressive collectivism and a socialist society ruled by an authoritarian elite—but simply in this, that Dewey was forced by his surround-

ing politico-economic conditions to *subvert* in the areas where Fichte had *led*, to *distort* where Fichte had *shaped*, and to *insinuate* where Fichte had *declared*.

Case in point: Let us consider Dewey's account of the special circumstances that, he claims, make the "school as social centre" so necessary. For it is here that we arrive at the real essence of the intellectual shell game that is Dewey's philosophy of education.

Epictetus advises us that we must look to what a man regards as being to his advantage, if we would find the man's piety. The opposite advice, I suspect, also holds good. Pious reverence—for a person, a thing, or an idea—is similarly a sign indicating where a man locates his advantage. Thus in reading the map of John Dewey's heart, we must trace the lines drawn in the language of the "social." For Dewey, the word "social" is no ordinary adjective. It is in constant and varied use. It appears gratuitously, incessantly. It appears with the inelegant and tiresome frequency of overused slang. It is inserted so often, in so many contexts, that its normal descriptive function disappears in a haze of imprecise meaning. And that very fact, one finally realizes, is part of the reason for its frequent appearance. Dewey generally eschews the word "political," preferring the allusive power of the imprecise "social." One would do well to keep that in mind while reading Dewey, and to test the sense of many of his vaguely benign-sounding recommendations by substituting "political" wherever he uses "social." For Dewey's project is precisely to reduce the social to the political, or rather society to the state.

But there is more to it than that. One of the classic methods of sophistry (literally among the tools of the ancient sophist's trade) is equivocation. Use a word often enough, and in a calculated mix of straightforward and vague senses, and eventually the listener becomes accustomed to accepting it as a kind of loose

placeholder in the argument. As a result, when you shift the word into a position to carry a sense or level of meaning never openly agreed upon, he will accede to your unstated connotations as though they are almost self-evident, imagining you are still using the keyword in one of its previously accepted senses.

Thus it is that Dewey begins his argument for the school as social center by placing his proposal in a seemingly uncontroversial historical context. He defines his topic as an attempt to determine "what to do in order to make the schoolhouse a centre of full and adequate social service, to bring it completely into the current of social life," which, on the basis of what we have seen, may be restated as "how to infuse the government's indoctrination apparatus into all those phases and facets of men's lives to which government had not hitherto had access." He then begins his "brief historic retrospect" on the evolution of education with the following assertion:

> The function of education, since anything which might pass by that name was found among savage tribes, has been social. The particular organ or structure, however, through which this aim was subserved, and the nature of its adjustment to other social institutions, has varied according to the peculiar condition of the given time.[31]

"The function of education...has been social." This assertion serves as the basis for a synoptic interpretation of the history of education. But what exactly does it mean? It is obvious that any process of education involving the passing of knowledge from one person to another is social by definition, and also that *one* function (though not, as Dewey deceptively phrases it, *the* function) of the most common examples of education is social in

[31] *SSC*, 73-74.

the sense of preparing the learner to live more successfully among other people. The next sentence, however, implies that he is talking about a universal evolutionary development, which would not follow from the opening assertion unless by "social" he meant something much more technical and contentious than merely "related to society." So is the opening assertion a banal truism (education is related to society), or a theoretical assertion requiring proof (education is an act *of* society taken as a universal progressive entity)? Dewey clearly wishes to achieve the benefits of the latter by means of the psychological effect of the former. That is, hoping to lay out an interpretation of the history of education that will support his radical intentions, but that would appear completely specious were he to leave it without a grounding principle, Dewey uses the fluid keyword "social" to express his principle in a manner that seems uncontroversial. This is textbook equivocation, and he uses it to lead us unchallenged through his loaded historical survey, the core of which is as follows:

> At the outset there was no school as a separate institution. The educative processes were carried on in the ordinary play of family and community life. As the ends to be reached by education became more numerous and remote, and the means employed more specialized, it was necessary, however, for society to develop a distinct institution. Only in this way could the special needs be adequately attended to. In this way developed the schools carried on by great philosophical organizations of antiquity—the Platonic, Stoic, Epicurean, etc.—then came schools as a phase of the work of the church. Finally, with the increasing separation of church and state, the latter asserted itself as the proper founder and supporter of educational institutions; and the modern type of public, or at least quasi-public, school developed.... [My] reason for refer-

> ring to this claiming by the state of the education function is to indicate that it was in continuance of the policy of specialization or division of labor.[32]

Here we have a great example of the harmful fallout of German idealism, and of the dangers of playing the neo-Hegelian game of dialectical history. Beginning with a desired result—generally, *oneself* idealized as the end of history—and a conveniently conceived grand design that seems most plausibly to render the desired result as inevitable and necessary, rather than contingent and changeable, one then cherry-picks and squeezes historical events until they conform to the design, thereby seeming to prove what in fact no argument could *disprove*, namely the present. In this case, following the Marxist materialist model of historical dialectic, Dewey attempts to derive the absolute idea of "school as social centre" (i.e., himself) from the principle of the division of labor.

He claims that the initial step from education as part of "family and community life" to the development of schools as distinct institutions resulted from new, "remote" educational ends, and correspondingly "specialized" means. We might ask here, "Whose ends, and whose means?" After all, specialization presupposes specialists, men who have developed a new area or method of inquiry in response to a need arising from prevailing "social" conditions, whether these be general conditions of the community at large or peculiar conditions within an isolated subcommunity. But these are precisely the questions Dewey wishes to avoid, since to contemplate them would bring clearly before the mind certain premises of his own argument that he would prefer to leave hidden. He therefore carefully frames his history

[32] *SSC*, 74.

so as to obscure these questions and the considerations they bring to light.

Thus, in introducing the initial growth of schools set apart from the ordinary life of family and community, Dewey chooses to keep his account and his phraseology strictly universal and generic: "it was necessary for society to develop a distinct institution." This wording casts the development of earlier educational methods and institutions as a societal undertaking, an act of History, rather than what it obviously really was, namely the particular acts of particular men advancing their own interests in response to their own concerns. The reason for this convenient evasion of practical reality is two-fold.

First, Dewey is trying to portray the move toward government schools as a continuation and perfection of the thrust of human evolution, rather than a corruption and bastardization of the ideals and endeavors of all the individual thinkers and educators of the past. By falsely portraying each "stage" in education's alleged evolution as answering to the will of society as a whole, rather than to the will of the actual founders of schools per se, he creates an intellectual plane of plausibility for his claim that the takeover of education by the state is only a completion of this evolutionary process, rather than what it actually was and is: the forced curtailment of the kind of varied intellectual uprisings *against* established social institutions that led to phenomena such as the Platonic, Stoic, and Epicurean schools, and that would undoubtedly lead to countless beneficial experiments in education today, were the machinery of state compulsion not standing in the way. In other words, to the extent that there really is a dialectical impulse in the development of thought, monopolistic government control over the dissemination of ideas effectively ends it, not in the sense of completing it, but rather of killing it. This is the true meaning of Dewey's emphasis on the

need for the "social centre" to propagandize against dissent, of Fichte's emphasis on the importance of preventing anyone from thinking at all without a state-trained overseer until his complete absorption of progressive idealism is certain, and of Rockefeller's insistence that public schooling should be designed to prevent the development of independent and original thinkers.

The principle of specialization or division of labor need not, as Dewey presupposes, tend toward increasingly monolithic and centralized controls. On the contrary, this principle is precisely an impetus to break away from established limits, norms, and conceptions of life's possibilities, as is demonstrated with exceptional clarity by precisely the examples of ancient schools that Dewey mentions.

Secondly, emphasizing the individual men and private intentions associated with the earliest schools, or even with "the church," would draw attention to something Dewey does not wish us to attend to, namely the fact that *every* educational endeavor or institution—formal or informal, ancient or modern—is designed by its creators to serve the ends they desire. By confining his description of the process to the universal level, Dewey can describe each stage generically as representing what "society" needed at any given time, thereby avoiding the key implication of the shift to state-controlled education, namely that this, unlike all previous educational schemes, was schooling undertaken in the *state's* interest, rather than in the interests of non-governmental entities. The stealthy avoidance of this implication is what allows him to declare without missing a beat that "with the increasing separation of church and state, the latter asserted itself as the proper founder and supporter of educational institutions."

"The latter asserted itself." As we have already seen in his hagiography to Soviet communism, Dewey has a tremendous

talent for understatement in the service of oppression. From his progressive authoritarian perspective, there is no difference in principle between saying "Plato asserted himself as the founder of a school in Athens" and saying "The state asserted itself as the controller of all schools everywhere." And notice his cute qualifier, "proper." Education was the provenance of home and community. Then it was undertaken by specialized schools, and eventually by the church. But only with the advent of state-controlled schooling does History pass a judgment: Government is the "proper founder" of schools. Why is it proper? It is proper because the state "asserted itself" and "claimed" education "in continuance of the policy of specialization or division of labor."

So the principle of specialization leads to schools controlled, not by those who actually develop the areas of specialized knowledge (as in his ancient Greek examples or the case of church doctrine), but by the state. And the principle of the division of labor naturally tends toward state oversight and control of every aspect of life and the economy. If there seems to be a missing step in Dewey's reasoning here, perhaps it is provided by his casually proffered explanation of what he means by "the state": "the organization of the resources of community life through governmental machinery of legislation and administration."[33] Let that definition sink in for a moment, ponder the breadth of the phrase "the resources of community life," and it becomes quite obvious how the historical evolution of the division of labor necessarily results in Dewey's conception of a perfect society: a totalitarian "democracy" in which universal indoctrination and ubiquitous propaganda produce the kind of compliance and submission which all but eliminates the need for those indelicate excesses of state brutality—secret police, midnight confiscations and arrests, intermittent pogroms—that, as

[33] *SSC*, 74.

he later observed in the case of Stalinism, can give "the universal good of universal humanity" a bad name. If you can wrap your mind around this kind of reasoning, then you will understand why the destruction of churches under Stalin did not bother Dewey in the least. He believes an analogous process is essential to the historical development of the modern public school. The separation of church and state leads to the takeover of education by the state, which in turn weakens the influence of "dogma" and "authority," meaning of religion and old wisdom. The state then fills the spiritual gap left by the weakened church with propaganda where men once had faith and moral precepts.

Dewey, like his ideological brother Antonio Gramsci, teaches that the key to a lasting, modern, and progressive authoritarianism is education, which means state-controlled schooling conducted in an artificial environment designed to undo every natural inclination toward individual self-discovery and freedom. For practical purposes, the school must *become* the state in the hearts of its students/subjects. Dewey's thinking is extremely clear-eyed on this issue. The measure of his method's success is found in the inability of the overwhelming majority of today's public school graduates to see the issue as clearly as Dewey, our spiritual schoolmaster, saw it.

So much rides on his case for the historical inevitability of state-controlled schooling that one cannot help being surprised how little he offers to support this development. At best, his historical dialectic has made a case for the institution of schools of some sort to teach specialized knowledge which people would not be able to learn from family and community. It is noteworthy that the examples of such specialized schools that he gives, from ancient times, were not schools for children; these philosophical schools would have presumed their students had received a typical family-directed education before they arrived, just as our

early modern universities would have presumed of theirs. Perhaps Dewey chose these less than helpful examples because the only other straightforward model of Greek schooling in the strict sense that he knew was that of Sparta, where child schooling was already universal, compulsory, and "specialized" in precisely the sense Dewey prefers, namely that it was designed to inculcate blind devotion to the state and to dull independent thought. Drawing attention to Sparta would undermine his pretense at a theory of historical evolution on more than one level, so he ignores it.

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iii. Pragmatic Totalitarianism

> *Our educational policy must enable everyone who receives an education to develop morally, intellectually and physically and become a worker with both socialist consciousness and culture.*[1]
>
> Mao Tse-tung

Dewey's inclination as both writer and thinker is to throw endless splashes of paint against the wall in the hope that a coherent picture may suddenly appear. It would therefore be impossible, in the present context, to account for all of his sundry attempts to bring sense to his calls for universal compulsory socialization. Fortunately, this is unnecessary, as long as we resist the temptation to follow him around with bread crumbs, and instead keep our eyes focused on his real goals, which are relatively straightforward. What is more, we have already examined them in some detail, for they are essentially Fichte's goals, albeit with pinches of Marxism, sentimentalism, and even a little American optimism thrown in for a more fashionable exterior. Both to emphasize Dewey's debt to Fichte, and to bring some focus to his multi-angled assault on human freedom and individual dignity, I propose to retrace the six main points of psychological manipulation that we isolated in examining Fichte's scheme, this time supported by Dewey's parallel arguments, rather than those of his great progressive predecessor.

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[1] Mao Tse-tung, *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1960), 44.

(1) *The schooling is to be uniform and universal, because there must be no dissenting voices or independent minds to question the social order, the love of which is the highest aim of this educational program.*

The goal of ending dissent and independence is, of course, somewhat contingent upon the realization of the desired social order within the society at large. Developing progressive paternalist schooling within a less than fully authoritarian society is a game of incremental progress, and is beset with various kinds of resistance. Once the principle of state-controlled schooling has been established, however, the struggle is bound to resolve itself in favor of the school sooner or later, i.e., in favor of tyranny.

Dewey lays the groundwork for this process in the continuation of his historical speculation. In the past, he explains, there existed "a certain distinction between state and society," where by society he means "the less definite and freer play of the forces of the community which goes on in daily intercourse and contact of men in an endless variety of ways that have nothing to do with politics or government or the state in any institutional sense." This "freer play of forces," left to its own devices, is fundamentally disagreeable to Dewey, as it was to Fichte, because when men are free to interact and communicate with one another in ways not filtered through, or connected with, the state, such intercourse will naturally and necessarily foster the thoughts and feelings of independent, private men—men whose daily lives bear witness to the fact that they do not *need* government to direct their daily lives, an awareness which is anathema to the social control sought by progressives.

The standard progressive rationalization for the insinuation of government into men's private lives, first fully expounded by Fichte, is that, in effect, nature is not enough. It is not only that men, if permitted to live as their natural needs and inclinations

move them (individually or socially), may not find their proper purpose. It is that they absolutely *cannot* find it through such a life. Rather, history must be reinterpreted as a litany of mankind's failures to "advance" due to our continual dependence on the play of natural forces alone. As Fichte says, "where mankind has developed most it has become nothing." Thus a comprehensive, systematic, and universal intervention is required to dam up the normal flow of human development and guide our race into new, previously uncharted waters. Only there may humanity finally receive its progressive baptism, and begin to develop toward its true destiny as a collective consciousness transcending its mere individuating matter, which is to say a pseudo-religious authoritarian state in which men submit their individuating matter to the state's whims.

In a society with a long tradition of paternalistic authoritarianism, this artificial intervention in the name of the race, the folk, Germany, or what have you, is relatively straightforward. In nations with the traditions and sensibilities of freedom, however, there remains an annoying divide between state and society to deal with—this is Dewey's way of describing liberal democracy, in which men expect and demand a large social space in which to live and breathe without the stifling effects of government involvement. In other words, in Dewey's eyes, limited government and all those freedoms men of the nineteenth century had come to refer to as their natural rights constituted an unresolved social problem in need of a solution. Whereas Fichte could assert the familiar and accepted authority of the state to spread its tentacles freely throughout society, Dewey had to find a way around the burdensome evidence of men living and thriving with the state as a mere adjunct to life, rather than its end.

His ingenious theoretical solution was to conceive of school as bridging the theoretical gap between state and society, which is to

say between the progressive elite and men's private lives. Even with the state having "asserted itself" as the rightful provider of education, the gulf between state and society restricted earlier government schools to focusing excessively on what Dewey regards as incidental, non-social aspects of education, i.e., on intellectual development:

> [F]or a long time the school was occupied exclusively with but one function, the purveying of intellectual material to a certain number of selected minds. Even when the democratic impulse broke into the isolated department of the school, it did not effect a complete reconstruction, but only the addition of another element. This was preparation for citizenship. The meaning of the phrase, "preparation for citizenship," shows precisely what I have in mind by the difference between the school as an isolated thing related to the state alone, and the school as a thoroughly socialized affair in contact at all points with the flow of community life. Citizenship, to most minds, means a distinctly political thing. It is defined in terms of relation to the government, not to society in its broader aspects.[2]

The earliest state-operated schools, he says, were confined in their work primarily to improving minds by disseminating knowledge, and secondarily to teaching youngsters the basic workings and responsibilities of citizenship, i.e., preparing them for their basic political duty in a modern society, self-governance. In other words—and this is what Dewey finds so objectionable—these schools were still, for the most part, leaving the arenas of moral education, the formation of life goals, and the development of general social skills, under the control of private families and

[2] *SSC*, 75.

other community influences, which means outside the grip of government overseers. (His claim that earlier government schools had no moral component is dishonest, of course. What he means is that they lacked the ubiquitous and near-monopolistic moral influence he desires.)

All that, however, was in the process of changing, which Dewey announces in the evangelical tone we have previously seen him adopt to praise the "ardor of creating a new world" that he claims to have witnessed under Stalin:

> Now our community life has suddenly awakened; and in awakening it has found that governmental institutions and affairs represent only a small part of the important purposes and difficult problems of life, and that even that fraction cannot be dealt with adequately except in the light of a wide range of domestic, economic, and scientific considerations quite excluded from the conception of the state and citizenship. We find that our political problems involve race questions, questions of the assimilation of diverse types of language and custom; we find that most serious political questions grow out of underlying industrial and commercial changes and adjustments; we find that most of our pressing political problems cannot be solved by special measures of legislation or executive authority, but only by the promotion of common sympathies and a common understanding.[3]

The usual progressive "Now is the time!" flourish of the opening sentence introduces the most remarkable declaration, namely that what men are "awakening to" is the awareness that the affairs of government are not the only "important purposes and difficult problems of life." Prior to the late nineteenth century,

[3] *SSC*, 75.

men were not aware that community life had purposes and problems beyond those of government. Could anyone but a member of the progressive elite say such a thing, dismissing all previous humanity as narrow-minded sleepers? Notice that most of these newly discovered problems—which he cleverly qualifies repeatedly with the adjective "political" in order to take them out of the private sphere of life by definition—have to do with economics, science, and "underlying industrial and commercial changes"; this, to state the obvious, shows the influence of the Marxist strain of socialist thought on Dewey's theory. The key point, however, is his conclusion that these supposed new problems, created by new material conditions, can only be solved through "the promotion of common sympathies and a common understanding." That is, they require a new kind of thinking which is universal both in its dissemination and in its sensibility. This new collective spirit cannot be achieved without the leadership of the state as its promoter, in order to ensure universality; and it must permeate every aspect of life, far beyond the normal understanding of the purview of government, in order to have its proper transformative effect. As Dewey gleefully announces:

> The isolation between state and society, *between government and the institutions of family, business life,* etc., is breaking down.... The content of the term "citizenship" is broadening; it is coming to mean all the relationships of all sorts that are involved in membership in a community.[4] (Emphasis added.)

This clearly expresses the goal of Dewey's social thought in general, which is to absorb all life and all relationships into the workings of the state, which means to end the essential

[4] *SSC*, 76.

distinction between man and state, nature and coercion, life and submission. And the means to this goal?

> Change the image of what constitutes citizenship and you change the image of what is the purpose of the school. Change this, and you change the picture of what the school should be doing and of how it should be doing it.[5]

In other words, once all aspects of life have been subsumed within the progressive concept of an all-controlling state as moral guide, the public school must be reconceived as a training center for all aspects of life, in order to ensure that everyone thinks about and pursues his activities and relationships in the properly social way. Interestingly, Dewey would echo this line of reasoning years later in a lecture on German moral and political philosophy, attributing it this time to none other than Fichte:

> The key to political regeneration of Germany was to be found in a moral and spiritual regeneration effected by means of education. The key, amid political division, to political unity was to be sought in devotion to moral unity. In this spirit Fichte preached his *Addresses to the German Nation*. In this spirit he collaborated in the foundation of the University of Berlin, and zealously promoted all the educational reforms introduced by Stein and Humboldt into Prussian life.
>
> The conception of the State as an essential moral Being charged with an indispensable moral function lay close to these ideas. Education is *the* means of the advancement of humanity toward realization of its divine perfection. Education is the work of the State. The syllogism completes itself.[6]

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[5] *SSC*, 76.

[6] Dewey, *German Philosophy and Politics* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1915), 72-73.

Fichte's syllogism is also Dewey's, the only significant difference being the latter's eschewing of the religious overtones. It is worth noting that this later description of Fichte's dialectic of morality-into-education-into-State-indoctrination serves as Dewey's preface to an account of Fichte's proposals for the socialist redistribution of property.[7]

Public school, for Dewey, is the mechanism whereby the newly awakened man completes the dissolution of all distinctions between state and society at the moral and intellectual levels. The aim, clearly realized in practice today throughout the advanced world, is that when government gradually legislates and regulates its way into every facet of what used to be called the private sphere of life—property, moral behavior, health, charity, aesthetic ideals, personal opinions and the exchange of ideas—these strictures and coercions will be embraced by compulsory school graduates as long overdue, or at worst accepted with the same inevitability as death and taxes. The presumption in favor

[7] The *German Philosophy and Politics* lectures were composed during WWI, and Dewey's thesis there is, on the whole, a negative judgment of the practical effects of German idealism. The judgment, however, focuses on the irrational nationalism fostered by these ideas—an obvious concern to air publicly in 1915—not on their devolving of man's identity and purpose upon the state, per se. The latter, as we have seen, is a principle with which Dewey is fundamentally in agreement. He merely wishes to channel this collectivist impulse toward internationalism and "peaceful" submission to the collective, rather than nationalistic militarism. In short, in his public posturing, Dewey made great efforts to differentiate his own views from those of the idealists, particularly Fichte. He did this by emphasizing the peculiar nationalism of the movement, an easy target when speaking to a non-German audience. If you reread the passage from *Democracy and Education* with which I began Part Two of this book, you will see the same tone: accentuation of the dubious side of the idealists' German destiny talk, to mask the many ways in which his own theories, in their fundamentals, mimic those of men who had come to be considered politically suspect in English-speaking world.

of the complete manipulation of life by the designing hand of government will already have been long established through the public school structure and spirit.

(2) *The basic practical purpose of government schools is to give the state the means of separating children from their parents by force.*

Here is one area where Dewey's dewy-eyed sentimentalism has it all over Fichte's sweeping decrees. And the advantage is more than merely stylistic. As you will recall, Fichte insisted that the most essential step in establishing a proper state-controlled education system is to raise children in government facilities completely separated from the private family. His reason was that the family home exposes children to the practical needs and responsibilities of adult life, and this teaches them to be petty and selfish, i.e., to think about their personal well-being and how to secure it, when the primary social aim of state schooling is to inculcate unmitigated devotion to the collective. Dewey, though sharing Fichte's perspective, clearly recognized the practical unlikelihood, at least in his time, of completely separating all children from their parents, and furthermore the difficulty of persuading a society imbued with a deep-rooted sense of the inherent worth of the individual human being (denigrated as "individualism") that its children should not learn how to fulfill personal goals. He therefore preferred to embrace, distort, and exploit the family feeling, incorporating the family into his effort to undermine the family.

As we saw in his praise of the Soviets, he assumes the incrementalist position that compulsory schooling weakens the family attachment by its very nature, and hence that forcing a radical separation is unnecessary—time will do the trick. He was certainly correct about this, and subsequent history has only reinforced his assumption. In *The Book of Laughter and*

Forgetting, Milan Kundera offers us a wonderful image for an epochal change that occurs right under a civilization's nose without anyone noticing. Blackbirds, he observes, which were driven from many areas during the early period of industrialization, have not only survived the displacement, but have now readapted and migrated *into* the industrialized areas. They have left their forests behind and become city birds. This is a remarkable shift in the economy of life on Earth. And yet, as Kundera notes, "nobody dares to interpret the last two centuries as the history of the blackbird's invasion of the city of man."[8] We always imagine we know which events are of grand significance, when in truth we may be allowing surface noises to obscure the truly important. It is common today for conserva-tives to decry the breakdown of the "traditional family" as though this were a recent occurrence; as though a few feminists and gay rights activists had destroyed the human heritage. In truth, Dewey had his eye on those blackbirds a century ago. They migrated to the factories and skyscrapers when the attractions of the concrete slab and the flash of artificial light began to outweigh the appeal of the green forest and the glint of sunlight on the river. Feminism and "LGBT rights" are mere souvenirs of a bird already long flown. Dewey had it right: Public school killed the family.

To help this process along, however, and to put a sentimental face on it, Dewey frequently frames the case for the all-encompassing indoctrination program of his ideal school as a matter of improving on the work of the family itself. A prominent instance, from *School and Society*:

> If we take an example from an ideal home, where the parent is intelligent enough to recognize what is best for the child

[8] Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, translated by Michael Henry Heim (New York: Knopf, 1980), 197.

> [implied: Most real parents are not intelligent enough to raise their own children], and is able to supply what is needed [implied: Most parents are not able to supply "what is needed"], we find the child learning through the social converse and constitution of the family. There are certain points of interest and value to him in the conversation carried on: statements are made, inquiries arise, topics are discussed, and the child continually learns. He states his experiences, his misconceptions are corrected. Again the child participates in the household occupations, and thereby gets habits of industry, order, and regard for the rights and ideas of others, *and the fundamental habit of subordinating his activities to the general interest of the household*.[9] (Emphasis added.)

Notice, first, how Dewey discusses the dynamic of normal family life as though it were an impossible dream, thereby preparing the reader for the obvious next step. Furthermore, I draw your attention to the specific description of the kind of conversation that should take place: "He states his experiences, his misconceptions are corrected." The child is not to be describing his thoughts, opinions, judgments, but merely sharing his subjective experiences and feelings; and these are to be "corrected," so that he will subsequently experience things in the right way. This is not a matter of semantics. As we shall see, Dewey is adamant that prior to adulthood, the student is to be discouraged from seeing language as a means of expressing thoughts, and encouraged to communicate primarily about the subjective aspects of his activities, so that his subjective understanding of his experience may be manipulated into the shape most conducive to the ultimate goal of Dewey's model of education, which is fore-shadowed on the micro-level by the "fundamental habit" he saves for last

[9] *SS*, 35-36.

among his list of outcomes in an ideal home: "subordinating his activities to the general interest of the household."

The purpose of this family-friendly introduction, you will have noticed, is to pretend sympathy with the efforts of parents while providing a new, socialistic interpretation of why parents do what they do. You may have thought the purpose of household chores was to encourage feelings of self-reliance and personal responsibility, to habituate the child to believing that he must do productive things in order to deserve life's rewards, and to prevent idleness and sloth by giving him a taste of the satisfaction of earning his keep. But no, Dewey insists that the purpose of these activities is to teach the child to subordinate himself industriously to the will of an abstract entity, "the household," and to accept the existing social order. One hardly needs a schematic diagram to understand what will take the place of the household once this entire process is shifted to the societal level.

After carrying on to describe how the ideal home would have a workshop, a miniature laboratory, and opportunities for outdoor excursions in nature, he arrives at last at his predictable point:

> Now, if we organize and generalize all of this, we have the ideal school.... It is simply a question of doing systematically and in a large, intelligent, and competent way what for various reasons can be done in most households only in a comparatively meagre and haphazard manner. In the first place, the ideal home has to be enlarged. The child must be brought into contact with more grown people and with more children in order that there may be the freest and richest social life. Moreover, the occupations and relationships of the home environment are not specially selected for the growth of the child; the main object is something else, and what the child can get out of them is incidental. Hence the need of the school. In this school the life of the child becomes the all-controlling

> aim. All the media necessary to further the growth of the child centre there. Learning?—certainly, but living primarily, and learning through and in relation to this living.[10]

"Learning through and in relation to living" sounds benign and right. After all, is this not what learning at its best ought to be? But to one who would ask, "Isn't this just what we mean by learning as a function or extension of the private family?" Dewey has provided a simple answer: Family life is not really living, but merely a "meagre and haphazard" approximation of living. If you ask, "Why can't the child simply meet a larger group of adults and other children naturally, among his extended family, or in the course of normal life in the community?" Dewey will answer: But those relationships are not "specially selected for the growth of the child," unlike the expertly designed social setting of the school, where the adults are carefully trained to *play the role* of "real adults," while the children are perfectly organized to *simulate* a "real society."

If this reasoning seems as ridiculous to you as it should, you might excuse Dewey's desperate stretching of common sense by considering what *you* would say if you wanted exactly what Fichte wanted—the annihilation of the private family as a rival influence to the state—but knew you could never get away with saying it directly. Dewey's clever solution is to say that he wants what every family wants for its children, but at a more perfect level. And he works on defenders of parenthood by suggesting families ought to feel guilty if they do not submit their children to the authority of the school, for "the occupations and relationships of the home environment are not specially selected for the growth of the child," whereas at school "the life of the child becomes the all-controlling aim." This is Dewey's typically sophistical way of

[10] *SS*, 36-37.

restating Fichte's straightforward point about family being a harmful moral influence.

The larger purpose here, as usual with Dewey, is partially submerged in the thick goop of his argumentative style. The big lie is the idea that "generalizing" the ideal home (as he describes it) in abstraction from the family produces the same result in a more perfected form. To the extent that Dewey's own account of the effects of the ideal home deserves any credence, we immediately find one difference so fundamental that it nullifies all superficial likenesses: The child raised in that home is learning a devotion and allegiance to the good of the family and to its particular members; his counterpart raised in Dewey's ideal school is learning a devotion and allegiance to the state, and to an abstraction called "society." It is not difficult to see how the second kind of devotion weakens the first. The child's loyalties and perspectives are not being broadened, but merely shifted from the private realm rooted in nature and his own natural needs to the public realm of the state and *its* needs. The goal is not primarily learning, nor an improvement of what the family can offer. The goal is to destroy the chief rival to the undivided loyalty the progressive state requires, a rival that would enliven the individual spirit and keep men rooted to progressivism's nemesis, nature.

Dewey's specious reasoning provides another crystal clear instantiation of the progressive illogic of universalization described in "The Standards Trap" and encountered repeatedly since. It also provides me a good opportunity to dispel a possible misunderstanding. I am not suggesting that the family constitutes a perfect world, or that devotion and allegiance to family at all levels is the ultimate aim of life. Full maturation may entail a recognition of the spiritual limits of the family attachment itself. Even in everyday terms, it is well-understood that growing up

involves a continuous series of challenges to familial authority, and if the process is successful, a gradual assertion of the young man's or woman's independent judgment, and freedom from the exclusive influence of "the general interest of the household." In a healthy family, this process of self-assertion and developing independence is ultimately a source of pleasure and satisfaction for everyone, parent and child alike. Growth within the artificial "household" of the state school, however, is expressly designed to have exactly the opposite effect. That is, whereas the healthy family home is aimed at producing an independent individual prepared at last to do what one of our time-honored metaphors tells us we must, namely *leave the nest*, the compulsory school is meant to prepare its charges to be held and permanently entrapped, intellectually and morally, within the constricting embrace of the state's collective household.

The family, which loves its child, is calibrated to guide that child out of his dependent condition and into mature adulthood. The state, which loves its power, is calibrated to prevent that development from occurring. That is why Dewey, like Fichte and all other progressive advocates of compulsory schooling, ultimately sees the family as an enemy. And that is why such men have spent two centuries slowly and deliberately destroying it.

(3) *The primary adult contact in the daily life of the pupil is to be the government-trained teacher, whose chief role is to see to it that children learn to regard the sacrifice of their interests, minds, and goals to the needs and priorities of the collective as not only their highest moral obligation, but the only legitimate source of satisfaction.*

Dewey is fond of talking about utilizing the child's interests in the process of education. He means interests strictly in the sense of curiosities or drives, and not at all in the sense of personal happiness or purpose. The child's interest, in that second sense,

is precisely what school is intended to eradicate, both practically and psychologically. A child is not to care for his own interest—that is, for what is ultimately good for him as an individual human being—but is to live for the collective.

As we have seen, Dewey bemoans the fact that in the family home, the relationships and activities are not "specially selected" for the sake of the child's growth, and contrasts this supposed deficiency with the school environment, where "the life of the child becomes the all-controlling aim." Aside from the usual progressive elitist's condescension of assuming that parents do not think about what is best for their children except incidentally, another basic question arises here: *Should* the life of the child become "the all-controlling aim," in the sense that Dewey intends?

In a normal, decently healthy family—no ideals required—adult concerns and priorities (including those related to the rearing of children) give the household its focus and purpose. Through observing and questioning the strange goings on around him, along with the occasional chastening experience of having his feelings or desires of the moment overridden by other, more adult interests or needs, the child learns some of the most valuable moral lessons. He learns that there is a world and a sensibility that he will have to work hard to come to understand. He learns that while he is important to those he admires and loves, he cannot be their primary point of interest at all times, that he does not "own the world." (This, in turn, encourages him to carve out a space for himself, to learn to think and act independently.) He learns that it is pleasant to be helpful to those one loves, rather than merely to receive benefits. He learns that when his elders seem to be thwarting or overlooking his interests, they are often actually thinking of greater benefits for him down the road, and therefore that life is to be understood and pursued as a continuum in which the present must often be servant to the

future. He learns that sometimes he will have to work things out for himself—that neither does the world owe him everything simply because he wants it, nor would such a condition even be desirable. Overall, and perhaps most importantly, he learns that adulthood is the deepest concern and purpose of the household, of family life, and of *his* life.

Dewey's pseudoscientific laboratory, by contrast, is designed to obliterate all those lessons of home life, because their cumulative result is the bane of the collectivist state, namely thoughtful, maturing youngsters who do not wish to remain dependent children forever. It is in this sense correct to say that in the government school, unlike the family home, "the life of the child becomes the all-controlling aim." This, in fact, is Dewey's theory of education in sum: the means to creating a universal social condition of which childhood is the all-controlling aim.

How far is Dewey prepared to go in using the school to undermine the family's influence? Consider this early account of the meaning of the artificial society or alternative reality he seeks to universalize through compulsory schools:

> The intellectual and moral discipline, the total atmosphere, is to be permeated with the idea that *the school is to the child and teacher the social institution in which they, for the first time, live,* and that it is not a mere means for some outside end.[11]

Consider the implications of the idea which Dewey has italicized in this passage. This notion, which is to permeate the school

[11] Dewey, "Results of Child-Study Applied to Education," (1895), in *The Early Works of John Dewey, 1882-1898* (hereafter *Early Works*), edited by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), vol. 5, 206.

environment, will obviously have a very different significance in the minds of teachers and children. For teachers, it is a performance, a pretense—teachers are to be trained to misrepresent themselves and their feelings to their students. This is consistent with Dewey's overall conception of education as—to use the vocabulary in vogue during his later years—propaganda. Children, to state the matter plainly, are to be raised in an atmosphere presided over by insincere and manipulative adults. Indeed, I would suggest that this insincerity and manipulativeness are the core of the training ritual we call teaching certification. Comprehensive state-mandated teacher training was Fichte's idea, and we have seen to what use he wished to put his "qualified" teachers. Of course, the human mind is famously capable of masking itself from itself, which means that most modern public school teachers, who were indoctrinated within the government school atmosphere as children before they underwent training as teachers, probably do not consciously perceive themselves and their role the way Dewey describes it here. But that does not make Dewey's description any less accurate; it merely demonstrates the subtle workings of the self-perpetuating doomsday machine that is public school.

This is an appropriate opportunity to note Dewey's frustration, expressed in a turn of the century article entitled "Pedagogy as a University Discipline,"[12] at the absence of a fully developed academic system for the study of teaching methodology. There is a grave need, he argues, for two distinct levels of pedagogic study. The first would be schools "whose function is to supply the great army of teachers with the weapons of their calling and direct them as to their use."[13] But beyond this there must be schools

[12] Dewey, *Pedagogy as a University Discipline* (1896), hereafter *PUD*, in *Early Works* vol. 5.
[13] *PUD*, 281.

dedicated to the training "not of the rank and file, but of the leaders of our education systems," the top of the bureaucratic and political pyramid of government schools, "teachers in normal and training schools, professors of pedagogy, superintendents, principals of schools in our large cities...."[14] These are the presiding scientific experts of education, determining methods and policy for entire communities, and hence delimiting the range and meaning of the work to be carried out by the "rank and file" teachers.

However, although this becomes obscured through time and practice, such pedagogic "science" is ultimately subservient to something entirely pre-scientific which stands silently but commandingly above all the experiments, data, and observations: a specific, chosen *goal*. The first real "pedagogic" question is not "What are the most empirically supportable methods of attaining the desired results?" but rather "What are we ultimately hoping to achieve with our teaching?" And this implies a series of ensuing, increasingly fundamental questions: "What is the proper and justifiable goal of education?" "What is the best way for a human being to live?" "What kind of thing *is* a human being?" By emphasizing and aggrandizing the supposedly objective science of pedagogy, the compulsory school titans have followed the progressive norm as applied in all areas of government over these past two hundred years: Create a hierarchical bureaucracy and set it in motion toward an outcome never fully and openly debated; before long, the internal debates about methods and effectiveness, data and provable outcomes, will take over the public consciousness, obliterating the fundamental question that was never properly decided, and will never be raised again, namely "What is the *purpose* of all of this?"

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[14] *PUD*, 281.

The present survey of the history of the ideas that created the public education establishments of the late modern world—not the "science," but the underlying philosophy—is intended to highlight the precise answer to that pre-scientific question, as offered by the men who made these establishments possible. We have now seen the answer from various angles, and heard it from various lips. The purpose is the submission of the individual human being to the interests of the state, i.e., of the progressive elite. To punctuate this, given what we have seen, consider Dewey's explanation of the lack of a proper apparatus for the American student of higher pedagogical method:

> If they become dissatisfied with their pedagogical horizon, there is at present very little resource save a journey to some German university which has recognized the need of advanced, as well as elementary, pedagogics.[15]

And then, bemoaning the American resistance to "any close, systematic and centralized direction and supervision of education on the part of a governmental authority," he makes a plea for universities to take on this role as a substitute for the sadly lacking "bureaucratic control." The educational establishment itself, he argues, must come together "on the basis of co-operation" to "accomplish what the central educational departments of Germany and France accomplish under the [superior] conditions prevailing in those countries."[16] (Notice how precisely this sentiment is echoed in the writings of Rockefeller's General Education Board, as detailed in Part One, "Compulsory Mass Retardation.") Of course, Dewey's hopes have, for the most part, long since been realized, in his nation and throughout the

[15] *PUD*, 282.
[16] *PUD*, 282-3.

civilized world. The planet's schools are now full of teachers who have all been trained to pretend that school is "the social institution in which they, for the first time, live"—and perhaps even almost to believe it.

For a straightforward example of the distinction I am making between the scientific study of methodology and the pre-scientific goal-setting which, though gradually forgotten, is in fact the controlling process, we may turn to Dewey's own teachings on pedagogy. In 1895, the University of Chicago Press published Dewey's "Educational Ethics: Syllabus of a Course of Six Lecture-Studies."[17] The work is exactly what its title suggests, a course syllabus, and Dewey concludes his plan for Lecture I, titled "Ethical Problem of the School," with a series of "Exercises" for students, specifically several questions for further analysis. The questions are all in the same vein, but two particular examples jump out as exemplary of the issue at hand:

> 4. Point out phases of *excessive individualism* in existing social life that seem to you to be developed or reinforced by existing school methods. State these methods and how they operate in this direction....
>
> 6. Give negative instances [of the lecture's postulate concerning the role of school]; that is, show where methods which fail in realizing present powers also hinder or prevent realization of *social service*.[18] (Emphasis added.)

These are "methodology" questions, but completely dependent for their purpose and direction on predetermined and controlling principles of education involving a specific and contentious theory of human nature, according to which the chief problem of

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[17] Dewey, *Educational Ethics* (1895), in *Early Works* vol. 5.
[18] Ibid., 293.

late nineteenth century American society was its "excessive individualism," and the primary role of school is to train people for "social service." Once one becomes enmeshed in these pseudoscientific "how" questions, however, one tends (and is intended) to forget that there are alternative answers to the implicit "why" questions—the predetermined principles of education and human nature—in which the "how" questions are grounded.

In the final analysis, Dewey talks a lot about the specialness and dignity of the teacher, but in fact his intention through all this pedagogical training, elementary and advanced, is to reduce the significance of the "rank and file" teacher in favor of the overarching and generic controls imposed by the system. In other words, he is in agreement with the principles expressed in 1834 by John Duer: The government teacher must be "properly *trained*, and properly *examined*, and *watched*, and *controlled*, and, above all, properly *rewarded*." Teacher training and certification mean exactly this: Individualized, personal teaching is out; the professional guild of tethered state agents is in.

> I believe that the child should be stimulated and controlled in his work through the life of the [school] community.
>
> I believe that under existing conditions far too much of the stimulus and control proceeds from the teacher, because of neglect of the idea of the school as a form of social life.
>
> I believe that the teacher's place and work in the school is to be interpreted from this same basis. The teacher is not in the school to impose certain ideas or to form certain habits in the child, but is there as a member of the community to select the

> influences which shall affect the child and to assist him in properly responding to these influences.[19]

In other words, the imposition of ideas and the habit-formation are to come from the "social life" of the school, meaning from the design set in place by the elite overseers of the system. The teacher's job is merely to facilitate this process. If there is one vocation on Earth that must never allow itself to be reduced to a "rank and file," it is the teaching vocation. Public education has reduced teachers to exactly that.

Now let us consider what Dewey's carefully manufactured "total atmosphere" of the school means for the mind of the *child*. He is obviously not party to the deception or artifice being perpetrated upon him by the adults. Thus, Dewey's hope that the school should be "the social institution in which they, for the first time, live," applies as a matter of psychological truth for the child, who is to be imbued with the feeling that this artificial progressive world is the real one, superseding or erasing all prior experience, and pointing to nothing beyond itself—"it is not a mere means for some outside end." The natural process of the self-actualizing, maturing being, aiming for some higher end the meaning of which he can barely understand, but toward which he is drawn by the constant attractive force of the mysterious adult world around him, is to be stymied by locking his mind in child-world, in which his "interests" are to be exploited to lead him on a journey to a more perfect, more skilled, and more permanent version *of childhood*.

He will be taught how to do socially useful things, and how to accept his social role peacefully, perhaps even to like it; that will be his "adulthood." Meanwhile, the basic emotional dependency,

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[19] Dewey, *My Pedagogic Creed* (New York: E.L. Kellogg & Co., 1897), 9. Hereafter *MPC*.

fear of standing alone, and need for external guidance intrinsic to childhood will become permanent conditions of his soul. It is the teacher's role to hold the child in position, gently and with love, until the community of the school can complete its work of beating him into submission:

> I believe that every teacher should realize the dignity of his calling; that he is a social servant set apart for the maintenance of proper social order and the securing of the right social growth.[20]

The age of spiritual and intellectual growth is over; we live in the age of "social growth." Hence the new education does not require teachers. It requires "social servants" and maintainers of "proper social order." The teacher is subservient to the ruler, wisdom to power. Education is propaganda.

(4) *The public school environment and its rules and obligations both depend on and foster the weakening of the population's sense of "mine and thine"; sacrificing oneself to the collective becomes less complicated as one loses any clear perception of one's "self," which is to say of one's personal claim on the time and energy one is giving to the world.*

There is a common misconception, a by-product of the progressive assault on the history of Western philosophy, that the divide between today's political "left" and "right" corresponds to an ethical divide regarding the proper moral attitude of the individual toward his fellow human beings. According to this rendering of things, the socialist (or, more recently, "liberal") believes that a man ought to care for others, while the "capitalist" ("conservative") believes a man is not obliged to concern himself with the plight of his fellow men. Hence our modern notion of a

[20] *MPC*, 18.

political moderate or centrist (or Canadian) as one who believes commercial trade is necessary for economic stability, but not at the expense of large-scale, cradle-to-grave government programs that answer to the need to care for others. This misconception has become so much a part of the popular psyche that it has had an alienating effect on the so-called right. On the one hand, there is the general guilty conscience of the conservative, continually thinking he must prove he is not such a bad guy, in spite of being aligned with an uncaring political position—in other words, that although he believes a market economy is more productive, he is truly a progressive in his heart. On the other hand, there is an entire political sect, libertarianism, which originally took its bearings from this supposed moral divide, and, finding only blood and oppression on the side of "caring for others," decided, in effect—and in some cases quite literally—to accept the "selfish" label and run with it.

The popular misconception causing all the trouble is rooted in a deliberate philosophical distortion, one so strained and onerous that it is not at all surprising, in hindsight, that it has filtered down to the general ethos in a more comprehensible form. The misconception, again, is that the difference between progressivism and non-progressivism pertains to how the individual ought to behave toward others; specifically, that it is a difference of moral rules. In fact, the special distinction of progressivism turns not on how the individual ought to *act*, but rather on whether the individual *exists*. (Conservatives are sometimes tongue-tied when progressives claim their views are more consistent with Christian ethics. The proper answer would be that Christianity is inseparable from the metaphysical primacy and spiritual imperatives of the individual soul, which progressivism denies outright.) As we have seen, Fichte developed his Kantianism into the neo-religious position that the individual

as such is merely a partial perspective, a facet of the universal mind that reveals itself to itself through its march into the imaginary Future, and therefore that a man who clings to the perception of himself as a distinct entity is by definition immoral. This is Fichte's "sensuous" agent, living for his own pleasure, including the quest for his own selfish immortality, because he has not yet come to understand himself as a mere emanation of the universal mind, the collective consciousness, the state. From this point of view, which was taken up by Hegel and the other idealists, and then co-opted and transformed into equivalent notions in subsequent philosophical movements in Germany and beyond, there is no question of the individual man as such being moral. He is immoral insofar as he continues to perceive himself as an individual, and to pursue his ends *as his ends*. There is, strictly speaking, no such thing as individual morality. There is only the collective Will, acting through us toward its self-revelation, a process which we thwart with our "individualism."

The supposed moral divide which has filtered down to the modern political vernacular as that between the "caring" and the "uncaring" approaches to life is, properly understood, actually a metaphysical divide between the collective and the individual, universal consciousness and the personal soul. The question German idealism raised, and that has become the essential political question—whether we choose to face it squarely or not—is, "Do you ultimately *exist* independently of society?" The progressive, if he is being honest and understands his own position, answers "No." That is why, as we have seen repeatedly, progressives of all stripes insist that the first step in the "new education" (a phrase favored by both Fichte and Dewey) is to separate children from any influence that might entrench them in the habits of individual existence (i.e., nature), so that they may

be drawn, from the earliest point, into the (artificial) habits of collective thought and collective will.

On Fichte's rendering, as you will recall, the progress from individual to collective being is expressed as the development from the low form of consciousness, "dim feeling," to the high, "clear knowledge." The former, we must remember, is the state of most men throughout all of history, for it is the state of consciousness in which we are born, and which develops through unimpeded growth and freer forms of education; the latter "must be carefully fostered in the community"—that is, it requires state intervention to derail what had hitherto been regarded as natural moral development—and leads to a higher kind of race that understands itself as a universal "moral order," and therefore places no value on itself independently of that order, i.e., of the state. The process of education is thus moral, not in the sense of teaching children the golden rule and the like, nor in the sense of seeking to develop permanent character—the Aristotelian or Christian virtues, for example—but in the sense of completely reforming what it means to be a moral subject, away from perceiving oneself as an independent being with goals and obligations rooted in one's nature (remember Fichte's rejection of free will), and toward perceiving oneself as part of an abstract moral order that is willing its idealized destiny collectively.

The influence of this kind of thinking on the young Dewey was marked and profound. His early writings (perhaps his most philosophically interesting, written before he found his political mission) are often imbued with the language of German idealism, as may be seen in his first major work, *Psychology*,[21] which includes the invocation of God as the meaning of intellectual intuition,[22] and the emphasis on moral will as the ultimate

[21] Dewey, *Psychology* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1887), hereafter *Psy*.
[22] *Psy*, 244-45.

identity of the "universal self."[23] Most significantly for us, Fichte's two kinds of consciousness, "dim" and "clear," corresponding to pre-idealist and idealist morality, respectively, find their exact equivalents in Dewey's *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*,[24] with Fichte's Cartesian term "consciousness" replaced by the more empiricist word "self."

> It has already been shown that the self is not necessarily immoral, and hence that action for self is not necessarily bad—indeed, that the true self is social and interest in it right. But when a satisfaction based on past experience is set against one proceeding from an act as meeting obligation, there grows up a divorce in the self. The actual self, the self recognizing only past and sensible satisfaction, is set over against the self which recognizes the necessity of expansion and a wider environment. Since the former self confines its action to benefits demonstrably accruing to itself, while the latter, in meeting the demands of the situation, necessarily contributes to the satisfaction of others, one takes the form of a *private* self, a self whose good is set over against and exclusive of that of others, while the self recognizing obligation becomes a social self—the self which performs its due function in society.[25]

The "private self," also designated "the 'selfish' self,"[26] is immoral, because, to use non-Deweyan language, it acts to satisfy a desire rooted in individual moral habit, i.e., character—which Dewey distorts as "recognizing only past satisfaction." Meanwhile, the "social self," which acts not from desire guided by character, but

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[23] *Psy*, 417-424.
[24] Dewey, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics* (Ann Arbor: Register Publishing Co., 1891), hereafter *OCTE*.
[25] *OCTE*, 216-217.
[26] *OCTE*, 218.

rather from submission to social "function," is good. The classical or Christian conception of the virtuous man is immoral; the Fichtean self-denying slave to the collectivist social order (the state) is moral.

In case you imagine I am mischaracterizing a simple distinction between doing bad things and doing good things as something more nefarious, Dewey himself clarifies the matter:

> As it is in the progressive movement of morality that there arises the distinction of the law-abiding and the lawless self, of the social and the selfish self, so in the same aspect there comes into existence the distinction of the low, degraded, sensual self, as against the higher or spiritual self. In themselves, or naturally, there is no desire high, none low. But when an inclination for an end which consists in possession comes in conflict with one which includes an active satisfaction—one not previously enjoyed—the contrast arises. It is wrong to say, with Kant, that the bad act is simply for pleasure [and here, incidentally, Dewey caricatures Kant's position, presumably to distinguish it from his own]; for the bad act, the choice of a past satisfaction as against the aspiration for a wider good, may have a large content—it may be the good of one's family; it may be scientific or aesthetic culture. Yet the moment a man begins to live on the plane of past satisfaction as such, he has begun to live on the plane of "sense," or for pleasure.[27]

The phrase "the progressive movement of morality" is your clue that we are in the land of idealism, in which mankind has at long last discovered its higher collective self, and is therefore finally able to interpret its past existence, including its past moral life, in

[27] *OCTE*, 219-220.

this new light. That is why Dewey says that the distinction between social and selfish selves "arises," or "comes into existence." He is not making the ordinary kind of moral distinction between bad actions and good actions. He, like Fichte, is distinguishing *bad morality* from *good morality*, the old type from the new.

To be perfectly clear—that is, to set Dewey's meaning apart from his carefully loaded phraseology—the bad, selfish, immoral self, the self "whose good is set over against and exclusive of that of others," may include the self acting "for the good of one's family," or for "scientific or aesthetic culture." Notice that even Dewey himself, in attempting to characterize such a man as immorally motivated, is compelled to place his ascribed bad motive, "sense," in scare quotes. We are not talking about the pleasures of sense in any ordinary conception, but rather in the specialized conception previously utilized by Fichte. The low, "sensual" motive, for Dewey as for Fichte, includes all motivation traditionally understood to be exemplary of good character. Indeed, by including "scientific or aesthetic culture," he seems to have tidily summarized the entire realm of classical virtue, moral *and* intellectual, as comprising "bad action."[28]

To say that a man willingly acting for the good of his family is setting his good over against and exclusive of the good of others is patently absurd—or would be, had we not all been raised as what Allan Bloom dubbed "practical Kantians."[29] The badness of the man's act, you see, lies in his having derived satisfaction from *anticipating the good he would do for others*, rather than simply from *having done his duty*. That is, the fact that his pleasure answers to a desire to help his family, presumably rooted in past satisfactions related to having done some good for his family or

[28] *OCTE*, 219.
[29] Bloom, *Closing of the American Mind*, 122.

other people, shows that he is acting for his own private (natural) happiness, rather than for the artificial contentment of the "social self," which arises from having fulfilled one's due function in society disinterestedly. This is the precise moral trick whereby progressive authoritarians seek to separate us from the natural desires and attachments that render men resistant to abstract collectivist indoctrination, and communities resistant to abandoning human nature for servitude.

Personal happiness cannot be a legitimate moral aim for the progressive or higher self, which is inherently "social." The entire classical philosophy of virtue is wiped out at once. The man who loves the act of theoretical reasoning for its own sake, Plato's and Aristotle's divinely happy man, is virtually the textbook case of Dewey's "selfish self."

Here we see Dewey recasting Kant's ethics through the filter of Fichte's despotic idealism. Indeed, he is merely paraphrasing Fichte's two kinds of consciousness, albeit with the rhetorical emphasis on morality rather than knowledge—a distinction without a difference, since both philosophers identify knowledge as, in effect, the self-revelation of a universal moral will. Through this argument, we find Dewey beginning to develop the social philosophy that informed his mature theory of education.

We have already seen some of the ways he proposes to bring this progressive world of ideal or "social" selves into reality through state education. One very revealing statement of the general principle involved may be found in *The School and Society*. Dewey devotes a chapter to Friedrich Wilhelm August Froebel, the early childhood education specialist who created the concept of kindergarten. Froebel was a student of Pestalozzi, who as we have seen was the pedagogue preferred by Fichte and Humboldt. Dewey approves of Froebel's general approach, though criticizing his underlying psychological theory. He begins

this chapter by relating a story from the early days of the University of Chicago Laboratory School, regarding a woman who asked to see the school's kindergarten:

> On being told that the school had not as yet established one, she asked if there were not singing, drawing, manual training, plays and dramatizations, and attention to the children's social relations. When her questions were answered in the affirmative, she remarked, both triumphantly and indignantly, that that was what she understood by a kindergarten, and that she did not know what was meant by saying that the school had no kindergarten. The remark was perhaps justified in spirit, if not in letter. At all events, it suggests that in a certain sense the school endeavors throughout its whole course—now including children between four and thirteen—to carry into effect certain principles which Froebel was perhaps the first consciously to set forth.[30]

The "let's all hold hands and sing" approach to early childhood education—a morally questionable impulse even with legitimate kindergarten-age children, is to be applied throughout the schooling process, according to Dewey. Of course I am caricaturing the method to make a point; for a more straightforward account of the idea, we may turn to Dewey, who isolates the first general principle of the approach this way:

> That the primary business of school is to train children in cooperative and mutually helpful living; to foster in them the consciousness of mutual interdependence; and to help them

[30] *SS*, 111.

> practically in making the adjustments that will carry this spirit into overt deeds.[31]

Overt deeds that carry out the spirit of mutual interdependence: There will be no acting alone, acting in the interest of one's own personal development, or thinking that is not socially directed in the sense of being subservient to the imperatives of state progress. Ideally, once the spirit has been properly "adjusted," the idea that any of those things could have been desirable will have been rinsed from it entirely. (Remember Fichte's phrasing of this point: The child "must not even hear that our vital impulses and actions can be directed toward our maintenance and welfare, nor that we may learn for that reason, nor that learning may be of some use for that purpose.")

Dewey is very fond, in certain contexts, of claiming that his theory of education satisfies the impulses of both individualism and socialism, as though that made any sense. For those inclined to give any credence to these claims as evidence of Dewey taking a "moderate" position, consider that his career as a teacher and writer began in a still-young nation which was explicitly founded on the principles of that eighteenth century form of individualism which he regarded as the great barrier to social progress. As with his discussions of the "ideal family household," and his constant invocations of democracy, this claim to be achieving a happy marriage of individualism and socialism is, given the overall thrust of his philosophy, an obvious rhetorical ploy to lull the inattentive observer into accepting transformative progressivism as a legitimate variant form of Americanism. (American progressivism of the first half of the twentieth century was routinely framed as true patriotism and the validation of the American pioneering spirit.) What Dewey's combination of socialism and

[31] *SS*, 111-112.

individualism means in practice is that every individual should be afforded the opportunity to develop himself in the direction of a more complete servitude to the state, or, to use Dewey's typical phrase, social service. This, as we saw in Part One, "Individualism vs. Individuality," is his "new individualism."

Here is what the joint satisfaction of individualism and socialism entails, when built into Dewey's model of education:

> I believe that education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform.
>
> I believe that all reforms which rest simply upon the enactment of law, or the threatening of certain penalties, or upon changes in mechanical or outward arrangements, are transitory and futile. [Note: these methods would not, according to Dewey, be unjust or oppressive. They would merely be futile. Here Dewey plainly anticipates the view of the situation promulgated and popularized many years later by Antonio Gramsci.]
>
> I believe that education is a *regulation of the process of coming to share in the social consciousness*; and that the adjustment of individual activity on the basis of this social consciousness is the only sure method of social reconstruction.
>
> I believe this conception has due regard for both the individualistic and socialistic ideals. It is duly individual because it recognizes the formation of a certain character as the only genuine basis of right living. It is socialistic because it recognizes that this right character is not to be formed by merely individual precept, example, or exhortation, but rather by the influence of a certain form of institutional or community life upon the individual, and that *the social*

> *organism through the school, as its organ, may determine ethical results.*[32] (Emphasis added.)

The goal is "social reconstruction," the transformation of societies founded in the modern spirit of practical liberty into socialist collectives. This goal requires the externally imposed "adjustment" of human motivation and activity to create a new spirit of acquiescence to the "social consciousness," which, given Dewey's dialectical sublation of the "social" into the concept of the state, would more accurately be called "state consciousness." The path to this social or state consciousness is education. Education itself is a function of the state. The syllogism completes itself.

And at this point I remind the reader of Dewey's attempted distinction, in his address to the League for Industrial Democracy, between his "democratic" model of education and the totalitarian model:

> The noble distinction of a democratic society lies in the kind of unity it establishes between education and politics. It is for the people to instruct their officials, not [as in totalitarianism] for a few officials to regulate the sentiments and ideas of the rest of the people.

Meet John Dewey, totalitarian sophist.

Furthermore, we see in this part of Dewey's pedagogic creed another iteration of the progressive school theorist's diminution of the individual teacher. Only a broader social order into which the child's activities may be organically interwoven can truly develop the proper collectivist character; individual tutelage or example can never give rise to a firmly socialistic spirit. The

[32] *MPC*, 16-17.

appropriate question for today—*my* question, in fact—is the reverse: Can anything resembling a firm and enlightened ethical individualism ever be developed within the intrinsically socialist moral order of public school? For my own answer to this question, I defer to Dewey. In an outline not intended for publication, "Plan of Organization of the University Primary School" (1895),[33] he explains the psychological aims of his Laboratory School project:

> The child being socially constituted, his expressions are normally social. The child does not realize an activity save as he feels that it is directed towards others and calls forth a response from others. Language, for example, whether speech, writing, or reading is not primarily expression of thought, but rather social communication; save as it realizes this function it is only partial and more or less artificial, and fails, therefore, in its educative effect, intellectually, as well as morally.[34]

I emphasize that this is not a description of human nature or of typical behavior; it is Dewey's summary of the psychological outcome that forms the essential *goal* of the progressive school. The intention is that the product of the school machinery should no longer be what it was when it arrived, namely a natural human being. It must come out at the other end as a "socially constituted" child who "does not realize an activity save as he feels that it is directed towards others"—that is, he should have no will to act at all except insofar as his action will further the purposes of the collective. He will not express his thoughts—even *having* independent thoughts must be regarded as a failure of the

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[33] Dewey, "Plan of Organization of the University Primary School" (1895), in *Early Works* vol. 5, hereafter *Plan*.
[34] *Plan*, 226.

school program—but only share in "social communication." In all that he does and says, he will be living not as himself, but as a mere cell of the new social mind.

(5) *Public education's main political function, the complement to its moral aim of inculcating unthinking devotion to the collective, is to sort everyone into ranks and roles determined and controlled by a permanent ruling class.*

As we watch the West imploding morally and politically, with Europe defenseless, socialist, unwilling to mount a resistance against a resurgent medieval Islamism, and seemingly tired of adulthood, and with American students of *Rules for Radicals* author Saul Alinsky presiding over—not governing, properly speaking, but simply standing astride—the nation on whose fate rests the hope of civilization, it may be difficult to recall that progressivism was actually intended to work. That is to say, all universal consciousness talk aside, the practical *political* hope of the movement, from Fichte's opening statement on down, has been society ordered as a well-oiled machine, a universal selfless assembly line keeping the technology operational, meeting all deadlines, and always smiling when the supervisor walks by. (Dewey added finger paintings on the refrigerator for a touch of creativity.)

This is why Fichte, after elevating his listeners' souls with talk of divine love, historic moments, and mankind transcending its material nature on the path to a future lived in the pure realm of collective imagination, rounds out his educational proposal's idealist picture with the all too realistic nuts and bolts element that forms the practical heart of modern public schooling—*the vetting process*. After all, a society carefully regulated into psychological uniformity through compulsory communes, propaganda, and the continual smoothing out process of the "social centre," as Dewey calls it, could hardly ensure the desired sense

of collective purpose if the products of the system were subsequently allowed to do whatever they wanted to do with their adult lives. Of course, the school's system of collectivization does half the job, by delineating the child's available options and possibilities of life during his years spent in its alternative reality, so that in the end he will restrain himself, whether the gate is left open or not. But spiritual shrinkage and restraint are not the only purposes of this schooling. Its products, though deliberately weakened and homogenized in certain ways, are nevertheless meant to be useful, i.e., to serve a social function—which, again, is a polite way of saying a state function.

You will recall Dewey's loopy logic of the historical impetus of specialization in education, which by operating entirely on the abstract societal level in effect rendered a principle of specialization without regard for the specialists. According to this reasoning, newly conceived possibilities or methods necessitate not social space (freedom) in which they might develop, but rather government management to make the new methods socially useful. This is what comes of thinking of human action through the idealist lens of historical evolution—everything that happens is by definition an act of society taken universally, and hence cannot be properly conceived of at all in terms of its particularities. If specialization means *society's* introduction of new, more narrowly focused ways of performing tasks or developing ideas, then something—some social entity standing outside the specialization process itself—must provide the mechanism whereby the new task or idea may be incorporated into the existing social framework. In reality, *individual human minds* provide the mechanism of incorporation, by means of the natural developmental agencies called private communication and personal choice. The abstract societal perspective on the process, however, requires an equivalent cause on the ideal level,

an abstract universal mind, if you will. The progressive finds his inevitable solution: The *state* must be the entity with the task of incorporating the new. Hence new specialization, and the newly configured division of labor it naturally entails, must be controlled by the state, for only in this way may it be comfortably absorbed into the existing society.

That this progressive model of the industrial state is suggestive of the internal structure of a large business enterprise is not insignificant. The difference, of course, is that a business figures out what it needs, and then seeks available and willing employees with the required skill sets, whereas the state, by contrast, figures out what it thinks *society* needs, and then coercively mass produces the workers required to fill those roles. (How much more efficient business could be if only it had the coercive apparatus of human mass production on a society-wide scale at its disposal....) Public school is the worker factory. In this factory, the future workers' minds will be molded to accept their roles in that larger society of which the school is meant to be a spiritual microcosm.

Dewey's great contribution to the development of this notion of factory schooling was not its basic purpose; that predated him by many decades. What he achieved, rather, was the blending of this moral atrocity into a semi-systematic overall philosophy that would combine the best elements of Fichtean idealism with a pragmatic accommodation to the realities of representative government and corporate interests, and a subtler focus on the developmental psychology needed to *move* a society from its pre-progressive starting point to its fully collectivized end point. Hence:

> The school, as an institution, must have a *community* of spirit and end realized through *diversity* of powers and acts. Only in this way can it get an organic character, involving reciprocal

> interdependence and division of labor. This requires departure from the present graded system sufficient to bring together children of different ages, temperaments, native abilities, and attainments. Only in this way can the cooperative spirit involved in division of labor be substituted for the competitive spirit inevitably developed when a number of persons of the same presumed attainments are working to secure exactly the same results.[35]

Interestingly, the one reasonable practical proposal in Dewey's theory is the only one that has gained little traction in the general development of public schooling, namely dispensing with the strict separation of children into age-grades. It is worth speculating as to why this is not usually attempted. The reason is very likely a simple matter of logistics and structural impracticability, when dealing with children on the scale required of a public school system, and where formal standardized assessment is essential to the program. This indicates a fundamental problem with the whole Laboratory School concept. The isolated, limited context of the Laboratory School itself is the hidden premise in every "experiment," such that Dewey's own conclusions are subject to the same logical error he makes in developing the theoretical basis of his school out of the workings of the private family, namely invalid universalization. And of course, Dewey's desire for the weakening of age-segregation may be satisfied quite easily and naturally, and with benefits far beyond Dewey's wish to develop "cooperative spirit"—*outside* the context of universal public school.

To continue with his description of the school as worker factory:

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[35] *Plan*, 225.

> The end of the institution must be such as to enable the child to translate his powers over into terms of their social equivalencies.... This implies:
>
> 1. Such *interest* in others as will secure responsiveness to their real needs....
>
> 2. Such *knowledge* of social relationships as to enable one to form social ideas or ends.
>
> 3. Such volitional command of one's own powers as to enable one to be an economical social agent.[36]

Reread those three requirements carefully, and you will see that he has merely broken down the Marxist creed "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need" for easy analysis on a university blackboard. So the children must be trained to think in the manner of idealized socialist workers. (Real socialist workers, of course, are human beings, and therefore have conflicting interests deriving from the remnants of their natural motives which are likely to survive even the most rigorous and scientifically designed indoctrination. These nature/artifice conflicts will probably always render any forced universalization of the "cooperative spirit" more awkward than a progressive might like.)

Substituting the cooperative spirit supposedly involved in division of labor for the competitive spirit developed when people of "the same presumed attainments" are seeking the same results is an interesting notion. The explanatory focus on the mental state of the children is convenient, as it elides the trickier implication of this discussion, which is that the state will be intimately involved in the process of determining each person's role in the economic machinery of the larger society. And this, as we have seen in detail, is where standardized grading enters the

[36] *Plan*, 225.

picture. I have explained that the universal and generic system of grading, as it has evolved, is a complete artifice drawn out of the hot air of scientific schooling, a.k.a. the abandonment of teaching, and serves only the good of social engineering. Dewey verifies this, articulating the clearest rationalization for the practice:

> I believe that all questions of the grading of the child and his promotion should be determined by reference to the same standard [i.e., social service]. Examinations are of use only so far as they test the child's fitness for social life and reveal *the place in which he can be of the most service* and where he can receive the most help.[37] (Emphasis added.)

And when the place where the child "can be of the most service" has been revealed, then what? Then, particularly if the testing determines that his place is in a slot within the division of labor that might seem less than desirable or fulfilling in itself, we must count on his "fitness for social life"—that is, his level of cooperative spirit—and the ability of the social center to "interpret to him the intellectual and social meaning of the work in which he is engaged." And if his grade in "fitness for social life" class is a little low—that is, if he has retained some of that "competitive spirit" which the education process was designed to blunt, and therefore shows signs of not accepting his assigned role peaceably—then what happens? I suppose then he is due for some remedial socialization via the "social centre," lest he become one of Barack Obama's bitter Bible- and gun-clingers.

In any event, all theoretical idealism aside, Dewey's education model is in large part an elaborate two-pronged system of socialist job-training, vetting people for the needed social roles, and then indoctrinating them to accept those roles submissively.

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[37] *MPC*, 9.

It goes without saying that the freer mechanisms of determining the necessary social roles and sorting people into them, Nature and Chance—that is, free minds, open communication, voluntary relationships formed for mutual benefit—can also achieve a successful division of labor. And this voluntary division may answer more satisfactorily to practical needs, because the pairing of needs and specialization will occur organically and through the direct interaction of human beings, unlike the artificially-induced simulacrum of organic social relations imposed through Dewey's public school indoctrination, which answers only to needs determined by government experts thinking about last year's problems, with specialization circumscribed by the state's bureaucracy-laden five year plans and what have you.

But it also goes without saying that state oversight of the division of labor, education as population-control, and government-standardized training and vetting of workers, offer one definitive advantage over Nature and Chance: stability. I do not mean legitimate political stability in the sense of a well-ordered community of generally good people living generally good lives. I mean hierarchical stability, along the lines of a traditional caste system, but one superimposed on an industrial economy.

William Ayers, the guy from President Obama's neighborhood,[38] and the archetypal 1960s communist rabble-rouser, loves John Dewey. So did John D. Rockefeller, the archetypal capitalist tycoon. There is no paradox here, no contradiction, no misunderstanding. Dewey is *the* philosopher of the industrial, sentimentalized caste system that we adorn with names like "social democracy." The modern West was in the early stages of

[38] Cf. my "Revisiting the Guy in Obama's Neighborhood," *American Thinker* (March 22, 2012), http://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2012/03/revisiting_the_guy_in_obamas_neighborhood.html.

being undermined by German-inspired education reformers before Dewey was born. But it was John Dewey, adapting Fichte for non-authoritarian audiences, who made it internationally acceptable, almost nice, to say "Don't be selfish—you live for the state."

(6) *The teaching of literacy is to be stalled as long as possible. The artificial community in which the prisoners of the government education system are to be raised is to function and develop as an oral, pre-literate culture.*

This is another area where Dewey's thought, benefitting from his more practical pedagogical focus, and also from the added perspective of the Marxist materialist dialectic, transcends Fichte's rather heavy-handed approach. Fichte's demand that no one be taught how to read and write until the socialist-idealist indoctrination program is complete was probably far-fetched and implausible in an advanced society with a literary history. To state this another way, Fichte was slightly too honest about his reasons for requiring that children be prevented from gaining access to old ideas and old exemplars of human life. Progressive education theory would need to ferment for a few generations before it would mature into a perfect rationalization for withholding early access to past thought, or better yet, for anticipating and undermining the effects of such access where it cannot be withheld outright. Dewey provides that rationalization.

One of the most interesting dramatic developments in Plato's *Symposium*—his dialogue in which several prominent Athenians give speeches about the meaning of Eros in their lives—is Socrates' choice to frame his speech as a mini-dialogue between himself as the student and the priestess Diotima as his teacher. This surprising twist, given the exclusive manliness of the surrounding discussion, would deserve attention under any circumstances. In today's university classroom, however, the

teacher is conscious of the need to emphasize this intrusion of a feminine perspective for sadly modern reasons, in addition to all the good philosophical ones. Once, after a lecture introducing Socrates' speech, I received first impressions e-mails from two intelligent female students. The first wished to express her appreciation for Plato's presentation of Diotima, since she had been deeply upset, in her literature classes, to learn how Western culture had previously excluded and suppressed women's voices. The second explained how she felt let down, after anticipating the appearance of a female speaker, to see Diotima expressing herself in terms that seemed to validate traditional gender stereotypes.

These were two keen and serious students, so I was happy to walk through the issues with them. But I was also struck by the way latter-day progressives, with the litany of politicized "isms" through which they force us to interpret everything, have amplified the essential difficulty facing the teacher of old books, namely the struggle to draw students gently away from the Now, meaning from the presuppositions and half-conscious biases that are the greatest obstacles to real learning. One who thinks he already knows will not seek knowledge. The present, in psychological terms, can become a choir of little voices that drowns out fresh perspectives with its constant chant of "We already know." Thus learning, viewed subjectively, may be described as a series of instances of *rejecting the present*—that is, of finding glimmers from beyond your accepted horizon of the moment that force you to rethink what you thought you knew. The gift of literacy turns the entire past of human civilization into one ever-growing repository of weapons we may use in our lifelong battle to overcome our narrow, time-bound selves.

There are two ways schooling may destroy this gift of the human heritage, the gift of lost but always recoverable possibilities, without actually withholding the written word outright:

Short-circuit the essence of literacy, the immediate communication between minds across time and space; or propagandize literacy itself into disrepute and disuse. Dewey employs both methods. In fact, he effectively invented the first, understood as a practical educational methodology. This is the method embodied by my two *Symposium* students.

Reading the past through the prism of the present is an inherent shortcoming of the human condition, because the here and now is always the mind's path of least resistance. We love our own, and what is more, we believe we understand it. Old wisdom, by contrast, teases us with a dance of seemingly limitless veils. There are problems of evolved word meanings, impenetrable allusions and examples, and the inevitable challenges of trying to understand what someone was saying without fully understanding the particular context, alternative voices, and shared experiences to which he thought he was responding. Therefore, the prism of the present must always be our initial point of view; the hope is that the colors it separates when placed under the light of the past will be enough to grab the soul's attention, and to tempt her to seek a better perspective, imperfect though any vantage point must be.

Progressivism, however, is precisely the philosophical position that the present is necessarily truer or more complete than the past—that the past as such cannot teach us anything until we have imbued it with the meanings of the present. Past men, in effect, must learn from *us*, not we from them. Progressive reading strategies and interpretive theories are intended to produce a more sophisticated, crystalline prism that attracts the eye with its own shiny edges, so that the viewer hardly notices the separated colors of the past at all, or sees in them only a pale reminder of the beauty of the prism itself.

Reading Plato from the feminist perspective means judging Plato against the standard of the present, rather than challenging the present from the perspective of Plato. Whether the resulting judgment be approval or disappointment, the opportunity for learning from beyond our moment is lost, or rather deliberately sealed off from view. To teach young people, through progressive "critical theory," to interpret the thought and society of the past (or even that of their immediate naïve surroundings) from a pseudo-scientifically verified superior view is to trap their minds permanently in the Now, which means nothing less than *to prevent learning*.

Here is Dewey's explanation of how history ought to be taught:

> I believe...that history is of educative value in so far as it presents phases of social life and growth. It must be controlled by reference to social life. When taken simply as history it is thrown into the distant past and becomes dead and inert. Taken as the record of man's social life and progress it becomes full of meaning. I believe, however, that it cannot be so taken excepting as the child is also introduced directly into social life.[39]

In other words, history should only be presented to students on the condition that the interpretation of past events and men be carefully controlled in advance. Specifically, the past must be interpreted in terms of the progressive development of mankind toward its newly-discovered social self—a "people's history," if you will. Dewey shows his psychological astuteness (and his tyrannical soul) by insisting that even this loaded form of historical study must be undertaken only within an education setting that is structured to foster the collectivist principle—it

[39] *MPC*, 11.

must be taught "as the child is also introduced directly into social life"—so that the child may see and feel the direct relation between the attitudes inculcated in his daily life and the historical antecedents of this social consciousness. In other words, the carefully programmed interpretive filter might not "take" in the student's mind without the pre-established emotional buttress of his being raised in an environment, the school, that teaches socialism through its very structure.

From this reasoning, it follows that *the past should not be studied at all* outside the well-controlled intellectual context of a complete socialist upbringing. The classical liberal, or at least non-socialist, might perceive the past as containing examples of humanity's struggle for freedom, or against excessive government authority. Only the properly trained collectivist can be sure to see what he *ought* to see, namely examples of society's struggle for progress toward the universal State. This is to say that the past should not be presented until it has been stripped of its genuine educational value, which lies in its separation from the present. When Dewey says history without the prefabricated progressive interpretation is "dead and inert," he merely means that *nothing* is alive and active unless it is consistent with the present as experienced in the socialist school. This is how you close a mind to thought and learning forever.

A similar principle is applied to literature. The biographies of heroes, for example, should be taught only as examples of society providing for the needs of "social progress," and not as examples of individual achievement, or as beautiful writing.[40] Individual achievement, of course, is precisely what Dewey hopes to brand as a social taboo. The beauty of language—particularly past language—is dangerous, as it might expose children to the value

[40] *SS*, 158ff.

of individual minds, or to the value of language itself, particularly written language, as a means of expressing thought.

> Language is almost always treated in the books of pedagogy simply as the expression of thought. It is true that language is a logical instrument, but it is fundamentally and primarily a social instrument. Language is the device for communication; it is the tool through which one individual comes to share the ideas and feelings of others. When treated simply as a way of getting individual information, or as a means of showing off what one has learned, it loses its social motive and end.[41]

I draw your attention to Dewey's way of explaining the specific evils that result from teaching children to see language as the means of expressing thought, namely that it makes language "simply a way of getting individual information" or "showing off." This is strictly my personal judgment, but I would say that only a man who truly hates the human race could describe discursive reasoning this way.

To summarize, Dewey's first case against offering children the gift of the human heritage is to stipulate that the past must be exploited exclusively for examples of how previous peoples were groping toward the great revelation of progressivism, or, as has become more popular these days, how they were systemically *prevented* from achieving this revelation.

His second method of eliminating the destabilizing influence of past ideas—the anti-literacy propaganda campaign—is more straightforward, and improves upon Fichte's simplistic proposal to delay the teaching of literacy as long as possible, although in its practical effects Dewey's enhancement may seem more cosmetic than substantial. Seeing that Fichte's extreme plan

[41] *MPC*, 12.

would never fly in a free nation, he exerts his considerable powers of advanced mealy-mouthedness to promote a workable compromise—so workable, in fact, that it provides a remarkably clear account of what has happened to literacy in our time.

In an article entitled "The Primary-Education Fetich,"[42] Dewey makes one of his cleverest cases for the destruction of traditional "three Rs" education. The particular "fetich" of his title is literacy:

> There is...a false educational god whose idolaters are legion, and whose cult influences the entire educational system. This is language study.[43]

In particular, Dewey bemoans the traditional focus on reading and writing during the first years of school. Noting that this "false god" is generally defended on the grounds of having stood the test of time, Dewey offers a perfect progressive response (in the post-Marxist style):

> On the contrary, the fact, that this mode of education was adapted to past conditions, is in itself a reason why it should no longer hold supreme sway. The present has its claims.... To educate on the basis of past surroundings is like adapting an organism to an environment which no longer exists.[44]

This is Dewey's case for progressive schooling in a nutshell. And what is the precise difference between past and present conditions that warrants de-emphasizing reading and writing in childhood education?

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[42] Dewey, "The Primary-Education Fetich" (1898), hereafter *PEF*, in *Early Works* vol. 5.
[43] *PEF*, 254.
[44] *PEF*, 254.

> The existing status was developed in a period when ability to read was practically the sole avenue to knowledge.... To avoid intellectual chaos and confusion, it was necessary reverently to retrace the steps of the fathers. The régime of intellectual authority and tradition, in matters of politics, morals, and culture, was a necessity, where methods of scientific investigation and verification had not been developed, or were in the hands of the few.[45]

Put simply, why *read* when you can *do*? Modern industry and socialized schooling have created conditions in which every child may learn from hands-on involvement with the carefully controlled material world, using scientific methods. This new scientific socialism renders the old régime, whose divine and earthly authorities are deposited in your library, obsolete. Politics, morals, and culture are now to be developed through the micromanaged growth of social consciousness in the public school. Literacy is no longer important as it once was, before progressivism found the scientific key to human development. (Incidentally, there is an interesting book to be written cataloguing the categorical statements, in every important testament in the history of progressivism since Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, that we have now found the key that answers all the questions mankind has struggled with forever, and that if the reader is patient, he should have the whole Truth delivered to his doorstep sometime early next year. The strangest part of it is that this is one area where the progressives were not dissembling—they really believed this, and I suspect their heirs today still do.)

Dewey notes that "the advent of quick and cheap mails, of easy and continuous travel and transportation, of the telegraph and

[45] *PEF*, 255.

telephone, the establishment of libraries, art-galleries, literary clubs, the universal diffusion of cheap reading-matter, newspapers and magazines of all kinds and grades...have worked a tremendous change in the immediate intellectual environment." And the result of this "tremendous change"?

> The capital handed down from past generations...*is no longer amassed in those banks termed books*, but is in active and general circulation, at an extremely low rate of interest.... The significance attaching to reading and writing, as primary and fundamental instruments of culture, has shrunk proportionately as the immanent intellectual life of society has quickened and multiplied.[46] (Emphasis added.)

This hardly needs comment. John Dewey, the most influential force in education throughout the civilized world today, is here making the explicit case for what we now call the dumbing down of society. The by-products of all the centuries of intellectual effort and innovation having now been realized in practical life, we may dispense at last with the burdensome chore of preserving and studying those efforts themselves. The masses have telephones and newspapers, quick transportation and even dime novels for those who wish to keep up the antiquated habit of reading. So why do they need the old "great books"? I suspect that if you could hold this argument clearly before your mind simultaneously with Dewey's claim that public education in an industrial democracy places the people into the position to "instruct their officials"—I mean if you could really hold the two ideas side by side in your mind for just a moment—you would experience an epiphany of the meaning of Dewey's whole political philosophy, and of the politics of late modernity in general.

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[46] *PEF*, 256-7.

Dewey's claim that literacy, at least of the sort that would entice the child to private reading and writing, is no longer essential to primary education, is further supported by this clever point:

> The plea for the predominance of learning to read in early school life because of the great importance attaching to literature seems to me a perversion. Just because literature is so important, it is desirable to postpone the child's introduction to printed speech until he is capable of appreciating and dealing with its genuine meaning.[47]

We have already seen what Dewey means by "genuine meaning," and why he believes socializing children before they can read is essential to their proper reception of this meaning. I do not know at precisely what age a child ought to learn to read, and to be encouraged to read good literature privately. Contrary to the assumptions of scientific pedagogy, I assume the proper age varies considerably from child to child. But I know that if a child is to be submitted to indoctrination in a socialist re-education camp, I want him to be able to read and learn independently before the indoctrination overwhelms his thought processes, while he is still able to receive ideas from outside the prison of the present *without* a built-in critical theory to stifle their potential ennobling effects on his soul.

Dewey's argument that early literacy was more important in the past when men had no other connection to the world's knowledge, whereas now we have the telegraph, telephone, and newspapers, is like a farmer saying he no longer needs rain and sun to grow his crops, because he has a rainbow. That rainbow world sums up the moment through which we are now living—

[47] *PEF*, 264.

the final stages of hollowing out the amassed wealth of millennia in the names of science, culture, and progress. Our mind-numbing mass entertainment, our propagandizing news media, our exhibitionist "social media," and our access to instantaneous means of communicating our experiences and feelings, rather than thoughts, constitute the ersatz happiness of a civilization that has forgotten what happiness means. Hesiod, Parmenides, Aristotle, Dante, Locke, and Swift are now ghosts in the world they made possible, but which has subsequently rendered them obsolete: the world of sitcoms, CNN, Facebook, and a million indistinguishable "stars" squealing on about their childish feelings. Perhaps the only great writer of the past who truly lives today is Alexis de Tocqueville—not because he is widely read, of course, but because, through his admonition about the threat of soft despotism, he inadvertently provided democratic totalitarianism with its grammar book.

The most common defense of Dewey the man and thinker against charges that he embodies a totalitarian impulse is to cite the vocal anti-communism of his final years. His defenders awkwardly dismiss his initial praise of Stalinist Russia—written, you will recall, when he was sixty-nine years old—with a red-faced shrug, or even attempt to qualify it after the fact with a little Deweyesque fudgery of their own.

A typical example of this is Dewey's obituary in the *New York Times*,[48] which defines him as "an avowed anti-communist," but also as "too big a man to be sneered at as an 'armchair Bolshevist,'" saying "his convictions were those of an essentially honest man." Delicately touching upon this honest man's out-

[48] *The New York Times*, "Dr. John Dewey Dead at 92; Philosopher a Noted Liberal" (New York: New York Times, June 2, 1952), http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/1020.html.

rageous distortions and quarter-truths on behalf of the Soviet Union and other dictatorships, the obituary observes:

> Dr. Dewey saw the good as well as the bad in countries where the masses were groping for new social systems. He visited Russia, China and Turkey; saw for himself, and maintained his views in the face of public opinion in this country. He condemned hasty judgment of the affairs of other peoples and pointed to the flaws at home in no uncertain terms.

I suppose Dewey's description of the Stalinist regime that he "saw for himself" as "democratic beyond the ambitions of the democracies of the past," as advocating "the universal good of universal humanity," and as embodying his beloved "cooperative principle" "much more organically" than could ever be achieved in his own country, are merely examples of condemning "hasty judgment of the affairs of other peoples." I suppose we *must* accept this interpretation, for the only other possibility is that Dewey must be described with a word that simply will not do in polite discussion of the thought and writing of a major philosopher: liar.

Here, for me, is the last word on Dewey's philosophy of education, the conclusion of his 1902 speech to the National Council of Education:

> Men will long dispute about material socialism, about socialism considered as a matter of distribution of the material resources of the community; but there is a socialism regarding which there can be no such dispute—socialism of the intelligence and of the spirit. To extend the range and the fullness of sharing in the intellectual and spiritual resources of the community is the very meaning of the community. Because the older type of education is not fully adequate to this task under

> changed conditions, we feel its lack and demand that the school shall become a social centre. The school as a social centre means the active and organized promotion of this socialism of the intangible things of art, science, and other modes of social intercourse.[49]

These words, written as a rousing finale for a speech presented to teachers, describe the meaning of public school flawlessly. For all his effort to seem moderate in his "demand," we must ask this question: Once men accept the "socialism of the intelligence and of the spirit"—that is, of the mind—as admitting of no dispute, what argument do they have against the socialism of the mere material *products* of the mind? John Dewey knew the answer. We are all living it.

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[49] *SSC*, 86.

Eros and Education

> *If intellect is divine, then, in comparison with man, the life according to it is divine in comparison with human life. But we must not follow those who advise us, being men, to think of human things, and, being mortal, of mortal things, but must, so far as we can, make ourselves immortal, and strain every nerve to live in accordance with the best thing in us; for even if it be small in bulk, much more does it in power and worth surpass all the rest.*[1]
>
> Aristotle

> *The mere absorbing of facts and truths is so exclusively individual an affair that it tends very naturally to pass into selfishness. There is no obvious social motive for the acquirement of mere learning, there is no clear social gain in success thereat.*[2]
>
> John Dewey

i. Two Motives of Education

Throughout this postmortem for a civilization, I have described universal compulsory schooling as a tyrannical design to separate children from themselves, or from nature. I am quite aware that such statements live on the border between precision and

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[1] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X.7, 1177b.
[2] Dewey, *SS*, 12-13.

obscurity, and that in offering them as my ultimate case against compulsory schooling, I run the risk of seeming to bet my whole stake on a will-o'-the-wisp. Therefore, having set out my arguments—practical, theoretical, and historical—I feel compelled to address, however inadequately, a topic in speaking of which I am not only inexpert, but might also be, if I may use such a word, impious.

Let us recall how the two most profound thinkers behind the growth of compulsory schooling expressed the supposed moral problem that their education models were designed to combat.

First, Fichte explaining why the child must be raised in a facility apart from the family and community into which he is born:

> He must not even hear that our vital impulses and actions can be directed towards our maintenance and welfare, nor that we may learn for that reason, nor that learning may be of some use for that purpose.

Next, Dewey explaining the distinction between the self with which we are born and the self achieved through proper socialization:

> The actual self, the self recognizing only past and sensible satisfaction, is set over against the self which recognizes the necessity of expansion and a wider environment. Since the former self confines its action to benefits demonstrably accruing to itself, while the latter, in meeting the demands of the situation, necessarily contributes to the satisfaction of others, one takes the form of a *private* self, a self whose good is set over against and exclusive of that of others, while the self recognizing obligation becomes a social self—the self which performs its due function in society.

Now, against these prime examples of the progressive standard of education, let us juxtapose the Aristotelian standard which we observed in Part One:

> The [educational] object also which a man sets before him makes a great difference; if he does or learns anything for his own sake or for the sake of his friends or with a view to excellence, the action will not appear illiberal; but if done for the sake of others, the very same action will be thought menial and servile.

Seeing these two points of view together, particularly in light of the overall philosophical and historical context that we have outlined, one becomes fully aware that we are looking at diametrically opposed views of the purpose of education, of the relationship between man and society, and, if our modern minds are still large enough to contain such a notion without embarrassed laughter, of *the meaning of life*. Both Fichte and Dewey, in the above statements and throughout their entire philosophies of education, isolate as their enemy the natural human impulse to harness one's powers in search of one's own well-being. As we have also seen, both men specify that the target of their attack, the "selfish self" or "dim consciousness," embraces *all* actions not motivated by the feeling of pure servitude to the state, from those aimed at securing the good of one's friends up to and including the quest for spiritual salvation and a life of intellectual achievement.

For both men, then, we may say that the defining purpose of the new education is to promote a model of learning pursued exclusively for the sake of "social service." This is the progressive movement's development of Kant's separation of morality from

the desire for happiness, the moral agent from the pursuit of "self-interest." The primary and defining function of modern state-controlled education, derived from this post-Kantian extrapolation of Kant's moral revolution, is to inculcate the attitude that learning is to be permitted or valued only as part of a program of what may, without exaggeration, be called *moral enslavement*, insofar as a slave is a man who has been trained to believe he has no right to live at all independently of his usefulness to other men. That this indecent perspective has become the almost universally accepted moral credo of our age indicates the extraordinary and permanent influence that German idealism and the universal schooling model it engendered have exerted over the development of the late modern world.

This directly contrasts with the Aristotelian view, according to which any action *not* undertaken for the sake of oneself, one's loved ones, or "excellence," indicates a servile and menial condition. Fichte and Dewey, for that matter, would not really disagree with Aristotle in this; they merely pass a different judgment on the ultimate value of servility. The whole difference, buried under layers of modern abstraction, turns on the question of the proper motives of action.

Any action—not an involuntary movement, but a voluntary self-movement—answers to a desire. A basic question then, with regard to any deliberate act, is "*To whose desire does it answer?*" This is the question to which Aristotle attends directly when he distinguishes liberal from illiberal doing or learning on the basis of whose interest is being served. It is the question Fichte looks boldly in the eye when he declares the goal of education to be the destruction of free will. And it is the question Dewey fudges and dissembles over by reducing society to the state, and declaring the existence of his imaginary "social self." For Aristotle, the only operative motivating desire in moral action must be that of the

agent. For Fichte and Dewey, the agent's natural desire—that is, his interest in his own well-being—is precisely the factor that must be denied any role in moral action.

When applied to education, the two perspectives in question represent two views of the motives for learning. Is the child learning for the sake of his welfare, that of his loved ones, or in general self-improvement? Or is he learning "for the sake of others," i.e., to satisfy purposes not his own, and without regard for his own interests? The question, expressed from the point of view of the child, would be, "Is he seeking his own completion, or is he being molded to serve someone else's aims?" From the point of view of the educator, it would be, "Is the child being taught, or is he being indoctrinated?" That it is impossible, within the theories of Fichte, Dewey, and their legions of acolytes, clearly to distinguish teaching from indoctrination at all, or even to explain why the latter should not be the accepted goal (remember Dewey's Soviet formula: "propaganda is education, and education is propaganda"), is an indication of how far German philosophy has carried us from any coherent notion of human nature, or of freedom.

Therefore, here at the end of our tale of the birth of universal compulsory schooling—the idea that ate a planet—I propose to take one last look back at what has been lost. For if there is any truth in the narrative I have set out, then thinking our way back beyond that fateful fork in the road—beyond German idealism, pseudo-Newtonian social engineering, and the whole progressive assault on humanity that has followed in their wake—may be the key to finding what would have to be done to restore a human world in which men are sufficiently connected to nature to know the difference between freedom and slavery, and to be able to intuit when they are being pushed across the line separating the two.

It must be understood that "thinking our way back" is the best we can do; there is no *going* back. In this, Nietzsche's famous word whispered in the ear of the conservative holds great wisdom.[3] Men and time are not crabs; the backwards crawl is a fool's dream. The past cannot be restored, but it can provide insight into the present, and an idea for the future. In this case, our task is to dig through the rubble of progressive concepts to find the remaining embers of the fire in men's souls that once constituted the essence of human life, the fire that Fichte slanders as "dim consciousness," and Dewey as the "selfish self"—the fire that, above all else, public education was instituted to snuff out.

At the conclusion of one semester-long study of Plato's *Symposium*, a very intelligent student sent me an e-mail that made my day, in that it perfectly expressed my deepest hopes for every student I have ever taught, from kindergarten to graduate school. "I want to thank you," she said, "because I learned something more than philosophy. I think I became more adult than before...and maybe I should thank Socrates, too."

The goal of becoming more adult is the heart of anything worthy of the name education. "More adult" here entails no submission to one's due function in social service. It does not involve relinquishing one's will to state control. "More adult" means more human, more perfect, more of what one is naturally intended to be. And this goal is the satisfaction of a desire without which we would hardly be human at all, but which progressive schooling seeks to discredit and suffocate, leaving today's non-doctrinaire teacher in the peculiar position of trying to enliven dormant feelings within his students that teachers in the past would have been able simply to presume from the outset.

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[3] Nietzsche, *TI*, "Expeditions" 43.

Fichte says the child must be prevented at all costs from realizing he might learn for the sake of his own "maintenance and welfare," up to and including for the sake of his hopes of an immortal soul. Dewey says a man who habitually enjoys acting for the benefit of his loved ones, or who seeks knowledge for the joy of improving his mind, is living as a "selfish self." In short, they, like most progressives, redefine the natural pursuit of happiness as immoral, identifying morality with the forsaking of one's private good or interest in favor of what is euphemistically called society. This is no mere quibble or technicality. It is the defining distinction between fundamentally opposed moral philosophies. It explains the progressive attempt to subvert the natural desire that was once implicitly understood to be the necessary basis of any moral theory, and to substitute in its place an abstract and artificial lexicon of moral motivations designed to provide a pseudo-religious or pseudoscientific mask for the real goal of our new morality, which is to produce servile and menial men prepared to live servile and menial lives for the sake, and for the security, of their betters in the ruling elite. Put plainly, Fichte's love that loves itself as the lover of the interpretation of its love, and Dewey's social self, social service, and social mind, are progressivism's noisy but hollow stand-ins for nature's basic moral impulse, the longing for completion that the Greeks deified as Eros.

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ii. The Self and the Soul

Seventeenth century moral theory, spanning thinkers from Hobbes to Locke, identified the innate human desire for self-preservation as the basis of political relations, and happiness or felicity as our chief natural aim. A man cannot be denied his claim on his own life, or his natural wish to sustain and enhance that life through his own effort, alone or in conjunction with other men. This is the view that Fichte and Dewey condemn as selfishness and hedonism.

"Self-preservation" is a term of art, or rather of science. It is the modern empiricist's way of describing human motivation in terms reminiscent of the physicist's laws of motion. A "self," qua moving thing, will naturally remain in motion until stopped. To stop a self by force is to thwart its nature. Therefore, the self qua moral entity has a right to preserve itself, i.e., to preserve its motion. In the end, the idea may be somewhat reductionist and trivializing, as scientific explanations in the moral realm tend to be. The problem may be seen by asking the Lockean or Hobbesian theorist, "How long does a self naturally wish to preserve itself?" The likely answer, "Until the end of the man's life," has the air of a logical run-around, akin to the title character in *The Importance of Being Earnest* declaring to his love, "Miss Fairfax, ever since I met you, I have admired you more than any girl...I have ever met since...I met you."[4]

The reductionism is rooted in the modern effort to cast off ancient philosophical baggage, particularly as delivered by

[4] Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (London: Leonard Smithers and Co., 1899) Act 1, p. 25.

medieval scholasticism. Hence the language of the soul, which had come to carry explicitly religious portent, was gradually eschewed in the name of the new scientific perspective. This modern zeal for escaping the ancient sensibility is apparent at every turn in reading Hobbes, Locke, and Descartes. As is typical of such passionate declarations on behalf of a great new idea, however, sober reconsideration inclines one to view the new partly in light of what may have been lost in the process of sweeping away the old. In particular, one is compelled to ask whether the new lexicon of the self is really so unqualified an enhancement over that of the soul, or even whether it is really more grounded in empirical reality than its ancient precursor, as it is purported to be.

The soul (*psyche*) was a less speculative entity than medieval religion and modern reductionism have made it appear, having a basis in concrete, pre-linguistic reality—not so clearly true of the "self." The *psyche*, at its Homeric conception, was literally "breath," that which observably and unquestionably distinguishes a man who is living from that same man after he has been run through with a spear.[5] That is, *psyche* is a fact, an immaterial but undeniable fact. The Greek philosophers, applying the dreaded dialectical thinking that so disturbed the moderns from Hobbes to Kant, sought to develop the idea further: If we have an intangible life-force that distinguishes us from our carcass, what is it, how is it distinct from the body to which it brings life, and how does it come into relation with that body so as to make a pile of ever-changing matter a *living thing*? The study of the soul (psychology in the original sense) is grounded in the observable reality of the Homeric "breath of life," and therefore meets the requirement of proper rational inquiry,

[5] See Homer's *Odyssey* 11.221 and 14.425-6, for example.

namely that it be an attempt to explain the world of ordinary experience.

The modern lexicon of "self" and "ego" intentionally departs from this traditional inquiry. From Descartes, Hobbes, and Locke, the goal was to step away from the ancient psychological method, which was inexorably bound to a moral philosophy, a metaphysical view, and later a particular religious doctrine, all of which these moderns wished either to reject or to minimize in favor of a more scientific (meaning materialist) understanding of man. Psychology was the touchiest area of all in which to seek scientific verifications and the dismissal of metaphysics, so the early moderns did the best they could with subjective consciousness, atomism, extension, and the groundless and endless string of sense impressions, but in the end they did what one perhaps *must* do when one wishes to side-step the unifying soul and still make sense of man at all: They became metaphysical grammarians, if you will. Hence reflexives and pronouns became real entities—"self," "ego." Observable facts in need of theoretical explanation (e.g., breath in a lump of matter) were replaced with theoretical abstractions (the "I" or "self") in search of plausible and definable content. Generations later, Rousseau, and then the German idealists, went to town with these notions, building an entire theory of mind and reality, even a kind of theology, out of grammar. In other words, modernity effectively reversed the relationship between reality and language. Whereas the ancients had begun with a bare fact of experience (albeit the most mysterious one), and developed it through language, poetic and philosophical, into various accounts of our essential nature, the moderns had turned a linguistic tool into a conceptual repository to be stuffed with everything seeming to indicate an individual person, thereby setting in motion a new way of describing human

experience that risked eliding the most basic questions—life and unity—in the name of objective theory.[6]

What is a "self"? No one has ever really clarified this term, used in our modern way, and I doubt anyone ever will. Consider Locke's attempt at a definition: "that conscious thinking thing (whatever substance made up of, whether spiritual or material, simple or compounded, it matters not) which is sensible, or conscious of pleasure and pain, capable of happiness or misery, and so is concerned for itself, as far as that consciousness extends."[7] The self is an artificial category borrowed from language, where its function is important but entirely dependent, to express something supposedly real and independent. This puts those of us who prefer the language of soul in an impossible position. We cannot speak of issues of morality and psychology without seeming to mean something quite different from what we actually mean, due to this radical break in the philosophical vocabulary. Translated into the vernacular of "self" and "ego," Aristotle's great-souled man (*Nicomachean Ethics* IV.3) looks like a ridiculous egomaniac.[8] Aristotle stipulates that any true

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[6] Nietzsche, among others, caught them, and exposed the unacknowledged presupposition in the Cartesian "I think, therefore I am," namely the illegitimate inference that the awareness of thought indicates a discrete "I" that thinks. For Nietzsche, however, this became license to eschew any need for a unifying principle, i.e., a "conscious mind"—a classic instance of throwing out the baby with the bath.

[7] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (originally published 1690; republished New York: Valentine Seaman, 1824), Book II, Chapter xxvii, §17, p. 308.

[8] For the better part of two centuries, a German interpretive filter has stood between modern intellectuals and all things ancient. Even some very incisive critics of this very filter, such as the contingent known as the Straussians, tend to fall back into presuming that the Greeks were, in ultimate goals, mostly what the nineteenth century German university taught us they were. Anyone susceptible to this perceptual error with regard to ancient moral theory—

education must promote learning in the student's own interest, since any action not undertaken in one's own interest would seem slavish. It is easy to see how, in the modern psychological language, this might be reduced to "selfishness." In the language of the soul, which carries the musty scent of the much-maligned teleological view of man, Aristotle's statement is perfectly reason-

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assuming, with the German scholars, that the aim of Greek moral philosophy was essentially the German idealist goal, namely to diminish individual "selfishness" in favor of the collective—will remain permanently perplexed in attempting to understand the core differences between Greek and German civilization, and forever oblivious to how much of the Western heritage has been lost through the agencies of German scholarship.

One peculiar crystallization of that loss may be seen in the endless academic dismay over Aristotle's summary account of the social attitude of the completely virtuous man, which he calls greatness of soul (*megalopsychia*). Is the full-of-himself, condescending egomaniac Aristotle describes really supposed to be the most moral of men? Is this account merely intended as a pep-talk for young students of moral philosophy, to be dismissed with a wink by elders? Is it some kind of ironic joke? How can Aristotle's definition of greatness of soul—echoed in many ways in Nietzsche's description of the *Übermensch*—be consistent with moral virtue? In fact, if we could remove the German-colored glasses for a moment, we would find similarly jarring accounts throughout ancient moral thought. What is the poor modern scholar to make of all this?

I offer the following short-form explanation of the cause of this confusion: For Aristotle, the truly virtuous man experiences himself as so elevated in spirit that all earthly concerns, including petty self-concerns that might prevent virtuous (i.e., honorable) behavior, seem insignificant. For Fichte and Dewey, by contrast, the virtuous man experiences *himself* as so personally insignificant ("selfless") that every minor demand or "need" of the collective seems greater and more worthy than any concerns he might harbor for his own petty self. In other words, the German idealists effected such a complete moral reversal that we who live and think in their wake can hardly decipher the sensibilities of the world residing on the other side of that Prussian revolution.

If there is a single intellectual development that may be said to have paved the way for this idealist obliteration of the past, it was the modern conceptual shift from man understood as soul to man understood as self.

able, but we have lost that language, so communicating on these extremely important matters becomes a web of complications and misunderstandings. In fact, Aristotle's defense of what we now call "self-interest" comes immediately after his observation that the individual qua citizen belongs to the city, and not to himself. In modern terms, this makes Aristotle seem almost schizophrenic, although it is quite understandable from beyond the modern lexicon of ego, self, collectivism, and socialization.

The reason this lexical shift is so important is that its effects upon moral theory have been cataclysmic. Descartes, Hobbes, and Locke set the stage, though unintentionally, for our post-Kantian idealist nightmare, from which we may never awaken. For we all know the opposite of being "selfish" is being "social." If we are selves, and happiness is our natural goal, then self-interest in the modern so-called libertarian sense is the only moral position. To deny this is to deny the self—the individual human being—the right to exist. Hence, in order to connect men to one another more than contractually, without seeming to reject life itself, one must follow the progressives in inventing alternative, supposedly other-regarding selves, such as Dewey's "social self" or Fichte's "clear consciousness." Somehow the fiat creation of multiple selves within or transcending a single individual is to be accepted as a profound new discovery—even as a scientific advance—rather than what it obviously really is, namely grasping at collectivist straws without regard for reason or experience. An unself-interested self is an absurdity and a moral outrage.[9] Yet an "unselfish" connection to other people seems to deserve a place

[9] This explains why even Fichte, in his pre-1800 philosophy, made so much hay of "the I" and "self-love" as central principles of morality—though, of course, defining these notions on idealistic and ultimately anti-individual grounds.

in moral theory. The modern moral problem appears insoluble on its own terms.

If one substitutes "soul" for "self" in these modern equations, however, one immediately sees the difference, and a plausible solution. For soul has *no* opposite corresponding to "social." Soul, in effect, comes to the body *from the world*; self, by contrast, goes to the world *from the body*. That is, soul is inherently rooted in the cosmos, which would make us essentially rational beings, whereas self is rooted in the body, which would make us essentially feeling, rather than thinking, beings. Relatedness to the world beyond our material limits is intrinsic to the soul; atomism intrinsic to the self. Thus, in the era of the modern self the pursuit of individual happiness begins from behind a natural wall of separation from others, and the unifying purpose of political community is precisely the shared aim of building more secure walls to protect private development, whereas in the age of the classical soul the pursuit of individual happiness meant the quest for the fulfillment of a human nature which unites, not as irrational feelings unite, but as reason and truth unite. For the ancients, the just state is the state directed toward the happiest (i.e., most natural) life for its citizens, and may therefore claim an intermediary role in the individuated soul's search for self-knowledge, which ultimately means for completion according to its essential nature—a search for union, not with "the collective," but with Being. There is no tension, within a conception of man as soul, between the pursuit of individual happiness and connection to other people.

Thus it is only the modern language shift that has implicitly and illegitimately made concern for one's own welfare appear "anti-social," which is to say *immoral*. This is where the German idealists went in for the kill. For all moral philosophers worthy of consideration prior to Kant, the moral purpose and goal of life

was happiness. Kant rejected this, following the logic of the modern language of the self, though disapproving of its atomistic consequences. But to reject happiness as *the* moral end is to reject the soul itself, which means to reject life. From Kant onward, it has been improper among enlightened people to regard individual happiness as a moral end. The reason, though not always stated explicitly, is obvious—individual happiness (supposedly) flies in the face of being social. Where the two goals seem to conflict, the moral man must always defer to the social (i.e., moral), at the expense of his own petty happiness (i.e., selfishness).

Yet as Aristotle suggests, denying one's own happiness as the proper moral end of one's endeavors is slavish. Modernity's universal submission to precisely this denial—rooted in indefinable abstractions derived not from life but from grammar and science—helps to explain why civilization has acquiesced so passively to its modern machinery of slavery. It further explains why those who resist this enslavement tend to do so either with a spirit-deforming guilty conscience ("Am I selfish?") or with the abrasive swagger of the amoral nihilist ("Yes, I'm selfish—who isn't?").

Nevertheless, for all its dangers, the moral primacy of self-preservation as conceived by Hobbes and Locke was, before Rousseau and the Germans corrupted it, a modernized, abstract echo of a motive Plato defines more poetically, but also more concretely, as the *desire for immortality*. The irreducible moral presupposition that the Greeks shared with the pre-Kantian moderns was that the moral man, like all others, acts out of a desire for happiness. No other ultimate motivation is conceivable. Trace back a man's proximate reasons for what he does—he acts in order to learn, to escape, to destroy, to produce—and you will always arrive at one final answer: "in order to be happy." This is

not a premise for which one need offer an elaborate argument or proof. One's own life and experience are all the proof that is needed or possible. (I once tested this on a group of skeptical university students. Imagine their dismay as they came to grips with the fact that they were all "selfish." This is the real alienation of the modern world—an entire planet of men and women raised to be suspicious of themselves.)

This precedes all questions of moral theory, and for millennia it gave moral philosophy its purpose. For while happiness is indisputably the condition we are seeking when we act, the problem is to determine what will truly bring happiness, the fulfillment suited to our nature.

Socrates, through his account of the lessons in love he claims to have learned from Diotima of Mantinea, leads us further along this path to ourselves. Diotima teaches that to be happy is to have good things. Again, this is hardly a debatable point. No one wants to possess bad things, because no one could ever imagine that possessing what is harmful might bring happiness. Therefore happiness means possessing the good. Furthermore, since wanting to have good things and to avoid bad things entails wanting never to *lose* the good once achieved—for then we would lack that which provides happiness—we are forced to introduce the idea of time into our desire for happiness. That is, we do not merely desire to possess the good, but we desire to possess it *forever*, which brings us face to face with our intractable limit, since possessing the good forever would require *living* forever. It follows that desiring to possess the good forever entails striving to overcome our natural temporal limits. Hence, our innate desire for happiness, followed through to its ultimate implications, is a longing for immortality.

This conclusion is perfectly logical, and intuitively understandable to anyone who has been in love. It makes little sense within

the confines of scientific materialism, but it makes complete sense within an account of the meaning of Eros—the urge toward perfection or wholeness, a goal that transcends the narrowly "human" or "private" elements of our existence.

Nature, as it seems, points us beyond our limited (but necessary) material view of ourselves by means of our own most powerful desire. That is, she lights a path leading directly from the immediate impulse we share with all living things—the impulse to perpetuate ourselves—straight into the aether, where our divine spark resides. The man who pursues the welfare of his beloved or his family, the improvement of his community, the joys of friendship, and above all, the pleasures of theoretical inquiry, because his soul is attuned to regard these true goods as the means to his own happiness, is the man Plato depicts as embodying the longing for immortality, and whom Aristotle describes as dearest to the gods. When we place this now alien view of life next to the slavish products of compulsory socialization who represent the ideal of progressive schooling, it becomes clear that we are comparing a moral outlook rooted in love for human nature to one rooted in loathing for human nature. If we were inclined to subject men like Fichte, Marx, and Dewey, not to mention their political facilitators from Mann to Lenin to Mao, to modern psychological categories, we would recognize that their calls for selflessness, social service, and the collective spirit are repressions of a deep-seated repugnance at the thought that anyone should not be living *for them*—that is, we would categorize these people as severe cases of moral infantilism. Their spiritual deformity is the native sentiment and soil of public school, a mire in which nothing healthy can grow.

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iii. The Desire to Know

I return, with some trepidation, to the all-important nexus of Eros, morality, and learning. Plato's *Symposium* is, for me, the most indispensable book on the nature and meaning of education. In my dream teacher's college of the future, this would be the only book taught, and it would be studied for ten years before anyone would be permitted to seek employment as a professional teacher of any kind. This dialogue, above all, teaches reverence for the individual soul and its potential. For Eros—in the proper sense of our longing for completion, which means for the good—is the missing link in all serious modern theories of human nature. Without this notion of a natural and ultimate desire, implying a natural and ultimate goal, education cannot be understood at all other than as one form or another of indoctrination, which is how it has generally been understood throughout the modern era, with the differences among pedagogical approaches being merely dependent on whether a given theorist likes the human race or, as in the case of progressives, does not.

For if humans naturally seek happiness, and complete happiness means embracing the good beyond all limits of time, then our life's task is set for us: We must search for understanding of the true human good, and strive to attain it. This makes the quest for knowledge both an urgently personal imperative and a profoundly moral one. In other words, Eros connects education to the ultimate goals of our nature and to our tenuous intimations of the divine, which makes learning an aching need, rather than what it has become today, namely a lifeless chore imposed artificially from without, in the service of

someone else's goals, and sustained with "carrots and sticks" in place of the inner spiritual aim that ought to draw the learner forward almost in spite of himself, the desire for completion.

We are dealing in final mysteries. By no means do I imagine the present discussion to be exhaustive of the full breadth of the subject matter, or myself to be capable of such an exhaustive discussion. I only know that my own experience as both a student and a teacher corroborates the ancient wisdom at every turn. The natural educational path is an erotic one—a longing for wholeness, for Being. A longing answers only to the needs of the soul whose longing it is. A longing that is not "self-seeking" is therefore inconceivable. It is the quest for happiness, and hence necessitates the search for the nature of the true human good, which ultimately means the search for wisdom. This compelling reason to seek understanding is not, as Fichte and Dewey would have it, an unenlightened one which must be purged or circum-vented in favor of a "pure" or "selfless" one; it is the highest human motive. A soul not moved by it at all will not learn, even by rote (insofar as memorizing patterns may be called learning). Abstract fantasies of creativity and a love that loves itself as the lover of its love are no substitute for the concrete *real* love that moved Aristotle's celestial spheres in their eternal emulation of the unmoved movers; that moved Dante to write the *Divine Comedy*, revivifying all his heroes, enemies, and teachers, and placing his own Beatrice among the saints; that moved Socrates to his marketplace full of students and friends, and Nietzsche to his mountaintop and his cold winds; and that moves every child, to the extent that he is imbued with this impulse connecting our material nature to our inkling of eternity, to try to understand what is around him, how he is a part of it, and what he ought to do. From the most elemental level to the most advanced, the most immature to the most sage, the purest thinking is driven by

the desire to "know thyself," which means to seek your nature—to become more adult, as my student intuited of herself after her first Socratic encounter. This is an individual and "self-interested" pursuit at its core, the definitive case of soul-searching, and Ockham's razor forces us to identify the quest it sets in motion as education itself.

What Aristotle calls learning "for his own sake or for the sake of his friends or with a view to excellence," and Plato depicts as the soul's urge to beget in the beautiful, is the defining activity of the individual human being seeking the good, i.e., the happy life. This, in the end, is what modern public education, both in theory and in practice, seeks to destroy, by setting up alternative goals external to the soul's own natural impulses, and by imposing a new progressive moral perspective according to which the mere individual good and personal immortality are immoral ends. And that, to return to where this chapter began, is what I mean by saying that compulsory schooling is designed to separate children from themselves and from nature.

To destroy this connection between our most comprehensive urge and education is to cut the cord of human maturation and thwart the development of adult virtue. The fuel intended for learning is drained out of the child by progressive collectivist indoctrination, which teaches that desiring knowledge for its own sake is selfish. Education for social service is learning detached from the primary human good, which is to say from virtue understood as the excellence of the individual soul. This means learning toward state utility rather than toward completion. It is the menial and servile education against which Aristotle warned. It is learning without the highest motive, and therefore, of necessity, without the highest results. And this, of course, is precisely what is intended: One purpose of state schooling has always been to prevent over-education, which would threaten to

produce citizens unsatisfied with their assigned social roles, with their place in the "proper social order," and with their existence as interchangeable worker units for the elite overseers.

Fortunately, the positive force of Eros often has a way of asserting itself in spite of all modern attempts to orient moral growth entirely along abstract collectivist lines. That is, the innate desire to develop from potentiality to actuality—the perfecting impulse—is still able to move most children to varying degrees, allowing them to climb at least some distance, intellectually and morally, against the soul-crushing avalanche bearing down on them from teachers, textbooks, and the social structure of the school. Indeed, this seemingly inextinguishable fire, harnessed by the child himself in his rare private, quiet moments—in short, self-teaching—may be his only hope of actualizing any measure of his natural potential, given all the obstacles being placed in his path. This makes the erotic tendency, in the Socratic sense of the soul's desire to beget in the beautiful—to beget beautiful children, words, deeds, ideas, and virtues—the only force standing between our present shrunken spiritual world and complete desolation.[10] For it is this intimate need for completion and continuity, when properly guided, that ties men not only to their own precious lives and sense of purpose, but also to their own families, friends, and communities, and even, indirectly, to their own property and practical achievement as means to the higher goods. Eros is the link connecting our material existence to our highest possibilities. Most

[10] A somewhat simplistic, but popular, recognition of this is offered in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, wherein Winston becomes convinced that it is the sexual feeling itself that will guarantee the ultimate defeat of totalitarianism, because its power within the individual can never be entirely rooted out by any amount of propaganda. The problem with Orwell's idea, however, is that once genuine Eros—the longing for eternity—has been reduced to "the sexual drive," totalitarianism has already won.

importantly, it fuels the quest for learning, from "Mom" to metaphysics. A soul in which this desire is not entirely corrupted will find subtle ways of asserting herself against even the most draconian re-education measures, thus partially counteracting the state's regulatory control over the energies and minds of the masses.

To achieve public education's full aims, then, radical and direct steps must be taken, not just in ethical theory but in practical reality, to cut the magic thread linking the child to the stars, even at the price of sacrificing progressivism's earlier conceptions of the "proper social order," at least in the short run.

Eros, the intermediary between the human and the divine, cannot be exorcised from the soul outright, but he can be *diverted* from his proper role in human development, thereby becoming an overwhelming obstacle to maturation, rather than the most powerful impetus toward it. Plato himself poignantly demonstrates this through the example of Socrates' other great student, the anti-Plato, Alcibiades, who rejects Socrates' call to self-understanding in favor of Eros' lower manifestations, and hence becomes habituated to self-destruction and shamelessness. As he says of himself, he is now susceptible to shame only in the presence of Socrates, whose existence reminds him of what he has forsaken, namely the good, or, to say the same thing another way, himself. This shame, he says, may be assuaged only by avoiding his teacher altogether, which means that the awareness of what he has lost in his immoderation actually becomes a further incentive to avoid the very force that might draw him back to nobler pursuits. Alcibiades' example, reduced to the everyday level, represents the lesson the Frankfurt School Marxists took from psychoanalysis, with its renewal of interest in at least a degraded notion of the erotic: A man cannot run in two

directions at once.[11] The greatest obstacle to progressive socialization is our innate desire for self-actualization. The surest way to minimize this threat to tyranny's effectiveness is to divert and dilute the desire.

Developing the practical strategies to realize an all-out assault on a "capitalist" world already hobbled by generations of Dewey-style sophistry, mid-twentieth century progressives learned that releasing Plato's many-headed beast, the uncontrolled appetites, would not make people more dangerous, from the point of view of the progressive state; on the contrary, it would soften them. Alcibiades—or rather a society composed of millions of intellectually and morally miniaturized Alcibiades action figures—is precisely the goal of progressivism's multi-pronged sexual-cultural revolution, from Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* and the ever-present, life-draining vicarious reality of "mass entertainment," to sex education class and the pornographic perpetual puberty that dominates what is passed off as popular music today.

Appealing to the immoderate and uneducated appetites of the young—much easier to do when parents have been effectively removed from the children's daily lives and primary social activities, as is the universal condition in the era of public schools—the various "liberations" of recent decades have abetted the already-tyrannical socialization process with a more active and visceral assault on so-called "traditional morality." This assault, partly grounded in German-American critical theory—the Marxist-Hegelian effort to bury the past forever beneath fifty layers of socialist propaganda-cum-analysis—aims, most import-

[11] Cf. Roger Kimball, "The Marriage of Marx and Freud," *The New Criterion*, Volume 16 December 1997, a good summary of the Frankfurt School's methods and influence, available online at http://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/marxandfreud-kimball-3227.

antly, to call forth the untamed passions previously restrained by inner virtue or social norms. Detaching desire from its vital and irreplaceable role in moral and intellectual development turns the young against the quest for virtue and knowledge, and toward the ceaseless search for pleasure, ease, and safety. Kant himself, in an early work, somewhat grudgingly observed that the development of morality began when primitive man discovered the benefits of delayed gratification.[12] Today's advanced progressivism seeks to reverse the process.

Untethered desire is a fatal crisis for a society erected on principles of limited government, as it undermines the self-reliance and self-restraint that form the foundation of order and civility, and, by weakening the citizens' capacity for self-governance, it invites and encourages paternalistic leadership. Such disorder, it has been discovered, is less of a problem for progressive authoritarians, who merely feed the rabid dogs with meat stolen from other citizens. That is, creating monsters of dependency and grasping amorality can be turned into a tool of democratic totalitarianism, as long as the progressives can consistently portray themselves as the ones who wish to satisfy men's appetites, while portraying their enemies as those who would deny the mob's demands for "justice" and "freedom." Thus democratic political life is reduced to a level of demagoguery that even Plato, democracy's harshest critic, may not have foreseen—a manageable situation for progressivism, the political philosophy that has elevated propaganda to consubstantiality with education, and has thus institutionalized demagoguery to hitherto unimagined degrees.

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[12] Immanuel Kant, *Speculative Beginning of Human History* (1786), translated by Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1983), A.A. VIII, 112-113, p. 51-52.

From the progressive point of view, the great political danger is precisely the *virtuous* man, the one whose erotic nature is properly (naturally) directed and who sees what the state is trying to deny him, namely his life-defining quest for happiness. From an educational perspective, the new dynamic means that public school retains its primary focus on moral indoctrination and the destruction of free will, as Fichte demanded, but its method is now reversed. Rather than seeking direct submission combined with diligent dedication to duty, the vanguard education system of today is arranged to promote a slothful disregard for all order and restraint beyond that imposed by school socialization itself, and an obliviousness to the ordinary propriety and mutual respect that hold a community together as something more than a manipulated mob. The result, of course, is an authority-dependent, easily manipulated mob. This is the true realization of Fichte's dream for progressive man, though not quite as he imagined it: the overgrown child who knows nothing about the past, and has no respect for traditions or "old school" ways; whose only ambitions are petty ones—material comfort, physical stimulation, free time, free stuff; who perceives himself as wised-up and jaded, but in truth believes anything the government tells him, as long as it sounds like license to do whatever gratifies his whims today; and who feels free to live according to his pre-rational brute nature as long as he is entertained and provided for, having no conception of freedom other than as liberation from conscience, or of nature other than as the pull of irrational "drives."

Conservatives often muse over the apparent paradox that a philosophical outlook so invested in demolishing self-interest and promoting collective self-immolation has resulted in a civilization dedicated to petty materialist self-absorption. The

solution of this riddle, I would argue, lies in universal compulsory schooling.

Classical moral theories began from the presupposition that morality means the most natural path to the truly happy life, thus explicitly attaching our deepest desire to education. By cutting morality away from the pursuit of "mere private happiness"—which means away from individual souls as such, and hence away from the impulse toward completion—German philosophy detached Eros entirely from moral development. The natural impulse does not simply disappear, of course, but its natural path is effectively outlawed through the socialization process. According to official doctrine, it is not moral to seek personal happiness. Our highest completion, such as can be conceived, is to be collective and shared, like all else. Moral fulfillment is to be found only in mutual interdependence and belonging—or what Kundera encapsulates in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* as the lyrical communist injunction to hold hands and dance in a circle.

Modern tyranny, however, has found ways to defer to pesky human nature without sacrificing the political benefits of the progressive morality of collective self-destruction. Thus today we still speak—we *incessantly* speak—of something we call happiness. This is the theme of our end times amusement park of "self-fulfillment," "self-esteem," and even "self-love": We have accommodated the natural impulse to completion by confining it to a virtual reality of gratifications that occupies an amoral realm of consciousness separate from, and subordinate to, the moral sphere, which remains the province of submission and socialization. We are thus still allowed to speak of happiness, and even to speak earnestly of our various ten-step plans for achieving it, but we all know it is essentially a frivolous, airy-fairy thing, and that if ever our pursuit of it runs up against our socialized moral

duty, morality must come first. Happiness—the meaning of life—has been successfully reduced to a toy, a soother, with which a childish race pacifies itself while plodding along in its collectivist moral chains.

What does this nihilism mean for Eros, the desire that ought to propel us to adult virtue and rationality? Insofar as this volatile energy is not neglected entirely, its only permissible outlets become trivial "self-expression" and "creativity" (Dewey loved those terms), or the self-obsessions that were once called vice or morbidity. The first outlet explains our ubiquitous pop icon fetishism, which now extends through all arenas of social existence, with its million ephemeral stars distracting collective man from the drab twilight of soft despotism in an unending kaleidoscope of decadent but meaningless colors. The second outlet, the one promoted by the Frankfurt School types, is the world of polymorphous and continuous earthly pleasures—sexual experimentation, casual promiscuity, drug and alcohol abuse, all set to music and imagery that imitate and aggrandize pubescent sexual excitement, thereby converting everything precious, private, and mysterious into something coarse, public, and all too obvious. This all serves to dry up the reserves of primal energy which, had they been harnessed and guided toward more essential purposes, might have empowered the "masses" to cast off their chains—and more than just spiritually.

(At *Symposium* 182b-c, the homosexual Polemarchus defends his dubious practice of educational pederasty in a most clever way, aligning it with the *gymnasia* and philosophical conversation as Greek practices that are outlawed in the tyrannical barbarian states because they promote private friendship. Tyrants, he observes, have a vested interest in preventing men from forming deep, private emotional bonds. Though his argument is offered in defense of a very questionable activity,

Polemarchus' point is most trenchant, and goes a long way to explaining today's political liquidation of "traditional morality" in the name of mass socialization.)

These are not simply accidents of devolution, but deliberate strategies sprung upon the young to tempt them out of the money their mothers gave them to buy bread and milk. A few pennies here, a few pennies there, and by the time they arrive at the store, they are flat broke. The progressive movement has turned Eros, the soul's indispensable ally in the search for knowledge and freedom, into a fat, lazy little boy hooked on trinkets and treats, forsaking wholeness for momentary pleasure, love for stimulation, virtue for amusement, hope for gratification, and Being for a bit of sugar.

My grandparents, like many of yours no doubt, were married and tackling the adult responsibilities of starting a family while still in their teens. They, like the young men and women of many previous generations, would likely have been less intimately familiar with sex at that age than their counterparts today. The opposite knowledge gap obtains, however, when we turn to the matter of Eros. Today, I teach university students in Korea, the products of one of the most "advanced" and "successful" compulsory school systems in the world—Rockefeller's paternalistic dream of a lovingly molded underclass achieved in this small, homogeneous nation more perfectly than has proved manageable in his own large, diverse one. With regard to drinking and fornication, these students see themselves as grown-ups. But ask almost any of them if they would consider marrying their current boyfriend or girlfriend, and you will discover a truth as alarming and heartbreaking as it is predictable. At twenty-three, they still cannot, and do not *wish* to, perceive themselves as adults, and laugh with embarrassment and confusion at the very suggestion that someone of their tender age might be thinking of marriage.

The sexual interest has never evolved in them as it naturally did for normal young men and women for thousands of years, namely into a longing for eternity and a means of transcending their limited existence, or even a desperate dream of union with Being Itself. Progressivism has eased the poetic pain of Eros at last, which is to say it has snuffed out man's urgent quest for meaning. There are literally academic journals today populated by authors and their peer reviewers trying to explain how sexual gratification is essentially the same as scratching an itch.[13] There is a complicated but intimate correlation between the modern scholar's inability to distinguish Eros from a rash, and our inability to distinguish education from indoctrination. Public school socialization, like the whole progressive collectivist social hierarchy it serves, systematically tranquilizes Eros, so that the soul's potential remains permanently unactualized. Hence, while we have learned to analyze and justify our drives with the greatest sophistication, it is neither metaphor nor hyperbole to say that we have lost our will to live.

It almost goes without saying that such moral dissipation, always possible at an individual or local level, would be very difficult to impose upon an entire civilization without universal compulsory schooling. With coerced government control over the formative years of whole populations, this destruction is only a matter of time, as modern man has amply demonstrated. We still have the driven types, our high achievers and role models. But they are usually two-dimensional characters, mere specialists in the collectivist division of labor who rationalize their genuine self-absorption and spiritual lassitude as a kind of social service—they create jobs, entertain the masses, save the planet, or what

[13] A favorite example, which was burned into my memory during my own undergraduate seminar in so-called "philosophy of mind" eons ago, was an article entitled, "Could Love Be Like a Heatwave?"

have you. The natural longing for completion, for happiness, means striving to realize our potential as virtuous, independent, thinking adults. Such adults seek to form families, friendships, and communities in love, like-mindedness, and good will, rather than in whim, dependence, greed, and fear. They, unlike their socialized counterparts today, could never willingly submit to slavery, let alone take pleasure in it.

The longing for Being and eternity, however, is as dead as the soul itself. Early modern philosophy left it neglected and weak. The great German thinkers and their global heirs and henchmen killed it. Public school was the primary murder weapon.

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PART THREE: ENDING THE REIGN OF CRONUS

But when she was about to bear Zeus, the father of gods and men, then she besought her own dear parents, Earth and starry Heaven, to devise some plan with her that the birth of her dear child might be concealed, and that retribution might overtake great, crafty Cronus for his own father and also for the children whom he had swallowed down. And they readily heard and obeyed their dear daughter, and told her all that was destined to happen touching Cronus the king and his stout-hearted son. So they sent her to Lyctus, to the rich land of Crete, when she was ready to bear great Zeus, the youngest of her children. Him did vast Earth receive from Rhea in wide Crete to nourish and to bring up. To that place came Earth carrying him swiftly through the black night to Lyctus first, and took him in her arms and hid him in a remote cave beneath the secret places of the holy earth on thick-wooded Mount Aegeum; but to the mightily ruling son of Heaven, the earlier king of the gods, she gave a great stone wrapped in swaddling clothes. Then he took it in his hands and thrust it down into his belly: wretch! he knew not in his heart that in place of the stone his son was left behind, unconquered and untroubled, and that he was soon to overcome him by force and might and drive him from his honours, himself to reign over the deathless gods.[1]

[1] Hesiod, *Theogony* 469-490.

Swallow Your Pride, Save Your Child

Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.

Proverbs 16:18 (King James Version)

It is high time for parents who care about the future of their children, their communities, and their civilization to stop telling themselves comforting lies about their power to combat the degradations of public education. Believing that reason and morality can be restored while leaving the compulsory public school apparatus intact is like imagining you are going to raise your daughter to be Jane Austen while feeding her a daily diet of Beyoncé and Lady Gaga. Sometimes, conditions in life become so bleak that telling ourselves little white lies about the nature of the situation becomes a survival mechanism. We must not fail to distinguish, however, between giving ourselves hope and spitting into the wind.

The modern public school's purpose, as described by its leading theorists, advocates, and power-brokers of the past two hundred years, is to eradicate traditional notions of virtue, to undermine the natural human impulse toward knowledge and self-reliance, and to create societies of intellectually stunted, humble, conformist workers (and voters) for the progressive authoritarian state. To blind oneself to this reality, and to the obvious success of this project in undoing modernity, is unwittingly to facilitate the gradual smothering of the human spirit.

I have encountered many objections to my supposedly radical recommendations on education, most of which are addressed in this book. The one that disturbs me most, however, is that of conservatives who agree with my analysis of the subversive influence of public schools, but then dismiss my conclusion that the solution is to remove any child within your sphere of influence from the government school system as fully as possible, and to reject any political efforts to reform public education that would further circumscribe private options and hence limit parental authority over the raising of children (such as by imposing new compulsory "standards" or supporting alternative schooling with public funds). These conservatives, most of them undoubtedly decent and reasonable people, stubbornly insist that they can offset the negative effects of public school by spending "quality time" with their children at home, limiting their television viewing and internet use, and providing moral alternatives to the school's socialization.

Let us assume that parents are doing all of those things consistently and earnestly. Is this enough to ensure that the state indoctrination program is not having at least some retarding effect on their child's moral and intellectual development? Should parents be satisfied with merely *reducing* the damage done to their child? Must they not seek to prevent *all* such damage, to the extent within their power? Are they not morally obligated to do so?

And there is a further difficulty with this effort to fight the school's effects from within. Children, of course, do not only learn the lessons they are explicitly taught. Far more important in the long run are the implied messages they absorb from their experience, and from the actions of the adults they admire most. If those messages seem contradictory or confused, the effects may be very different from what the parents imagine they are

teaching. Children are not yet capable of examining all sides of an issue rationally. Their special strength, which slowly gives way to reason as they mature (if this evolution is not deformed by schooling), is an exceptional sensitivity to unspoken signals, emotional resonances, and subtle irregularities in the order of things.

Imagine, then, the case of a couple that sends a child to public school, and then hopes to undermine the school's damage at home by discussing the child's lessons each evening with a view to correcting historical inaccuracies, providing an alternative moral perspective, and encouraging self-reliance and confidence where the government curriculum is promoting dependency and fear. The parents tell themselves they are doing what they can to negate the harmful effects of the child's teachers, and of the mob rule social milieu of the school. Hence, they feel justified in rejecting suggestions that they should remove their child from public school outright. But consider the lessons a child learns from being confined, for several hours a day, to a social setting wherein—*according to the parents who confined him there*—what he is learning is false. Why, he must wonder, are Mom and Dad delivering me into the hands of people who are lying to me? Ought the parents to explain to their child that most of his teachers are ignorant cogs in a corrupt system, low achievers happy to have a socially respectable job with salary, benefits, vacations, and a very comfortable retirement protected by a powerful union with a socialist agenda? How is that supposed to make the child feel about the fact that his parents are willingly consigning him to hours of confinement with those teachers every day?

What if, on the contrary, the parents think it best to conceal the gross corruption and inadequacy of the school's teachers and curriculum, so as not to harden their child to trust, optimism and

goodwill? What confusion will their daily undermining of the school's lessons and moral outlook foster in the child's mind under *this* condition? Trying to protect him from cynicism, they encourage him to respect his teachers. That respect will, given the natural effects upon children of daily dependence and proximity, develop into a certain degree of attachment and affection toward the teachers—along with a faith in their authority and knowledge. Indeed, this emotional attachment to the teachers—a moral connection existing over the heads of parents, as it were—has been an essential element of the psychological manipulation of government schooling since the very early days of the project, as we saw in our examination of Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation*. In *The District School* (1834), Taylor uses a subtle rhetorical ploy to prod parents into ceding control over their children to the state. Accusing parents of caring too little about their children's education and character formation, he encourages them to take a more active role—not by teaching their children themselves, naturally, but rather by cajoling their children into being more submissive to the teacher, i.e., to the government school.

> You should, instead of trusting all to the teacher, cooperate with him, unite your labours with his, and ascertain the influence of the teacher and the influence of the school upon the child. Do not speak unfavourably of the teacher before your children, but teach them to love the instructer [sic] and the school-room, and at all times to be obedient.[1]

"Did you have a good day at school today?" "Pay attention to your teacher." These everyday parental remarks are perfectly innocent when spoken in the context of a relationship of mutual respect

[1] Taylor, *TDS*, 29.

between parents and educators, and particularly in a relationship understood at all times to be under the ultimate control of the parents. Spoken by parents of state-raised children, where the proper relationship between parent and educator is reversed, they undermine any hope of seriously contradicting the school's influence over a child, for they support a basic, implicit tenet of public school, namely that a good parent is an obedient parent, which is to say a complicit parent.

Thus, in the name of protecting their child's innocence, our hypothetical couple will have painted themselves into a moral corner, giving their child tacit emotional encouragement to submit to his school's invocations to relativism, nihilism, and soul-sapping collectivism—and then hoping to undo all of this in the evening, somehow without the child recognizing the contradiction. Out of the best motives, they will, in effect, have served their child to the lions. To present themselves as an opposing voice now will likely make the child feel like a pawn in some sort of ideological rivalry between two factions of adults whom he admires and respects—similar to the sad psychological effects of divorce upon young children.

Perhaps the most reasonable option for these parents would simply be to tell it like it is, explaining to their child that school is a boring, painful, and often demeaning experience to which we are all forced to submit against our will, even though we wish it were not so, and then help the child maintain a healthy skepticism about the whole experience by "de-schooling" him at home. But what would *this* say to a child's mind? Only the truth, namely that his parents—the people on whom he relies for his sense of stability and safety—are being prevented from taking care of him to the best of their abilities by a power that obviously supersedes Mom and Dad, and which does *not* have his best interests at heart. In other words, telling it like it is would

implicitly teach the child that he is essentially unsafe, that his parents are ultimately powerless to protect him, and therefore that self-protection at all costs ought to be his primary objective. In fact, I suspect this implicit understanding explains the cornered animal state of mind of many public school students anyway, and goes a long way to accounting for both the obsequious social climbing and amoral power-playing that typify the "well-adjusted" majority of students, and the emotional detachment, catatonic obsessions, and reticence to "come out of one's shell" that typify the contingent of loners and outsiders surviving on the fringes of every school's social system.

Apart from all the unintended emotional damage likely to result from any angle our hypothetical parents choose, there remains, of course, the more fundamental question of whether it is possible to negate the most pernicious effects of public school at all. There is, for example, no way to estimate the damage to a child's moral and intellectual development of having his pubescent (or pre-pubescent) erotic energies manhandled by progressivism's crude, animalistic reductions of the sexual realm. No parent, however well-meaning, can *ever* undo the spirit-flattening effects of modern government education's cucumber birth control demonstrations,[2] alternative lifestyle lessons, and gender equality sloganeering[3]—not to mention the effects of daily exposure to the dehumanizing "sex is no big deal" attitude

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[2] Glenn Fairman, "The Great Divide: My Time in the Trenches," *American Thinker* (December 9, 2012), http://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2012/12/educations_great_divide_my_time_in_the_trenches.html.

[3] Zosia Bielski, "'We want to talk about sex': Grade 8 girls push for sex-ed reforms to include the concept of consent," *The Globe and Mail* (February 5, 2015), http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/relationships/grade-8-girls-push-for-sex-ed-reforms-with-petition-of-40000-signatures/article22807466/.

encouraged by the school's social environment. Beyoncé kills Jane Austen, period. I have already described the peculiar task of struggling to help students of ancient philosophy to understand, through reasoning, the perspective that was merely the common *emotional starting point* for college-age students of Plato for most of the preceding twenty-four hundred years, namely that Eros is the great, tantalizing mystery of human existence, the key to our faint notions of immortality, eternity, and wisdom. Young people who acquire their sentimental education from progressive cucumber classes and hip-hop videos are hardly prepared to go seeking the meaning of life with Socrates and Aristophanes.

In sum, parents who are capable of providing home education or private schooling, but who leave their children in public school while hoping to undo the damage at home, are fooling themselves. Some damage can never be undone, and even that which can be somewhat mitigated would be better avoided entirely. Furthermore, setting yourself up as parental avenger against the government's indoctrination is setting your child up for confused feelings, resentments, and disillusionments that are both harmful to his moral development and completely unnecessary. Parents, swallow your pride and save your children. Your efforts to fight progressive education from within—saving your pride while allowing your children to be swallowed—are a microcosm of the Gramsci plan for modern civilization's defeat.

In truth, the history of universal compulsory education displays the fate of today's well-intentioned public school parent writ large. Civilization always was, in effect, combating and mitigating the compulsory school's damage at home. In the earlier stages, the degradation was subtler, but only because public education itself had not yet become a completely closed shop. That is to say, a hundred years ago many parents had spent relatively few years in public schools themselves; many teachers

and school administrators had received alternative forms of education, as had their own teachers and university professors; government schools were still somewhat under the sway of educational models adapted from the pre-progressive era; and the public schools had not yet fundamentally displaced family, religion, and great literature as the primary moral influences among the majority of people. Civilization therefore deteriorated slowly, rather than all at once. But it *did* deteriorate: Today's universal public school catastrophe is not a radical shift from the schools of "your day." It is the inevitable, logical outcome of a long, global war between authoritarians who have sought to mold a compliant underclass of submissive dependents, and responsible people—yes, some of them public school teachers—who wished to promote a happy, moral adulthood for their children. The lesson is clear—the authoritarians won. They always will, in the end, until they are forcibly denied the souls they wish to degrade.

Take your children out of the government schooling apparatus now—before today's heirs to the dream shared by men as different as Fichte, Dewey, Marx, and Rockefeller, achieve their ultimate aim, which is to deny parents the freedom to take their children out of the reach of the state at all. Jane Austen had no government schooling, standardized testing, or official state ranking, and received most of her education at home, reading books recommended by her father. Try it.

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Facing the Hardest Truth

Till this moment, I never knew myself.

Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*

There are many obstacles to overcome if there is to be any hope of saving tomorrow from the grip of today's progressive pre-education camps. The most stubborn obstacle of all, however, is perhaps the one embedded in our own hearts, namely the all too human inclination to comfort ourselves with the thought that the soul-deforming corruptions of public education began in earnest only after our own school days, and hence that we ourselves escaped the harm we so easily recognize in others.

This ego-saving instinct drives the rationalizations of those who object to calls for the complete abandonment of public schooling on the grounds that if the schools just got back to the methods of the good old days, all would be well. In other words, such people are unwilling to see the problem as anything deeper than the superimposition of some bad textbooks, teaching methods, or 1960s radicalism on an essentially noble system, because to admit that the problem is more fundamental than that is to admit that one's own education was harmful, which is to concede that one was indeed harmed—that *you are less than you might have been*.

Once, preparing a class of Korean undergraduates for a reading of Plato's *Apology*, I asked them to think back over all their years of schooling, and to tell me what percentage of their teachers had not deserved their pay. At first, the students just

smiled—Korea's Confucian heritage demands unreflective respect for all teachers. Finally, one young woman bravely volunteered that perhaps thirty percent of her teachers had not deserved their pay—a much higher number than I had expected from a Korean student. This opened the floodgates. Almost all the students in the room subsequently condemned a significant portion of their educators—one as high as sixty percent—as unworthy of being paid given what they had actually provided for their students.

Next, I asked them whether their own education had been worth all the money that had been spent on it over the years. With only one exception, everyone said unequivocally that his or her own schooling had been worth every penny (or Korean won, in this case). When I noted that this question was, in a sense, just a variation on my previous question about the teachers, a few students grinned sheepishly, and then a few more, as they gradually got the point: They were perfectly willing to declare that much of their education had been ineffectual or counter-productive—but unwilling to accept the logical result of this, namely that their own development had been slowed or stunted. (I have since repeated the experiment in several other classes, each time with similar results.)

These were students still in school, which is why the contradiction in their answers was so apparent and pitiable. For those of us who have long since completed our formal education, this natural tendency to self-protection is greatly exacerbated. We may easily discern the harm being done to today's young people, but draw the line at admitting that we too are damaged goods. To defend our pride, we must deny that our own education was compromised. The reason this denial presents such an enormous obstacle to change is that it implicitly detaches the current evils of public education from the institution itself. We hesitate to condemn the institution outright, because this

would devalue the conditions and results of our own intellectual and moral development. We thereby protect and excuse our civilization's most powerful means to permanent tyranny in order to protect our always fragile reputations with ourselves.

Were public schools in the advanced world better twenty, forty, or sixty years ago? Very likely. But it no more follows from this that public education is not such a bad idea than it follows from the fact that the welfare state of sixty years ago had not yet incorporated socialized medicine that socialism per se is not such a bad idea. Today's extensions of progressive control over an ever-increasing range of our lives did not arise from nowhere; they were made possible by earlier, gradual insinuations of the concepts and moral perspectives of totalitarianism into the modern soul.

Likewise with education. Dewey did not get the thoroughly progressive, individual-crushing system he wanted all at once. But the slow insinuation of his theories into the educational establishments of the world, beginning more than a century ago, has allowed his intellectual heirs to achieve a level of socialist indoctrination and illiberal moral degradation that in many ways have surpassed Dewey's most depraved hopes. The same, in turn, may be said of nineteenth century public school advocacy, all the way back to Fichte. So while it may have been easier in the past for people to come out of public school with some of their reasoning and character intact, it is invalid to conclude that this relative superiority indicates anything other than that an old cancer has worsened.

Public schools from the supposed good old days were the precondition for public schools of today. Once the premise was established that modern society's interest in a broadly educated population could best be satisfied by direct government provision and oversight of schooling, it was a very short step to the

conclusion that such schooling ought not to be left in the unpredictable, unsupervised hands of local communities, and then, inevitably, to the declaration that it ought to be compulsory. And from here, it was an even shorter step to the argument that everyone ought to be provided the same education, in the same way, in the name of equality and fairness. Thus, increasing centralization and standardization are natural (even if often unintended) consequences of the initial impulse to use the coercive power of government to provide something called "education" for all children. Such a metastasizing government beneficence is inherently susceptible to internal corruption by big thinkers, central planners, and bureaucratic mother hens. The result, all but inevitable given the initial premises, is what you see: an entire civilization undone, intellectually, spiritually, and morally, in the name of "making sure every child gets a good education," or of "preparing our children for citizenship," "for industrial democracy," or "for today's economy."

Some, comparing their own pasts to mankind's present impasse, might be tempted to object here that public schools in the old style were, after all, responsible for the most prosperous and powerful civilization in history. How sure can we be that the truth is not precisely the contrary, namely that public schools in the old style were responsible for the gradual *undermining and destruction* of the most prosperous and powerful civilization in history. The perceptual inversion made by apologists for the good old days results from imagining the relationship between public education and modernity as a still photograph, rather than observing its historical arc in progress. The mechanisms of liberty, free markets, and so-called ethical individualism were set in motion many generations before government schooling was generally available, let alone universal and compulsory. The generations that produced the ideas and art which gave modern

civilization its mind and character, as well as the generations that produced the statesmen and warriors who brought its political promise to practical realization, were generations without public schooling in anything like today's sense. The accumulated intellectual, spiritual, and economic momentum of liberalizing modernity was able to withstand the first frictions of progressive paternalism, allowing civilization and its economies to grow even while the totalitarian urge was beginning its slow lurch into civilized life. Nowhere was this progressive infection more destructive, and more brilliantly conceived, than in government schools, which can nip the natural impulse to learn and excel in the bud, and which were explicitly contrived from early on to produce competent but submissive workers for the benefit of the ruling class. The subsequent broadening of the schools' agenda to include the aggressive undermining of traditional morality, the short-circuiting of maturation, and neo-Marxist revisionism regarding the world's intellectual, artistic, and political history, bespeaks less a radical change in education policy than an inevitable devolution set in motion by the earlier stages of corruption.

The Jesuits said "give me the child for seven years, and I will give you the man." It is no accident that Fichte and his Prussian cohorts isolated childhood education as the key to revolutionizing German society, that John Dewey was focused on early childhood education as early as the 1880s, that Mao Tse-tung, a school teacher, made education reform central to China's Marxist revolution, or that many 1960s leftist radicals, such as William Ayers, are primary education specialists today. Yes, public education continues to deteriorate. But that is the point: The deterioration is a continuation of something begun generations ago. None of us who have been through any version of public schooling should fool ourselves about what this means, including

and especially for our own souls. This is no time for foolish pride; it is time for righteous anger, and the will to put a stop to generations of forced intellectual and moral decline.

Universal public education is modernity's Achilles heel, or its tragic flaw, the fatal mistake of a prosperous, quickly changing world—a civilization in the throes of youthful enthusiasm—imagining that it can take over where freed human nature left off, and even outdo freedom and nature, by mass producing through government micromanagement the kind of people who make liberty and civil society possible. This latter description of public education's foundations is the generous version, which I offer as a concession to those who object to my arguments by noting that many good men have advocated the state provision of education.

It is true that some *very* good men have favored this. It is also true that the best and most nobly motivated of these men—from Aristotle to Jefferson and Madison—were not publicly educated themselves, and never lived in a community in which state-controlled education was the norm, let alone compulsory. We cannot know, but may guess, how their views on the subject might be altered were they among us today, witnessing the practical reality of freedom reduced to government-monitored pleasure-seeking, thanks in large measure to the disintegrating effects of compulsory government schooling on humanity's practical intelligence, moral character, and the habits of mind that make liberal education, and civilized society in general, possible. The blind spot of those men of exalted spirit was perhaps their noble-minded presumption that in a good and just society, good and just motives would prevail. From less hopeful, but equally great, men, such as Plato and Tocqueville, we learn three harsh truths that together comprise all the answer we need offer to the virtuous hopes of wishful thinkers regarding state-regulated schooling: (1) no society is so pure or so just as to be

immune to the corruptive effects of human weakness, folly, or malice; (2) societal success and prosperity actually pave the way to corruption by weakening the resolve and vigilance of a populace grown over-confident in its strength and security; and, (3) the levers of monopolistic state authority are a natural magnet to those whose desire for power and wealth outstrips their interest in virtue and the common good.

In sum, state control of education—as of most things—is an invitation to ignoble men to insinuate themselves and their immoral motives into the system, seeking their own perceived advantage at the expense of fellow men who fall within range of their legislative influence. And since, in this case, it is the soul of the future—a population's children—into which this corruption may be insinuated, it would seem that education, far from being an exception to the rule of limited government, ought to be an especially emphatic marker of the proper limits of legitimate state involvement in men's affairs. The risk is too great. The proof of this is in the poison pudding of today's public schools, not in one or two districts, provinces, or nations, but worldwide. Indeed, the universality of compulsory government schooling is itself evidence of the way corruption breeds further corruption.

Leave your ego to one side, for the sake of mankind's future. If you were raised in the era of government-regulated compulsory schooling, your soul's growth was stunted to a significant degree, at the very least through the emotional bruising engendered by your spirit's resistance, and the years drained from your productive intellectual and practical life.

Be not proud. Be angry. And resolve to end this authoritarian siege before it ends *us*.

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Winning the Long War

> *The Ephesians would do well to hang themselves, every grown man of them, and leave the city to beardless lads; for they have cast out Hermodorus, the best man among them, saying, "We will have none who is best among us; if there be any such, let him be so elsewhere and among others."*[1]
>
> Heraclitus

Imagine trying to fight a war against a tyrannical enemy while granting that enemy authority to train your own soldiers. After all, you reason, sending your men to the enemy's training centers frees up your time and resources for other priorities. Moreover, the tyrant has graciously promised to train your men in good faith, so denying him this privilege might seem ungrateful or provocative.

What are your chances of winning that war? You might win a skirmish here and there, if a few of your men somehow retain enough independence to question the lessons in surrender they were taught by the enemy. But your long term prospects are, of course, dismal, since even after their rare provisional successes, your soldiers will only use their newly gained territory to set up a tent for conciliatory peace talks with the other side, in accordance with the rules of engagement they have learned in training.

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[1] Heraclitus, Fragment 114, translated by John Burnet, in Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 2nd Edition (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1908), available online at http://www.classicpersuasion.org/pw/burnet/egp.htm?pleaseget=65#N_47_.

Modern civilization—all of it—is currently under the dominion of various degrees of progressive statism, with its inherent paternalism, irrationalism, and nihilism. The leading architects and engineers of this calamity have paved the road to the devil's domain over many generations. Their recent boldness, moving in for the kill on the last, crumbling bastion of principled resistance, America, indicates that they believe ultimate victory is at hand, which in human terms means we are teetering on the brink of Ronald Reagan's famous thousand years of darkness.

We who reject the progressives' knee-jerk Hegelianism need not accept the inevitability of this result. Tyranny does not follow necessarily from any mechanism beyond human control. It does, however, follow necessarily from inaction and resignation. That is to say, civilization on its current trajectory is surely doomed unless we begin to mount a deliberate and determined defense.

The first step to mounting an effective defense is to understand how the progressives have won so much territory in this multi-generational war, by which I mean how, exactly, they have done it in practice, for concrete results derive from concrete actions. The nations of the semi-free democratic world have incrementally voted themselves into servitude, voted away their property rights, acquiesced in the breakdown of the family, and willingly given over their souls *en masse* to the rule of all the wanton and stupid desires and fears that men for millennia knew they had to control in order to remain men; they have forsaken the human heritage for the false promises of real or would-be tyrants, promises of security, stability, and a prefabricated, risk-free life. Why? How did the sirens lead civilization astray? And why has their song proved so irresistible, such that intermittent stasis has become our age's only reprieve from the damning drift?

The answer to those questions has been the theme of this book. For civilization, as Allan Bloom observed a generation ago, is

merely another word for education, while education, in turn, is broadly speaking the process of self-development in accordance with human nature. But as we have seen, nature has been consistently (and correctly) identified as the chief obstacle to progressive social reform, as it inclines men toward private attachments and the pursuit of happiness, whereas progressive authoritarianism demands that the individual immerse himself in the pseudo-life of an artificial, abstract collective (see Dewey's "social self"). Thus the inversion of genuine education entails the undoing of any civilized social arrangement grounded in nature. The progressives' hope has always been to use a denaturing quasi-educational process to prime mankind so thoroughly for moral surrender that when the time comes for each new degree of enslavement, the rulers may simply swing open the next gate in their clever labyrinth of pens within pens, and men will walk into the new, smaller enclosure of their own accord. They have every reason for confidence in their scheme, as they have been successfully training generations of men for such gradual surrender for the better part of two centuries, at public expense no less.

In short, as long as paternalists have your children in their schools, they own your, and your society's, future. True, you may, in an age of nominal democracy, win an election here and there, or thwart a particular piece of progressive legislation once in a while; but even those little victories will be won on compromised terms, and the turf gained in one battle will never be used as the staging ground for a broader assault.

For generations, progressives have had the insuperable strategic and psychological advantage of knowing that anything they fail to accomplish today will surely be accomplished tomorrow, because the political goals of tomorrow are being planted in the souls of the young right now, in schools designed for this purpose.

Public schools undermine the attachment to private family, by draining most of a child's energy and attention into a world unrelated to home; by forcibly creating an alternative social universe that engenders attachments rivaling those to parents and siblings; and by teaching children implicit and explicit moral lessons over the heads of their parents, lessons that may stand in direct defiance of the parents' beliefs. The public school, which is to say the government, becomes the highest moral authority in the child's life, the ultimate arbiter of truth, the child's primary social realm, and hence the main source of the foundational states of character that will guide his future choices and inclinations. Recall, in this context, the founding revelation of the progressive religion, as formulated by the man who was both the great prophet of that faith and the father of modern schooling, Fichte: God is our collectively imagined Future, while the State itself is, as it were, the divinity incarnate, our savior. Public school is the church where we learn to be our savior's faithful disciples.

In practical terms, the inherent momentum of public education toward increased school hours, perfect high school completion rates, and now even preschool and university viewed as increasingly universal bookends of the process, is not an impulse toward more learning, but rather toward less. More time in the artificial world of abstract, collective childhood means less time developing useful knowledge, private interests, and spiritual motivations that might have made a young person's future more fulfilling, more exceptional, certainly freer—and more independent, purposeful, and self-reliant.

And this is exactly why the paternalists hate private, non-progressive education (for "the masses"), why they demand that schooling be compulsory, and why they fight for increasing standardization of outcomes and methods, as well as for almost

exclusive control of children's time and energy from the earliest possible to the latest feasible age. Men capable of living independent lives grounded in their own skills and their own minds are a threat to the authoritarians, mainly because what such men naturally crave—more freedom—is precisely the opposite of the desire progressivism seeks to foster in every citizen, namely the desire of a helpless dependent for perpetual security, to be provided by the all-knowing, all-caring über-parent, Government.

This brings us back to our military analogy. The progressive enemy showed patience; having learned that they could not dismantle Rome in a day, and seen the risks of applying too much force at once, they instead carefully arranged the conditions of slow decay. The advent of compulsory schooling, masked as humanitarianism, was a political tipping point, the most essential coercive act required to ensure tyranny's long-term victory. Universal public schooling created a social environment, both internally and within communities at large, which intrinsically undermined freedom, regardless of what was taught during class, or by whom. This point was crucial, because it meant the more direct lessons of compliance, and the more aggressive lowering of intellectual capacity, could be introduced gradually, as the basic social conditions of the schools themselves actually prepared populations for subsequent stages of degradation. Parents infected with earlier, milder degrees of diminution were less likely to object to having their children imbued with the next degree, and so on. And public educators, trained up to a sentimental concern with increased equalization of outcomes, the maintenance of "proper social order," and the provision of emotional succor for the weak, rather than the fostering of independent effort and high achievement, became the perfect,

seemingly benign carriers of progressivism's global epidemic of tall poppy syndrome.

We have universalized the moral outrage of which Heraclitus accused his fellow Ephesians, in effect casting out our best men and women to prevent any from rising above the rest and thereby becoming a threat, or at least an effective resistance and counter-example, to established power. What judgment would Heraclitus level upon *us*?

Within just a few generations of its general introduction into the modern world, in defiance of thousands of years of counter-examples, and despite the fact that the very idea of forced government education contradicts the basis of modern liberal democracy or republicanism as blatantly as any idea could, compulsory schooling became an implicit and universal faith, and late modernity's only absolute and unquestioned social good, hailed as indispensable by men of all factions, parties, and sensibilities. Before long, the best result anyone even hoped for was a reversal of some particular deterioration in the curriculum, or of some particular bureaucratic expansion. This trajectory ensured that the underlying conditions of civilizational decay—the retarding and demoralizing procedures of compulsory schooling itself—would remain forever intact. Thus, future generations, on whom we must pin our hopes for renewal, will always have been trained by the enemy, even if that enemy occasionally makes a superficial concession to keep up the absurd illusion of good faith.

How to solve this?

First, accept the obvious: There is no general will in a society grounded in government schools for undoing compulsory indoctrination immediately. We must learn the most valuable lesson of progressivism, namely the indispensability of patience and gradualism. The next generation cannot be freed *en masse*

from progressive mental control, and yet this freeing of minds is the only way to restore the rationality and liberty appropriate to human nature in the long run. The necessary inference, then, is that we must begin raising private militias for future battles—people who will not have submission to the progressives as their implicit goal, because, not having learned their rules of engagement in collectivist training camps, they will have become exactly the men most naturally resistant to progressivism: moral, competent, thoughtful, and self-reliant.

In short, remove individual children from public schools, and raise them *as* individuals, by which I merely mean with their own well-being, rather than state utility, as the purpose of the endeavor. This is not a legislative solution depending on corrupt or corruptible politicians; it depends on no politician or party. This is private action taken with a view to granting someone a gift he will instinctively want to share and fight for, namely a feeling of uncompromised self-ownership and self-determination. The final battles in civilization's ongoing war will be fought many years hence, perhaps when all of us are dead and gone. This war's short term victories will be small, *but cumulative*. Parents must begin to take back the responsibility of raising their own children, the future men and women who will determine whether progresssivism is permitted to close the final, innermost gate of its labyrinth, locking our descendants inside to be devoured by the Minotaur of despotism (soft or, more likely, otherwise), or whether the monster will be killed at last by a modern Theseus, in the form of millions of healthy souls prepared to defend themselves as too few are today, and to rebuild their communities—to re-civilize—on principles of virtue and human nature.

You do not have the luxury of waiting for someone else to act. The trend throughout the world is toward increased restriction of parental authority. Private and/or home education, where they

still exist, are severely hamstrung by state-mandated goals, and by societies become dependent on the state's standardized vetting process. If and when these alternatives slide from being heavily regulated into being strictly illegal, the only way to rescue children from government education without being imprisoned would be mass civil disobedience, which would be highly unlikely in today's climate. (For those who respond to the prospect of a complete ban on private education with the standard head-in-the-sand "Oh, come on," I note a few of the ostensibly civilized, democratic nations in which homeschooling is *already* outright illegal or severely restricted: Germany, Sweden, Iceland, the Netherlands, Spain, Brazil, and Greece.[2]) Thus the time to act, for those still legally permitted to do so, is now.

The progressives control the mechanisms of power, and will unavoidably continue to control them for as long as they direct every nation's educational establishment—which means for as long as there is compulsory schooling. What is required, therefore, is *educational guerrilla warfare*: preparing a rebel army of civilized, non-government-educated individuals who will gradually grow to sufficient numbers to challenge the foundations of the progressive establishment in government, in the universities, in the arts, and in the rearing of new generations of young people freed from what the godfather of all progressive public school

[2] Cf. "Homeschooling International Status and Statistics," from *Wikepedia* (accessed July 2015). http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homeschooling_international_status_and_statistics. This, of course, leaves aside the regulations on alternative schooling that already exist in those nations in which such alternatives remain legal. And in all nations, a complete ban on private schooling is always part of the progressive chatter, which means it is only a few steps away from serious legislative debate even in those countries where such debate has not already begun in earnest.

administrators, Humboldt himself, called the "oppressive fetters" of state schooling.

Allow me to illustrate educational guerrilla warfare by way of a personal example. I once took a stroll with a friend in Korea—a graduate student, private teacher, and the young wife of a Christian pastor. When she mentioned their plans to have children, I asked her about the possibility of homeschooling, which is uncommon in her country. Her initial answer was the typical, "It would be so difficult." She has a conscience, however, so she immediately chuckled embarrassedly at her own words. Over the course of the ensuing conversation, and a subsequent one, I asked her the basic questions I believe all prospective parents must confront:

(1) Can you accept public education's lowest common denominator standards and its emphasis on basic social utility as satisfactory goals for your own child's upbringing?

(2) Do you agree to give up primary control of your child's moral development to the contingencies of childish mob pressures and the state schools' systemic demands for conformity?

(3) Do you wish to have your child raised in an environment in which his own genuine interests and curiosities are punished or drugged out of him in the name of "paying attention" and "socialization," thus diluting or smothering the natural enthusiasms that might have driven him to extraordinary achievements?

(The sinister excesses of compulsory schooling's indoctrination to acquiescence, and in general the disturbing marriage of bureaucratic and corporate interests that defines our late modern ruling establishment, may be encapsulated in one word: Ritalin. An entire civilization has invented an illness, ADHD, supposedly affecting absurdly high proportions of every community in the developed world, but for which we luckily have a wonder drug. The symptoms of the disease just happen to sound a lot like the

effects of the boredom of artificial confinement combined with the anxiety caused by overstimulation of a child's mind with rapidly changing flashing images. But no, we need those kids locked in their classrooms, learning to be submissive, and occupying their free time in a semi-comatose state with TV and computer games, rather than in reading, exploring, or talking with their parents; so we call their desperate squirming against restraint a "disease," and treat it with drugs that shave all the edges off the energetic child's emotional life, which means *off his moral development*. Ritalin is a perfectly acceptable, legal drug, produced by a perfectly respectable company listed on the New York Stock Exchange. The disease this drug is used to treat might properly be called "public school resistance syndrome," and the drug is the go-to solution adhered to by education ministries, school boards, and teachers the world over. To state the matter plainly, if public education were eliminated tomorrow, and parents freed to raise their children by any means they thought best and to change methods when something seemed not to be working, ADHD in the current epidemic sense might effectively cease to exist, the primary use of Ritalin might evaporate, and Novartis stock might sink. Is Novartis—the world's top pharmaceutical company—aware that its financial interest is currently being served by the global schooling establishment's impulse to *subdue* inconvenient childhood energy rather than educate it? Does the company know that its product is being exploited by government "education experts" to normalize the practice of drugging children into state compliance?)

(4) Are you convinced that John Dewey's programmatic wish to have every child raised in a collectivized setting in order to undermine independent thought and short-circuit the private family is better for your child than the private home- or church-based models of education that produced classical Greece and

Rome, the Italian Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the American Revolution?

My friend is earnest and good-hearted. I do not believe she will evade her own conscience on this matter. Her children will be what they are capable of being, and what they want to be, rather than submissive, diminished, useful tools of authority.

If the friendly but pointed conversation I have just described under the name "guerrilla warfare" does not look like your idea of war, be assured—and warned—that it *will* look like war to the progressives and their educational leaders. For however civilized (and civilizing) our methods might seem, the ultimate outcome of this war will be of as great a world-historical significance as that of any previous war—and the authoritarians certainly know it. This is nothing less than a war to preserve and rejoin a several-thousand-year continuum that progressivism seeks to erase from human memory forever. The battleground is the souls of today's children, the soul of humanity's future. The authoritarians have all the heavy weapons, in the form of their own educational establishment enforceable by law, funded by taxation, and defended by a sheep-like academic class, a bootlicking mass media, and a mass of mankind that has been trained to accept the terms of its own enslavement in exchange for the false comfort of liberation from human nature. We, their hated enemy, have only our powers of personal persuasion, our own and our friends' private consciences, and the strength of knowing that truth and nature are on our side.

That's enough. "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." (Lao Tzu)

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Time for Bitter Business

Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,
That I, the son of a dear father murder'd,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words,
And fall a-cursing, like a very drab,
A scullion!

Hamlet, Act II Scene ii

On the subject of dismantling compulsory government schooling, many people seem inclined to *speak* as though they cannot wait another moment to spring into action—and then *act* as though they need the hand of God to point the way ahead before they do what they know in their hearts must be done. This is not meant as harsh criticism. These people are merely exhibiting an innate human weakness defined for all time by one of our greatest archetypes. They are Hamlet.

At a moment as historically important as this one, two inner threats lie in wait for those who understand the seriousness of the situation. The first is that they should undermine their own cause with reckless outbursts and the resulting disarray. The second is that they should cocoon themselves against the clear imperative to act by bemoaning the lack of a perfect plan. It is this second danger that I wish to address now. The people I am thinking of are men and women who know that generations of public schooling have laid waste to reason, morality, and responsible citizenship. They desire radical change—and yet something about the enormity of the situation has paralyzed

them. Much like Hamlet, they rail (correctly) against the undoing of their family's and society's legitimate authority by an unjust and destructive usurper—but then they lament the supposed reluctance of the heavens, or of their fellow men, to provide a solution.

The truth is that education is one of the few areas of authoritarian encroachment where most of us can, for the moment at least, advance civility and morality through our own action. There is no need to wait for presidents, legislators, or courts to act on our behalf, which would actually be putting the cart before the horse. Nor is there any need to demand that people with public voices, billions of dollars, or political connections take the first step. The first step is available to anyone who wishes to take it. Millions have already taken it; one need only join them.

Hamlet, the eternal essence of the ratiocinative man trapped in a moment of practical urgency, always has a reason for inaction. All his reasons seem reasonable to him—indeed, they *are* reasonable—and yet they conspire against his soul's moral imperative, functioning in his virtuous mind as excuses function in the minds of vicious men. Hamlet, an honest man, does not "rationalize" or "procrastinate." Rather, he clogs up his moral arteries with nuanced qualifications; he racks himself with second thoughts.

This, I believe, is where too many people stand today with respect to the warning presented to them, not by their father's ghost, but by the ghost-like witness of their own children, or those of others—children whose souls and potential are daily being siphoned off by an education system designed to produce subjugated spirits, mere slogan-vessels, whose (carefully nurtured) dominant passions are born of greed, sloth, lust, and envy, which can easily be subdued and manipulated by the power

elite's petty material promises, entertainments, and demagoguery. Our Hamlets see this treason, and want to avenge it, but they have become obsessed with the seeming intractability of the corrupt system, rather than focusing on practical actions they could take today that would squeeze off its blood supply. Their obsession with the political enormity of the corruption, combined with their impatience to unravel it, threatens to reduce them to caustic skepticism precisely where positive engagement is most needed.

Some of us are dedicated to developing the most persuasive theoretical ammunition for the long battle to protect future generations from state indoctrination. In reply to these efforts the impatient Hamlets declare, "This historical and theoretical mumbo-jumbo is all well and good, but when is someone going to come up with a practical *plan*?"

Thousands of parents speak and write in a hundred different forums about their successful experiences as home educators. And yet Hamlet says, "But individual action is pointless—when are we going to get organized?" or "A parent would have to give up his or her job to teach the children full-time," or "Some parents are not competent to teach their own children."

Advocates and administrators of private schools, secular or religious, produce evidence and argument for the myriad advantages of rescuing children from the public system quickly, and the eminent feasibility of doing so. And yet Hamlet says, "It's too expensive when we're already paying taxes for public school," or "There's nothing we can do until politicians radically reform the compulsory school laws."

A collective plea is issued for reasserting parental control over children's education in the name of renewing a dying civilization, but Hamlet says, "It's too late to save civilization now—it would take generations."

Let us begin with this last point. "It's too late to save civilization now—it would take generations." This view, variations of which appear regularly in conservative forums, is self-contradictory. The claim that something would take a long time to achieve is itself an acknowledgment that it is indeed possible. *Of course* it will take generations. Education is a slow process in an individual soul. As a societal shift, it is even slower, because at the outset most people will not be involved in the revolution, and because even those who are will vary in competence and results. Are those who use this argument against immediate action on education imagining that a rejuvenated civilization will arise spontaneously from the approaching collapse? As things now stand, it is no exaggeration to hypothesize that the majority of people will enter the difficult times ahead ignorant of human nature and history, conscienceless, and lacking both practical efficacy and the independent character to acquire it. What kind of society is likely to emerge from such a population during a period of crisis? No—the belief that collapse is inevitable is all the more reason to take what action you can against the spiritual degradations of public education right now, while there is still hope of starting someone's life off on the path to self-reliance and moral integrity. There will be no quick fix for civilization. We are certainly looking at a multigenerational war; all the more reason to start the process without further delay.

We must once again take our cue from the earliest progressives, who got the ball rolling on compulsory schooling throughout the modern world so many generations ago. Motivated by a gnarled combination of raw power lust, messianic reformism, and moral condescension, they took what limited steps they could in the midst of the prosperous, growing societies of which they disapproved. They are long dead now—and yet today, if they are not burning, they must be enjoying the fruit of

their cynical labors posthumously. Men's most momentous actions, as Hamlet would certainly agree, are often those which overreach the bounds of our mortality. In redefining education you will need to count on future citizens to complete the most far-flung goals of your efforts. On the other hand, you will realize through this work that you have the power, with your actions today, to define the trajectory of motions that will extend beyond your material life.

In the meantime, virtuous action is its own reward. You can, by helping to save even one child from the wasted years and the moral and intellectual diminution of public school, help to set your own community on a road to strong character, self-reliance, and resistance to government dependency, combined with an unleashing of the innate curiosity that allows children to develop talents and knowledge at remarkable rates, almost without assistance—unless the state is allowed to beat or hug them into submission first. Future generations will need all the virtue, intellectual dexterity, and historical perspective within their potential if they are to withstand the hard times ahead, and emerge as free men and women. Delayed action at this late date will have tragic consequences.

So act.

Remove your own children from public school now. If you are intending to have children in the future, begin planning for their private education immediately. How will you provide it? How will you pay for it? If you are not prepared to face these questions squarely, perhaps you are not prepared for the responsibility of raising children suited to a free society—and you, along with your fellow citizens, will most assuredly reap as ye have sown.

Whether or not you have school age children yourself, encourage the reasonable parents among your relatives and friends to remove *their* children from public school. Make the

case, rationally and thoroughly. Leave them to think about it, and then make the case again. Give them some good reading material to ponder, such as Gatto's *Underground History of American Education* (invaluable regardless of your nationality, as the machinations it describes have had global effects). And as a show of good faith, offer to help educate their children.

If you belong to a church or synagogue with sensible leaders and a responsible congregation, urge them to form a school together. If you know teachers who are working in a public system but are fed up with its failures and corrupt agendas, encourage them, cajole them, *beg* them, to join a private school venture—their consciences are probably already tugging them that way. If you are planning to educate your child at home, seek out others who are doing the same. Exchange ideas, or teach one another's children according to each parent's strengths. If you are not engaged in educating a child of your own, consider how you might contribute to the education of others' children. Grandparents, shake your adult children, and reclaim your historical role as patriarchs and matriarchs. The broader the market of available sources of learning, the more likely parents will be to remove their children from the government re-education centers—and the more affordable doing so will become. (This is also, by the way, an immediately practicable method of defunding public schools, which receive tax money based on student numbers.)

If you have skills or knowledge that might help to stir a new, energized generation of unfettered children to seek understanding or practical efficacy the way today's shackled young souls seek computer game high scores and perverse music videos, then use them for the sake of your community's future. Whether full-time or part-time, for profit or on a volunteer basis, offer to tutor young people in those areas where your abilities might fill a

gap in a parent's or private school's offerings. Do you have a long-standing interest in European history, astronomy, bird-watching, or carpentry? Then offer to teach it to young people, individually or in groups. I recently realized, upon reflection, that of all the primary and secondary schooling I underwent, the only class I remember with unequivocal fondness was not a school offering at all. A man in my Catholic parish, the father of one of my elementary school classmates, had an interest in photography, and decided to start up a little camera club for boys from the church. We used cheap cameras, and only black and white film, because it was easier and less expensive to process. We learned how to take pictures and develop them. What a joy it was to stand in Mr. Deduca's little basement darkroom, watching my masterpieces arise from the photographic paper. If only a few of my "real" classes, with my "real" teachers, had been half as interesting, or had exerted half so positive an effect on my subsequent life!

What about the other common considerations and over-considerations with which people talk themselves out of doing the obvious? Will some parents and private schools do a worse job than others? Yes—but in a world of private education, there will always be available alternatives to a failing effort, as opposed to the inescapable damage done to *every* child in the one-failure-fits-all world of public education. In addition, granting the minimal requirements of a relatively safe and stable environment, basic amenities, a few good books, and a sensible guiding hand, a child left almost to his or her own devices is likely to achieve far more real intellectual growth, while incurring far less moral deformity, than the same child in a government school.

And that last point really *is* the point. We must remind ourselves that merely meeting the government-standardized definition of an educated person more efficiently, and without

the direct moral harm of public school socialization, while much better than nothing, is in the end only a provisional goal. It will likely appeal to more people today than a more fundamental rejection of progressive educational standards—because in an age inured to the universal schooling entitlement, persuading people that the entire project has been a fraud right down to the floor will take time—and therefore even this provisional goal is certainly worth encouraging. Such improved efficiency, however, is at best a transitional aim. An age that comes to grips with the tyrannical history and meaning of public schooling will be compelled at last to completely reject that model's principles and priorities, and not merely its buildings and social structure. To find less damaging ways of doing something that is inherently limiting and spirit-diminishing—to beat the system, so to speak—is an improvement, to be sure. But the ultimate transformation must be toward true educational freedom, which means children raised independently of all state-regulated standards of success. Today's progressive-academic-corporate complex benefits from a very specific kind of mental training, and therefore seeks to vet young people according to its own illiberal needs. The forcing of all souls through this social funnel is the injustice that must ultimately be corrected. A renewed economic and work environment prioritizing the individual pursuit of practical knowledge and self-determination, and the revival of academic principles favoring liberal education, will develop gradually out of a growing popular undercurrent that boldly rejects this entrenched, government-standardized funneling—the compression of men into vast uniform masses, as Humboldt called it. The final goal, in other words, cannot merely be high-achieving homeschoolers out-scoring their publicly-educated counterparts on standardized tests. That would entail a basic acceptance of the state's wisdom on intellectual potencies and socio-economic purposes. Rather,

the *real* models of success, and of a fundamental redirection toward educational liberty, would be Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Edison, and Jane Austen: unschooled, family-directed, self-taught, driven by the desire for knowledge, self-development, and excellence, rather than by the quest for top rank in a universal and uniform vetting process. This deeper victory takes great courage and patience, as it requires forsaking the short-term social advantages of living according to rules written by and for an elite with power lust in its heart and disdain in its eyes. As I envision it, progressivism's multi-generational process of spiritual centralization and collectivization must be incrementally reversed, gradually devolving child-rearing authority, including the authority to set goals and standards, from the domain of a permanent administrative establishment back down to the family level. The first step in this revolution is to give as many children as possible the widest range of learning opportunities beyond both the physical environs of government schools *and* the dehumanizing distortions of the universal ranking system.

Is private education costly, whether in tuition fees or in the lost income potential of the home-educating parent? It may well be—but how do you weigh the budgetary priority of a child's dignity, mental development, and preparedness for responsible citizenship against, say, the value of a new car, a bigger home, or an expensive vacation? And taking the long view, how do you weigh the value of a renewed spirit of self-reliance and civic responsibility against the perpetual enslavement of the state-dependent herd and the submissive, socialized "labor force" that are guaranteed to issue—that are *meant* to issue—from the continued manipulations of the progressive public school establishment?

Hamlet, in the aftermath of King Claudius' self-exposure during the play within the play—"Give me some light: away!"—

declares himself prepared to "do such bitter business as the day would quake to look on." But then, yet again, he fades into qualifications and second thoughts. We, facing a similar moment of clarity, must not fade. There is no need for further proof, nor time for further introspection. It is time to act, while action is still viable. Thinking, writing, and speaking are worthy actions, and are essential in the long run, as persuasive arguments are our primary weapons. But in addition to these, for those who perceive the centrality of education in determining the future possibilities of a man, a community, and a civilization, immediate practical steps are required. The first and most vital step is relatively obvious—it only seems obscure if our inner Hamlet has us paralyzed. Work as though your life depended on it—your freedom certainly does—to get any child within your sphere of influence out of government schooling immediately. Legislative solutions will come last, not first, as future generations of self-sufficient and strong-charactered individuals make their stand against a withered and debunked paternalistic establishment. The greater the number of such free-spirited men and women, the starker and more humiliating the contrast with the downward-ratcheting standards imposed by the growth-stunting racket we call public school.

A final thought: Rebuffed and humiliated paternalists, such as will result from a significant public school exodus, will become even more brazen in their tyrannical lunges. Men and women of real and steadfast virtue will be needed then—all the more reason to start producing such people today.

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Replies to Objections

> *Socialism, like the ancient ideas from which it springs, confuses the distinction between government and society. As a result of this, every time we object to a thing being done by government, the socialists conclude that we object to its being done at all.*
>
> *We disapprove of state education. Then the socialists say that we are opposed to any education. We object to a state religion. Then the socialists say that we want no religion at all. We object to state-enforced equality. Then they say that we are against equality. And so on, and so on. It is as if the socialists were to accuse us of not wanting persons to eat because we do not want the state to raise grain.*[1]
>
> Frédéric Bastiat

Having now examined the question of compulsory schooling from practical, historical, and theoretical angles, we may benefit from a final survey of some of the standard objections to my basic conclusion. For while the typical defenses of public school have been addressed at various points along the way in this discussion, the stakes involved here are too high, and the effects of our universal progressive indoctrination too stubborn, to take anything for granted. Therefore, in the spirit of St. Thomas Aquinas, who elevated the dry patterns of scholarly thoroughness into the beauty of a kind of intellectual music, let us conclude our long argument with brief replies to some of the objections most

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[1] Frédéric Bastiat, *The Law*, translated by Dean Russell (Irvington-on-Hudson, New York: The Foundation for Economic Education, 1964), 32-33.

commonly presented to those who seek to make the case against state-controlled education.

Objection 1. *"In a world without public schools, only the wealthy would receive an education."*

First of all, this objection is, logically, only an argument for schools to be provided at public expense for the (voluntary) benefit of poor families. It cannot legitimately be extended to support the institution of *universal compulsory* schooling. Nevertheless, it has in fact been forced into such illegitimate double duty since the very early days of modern public school advocacy. This indicates that much of the early argument for public schools as a developmental safety net for the poor was in fact a political wedge to hold open the door for the advocates' true goal, the gradual implementation of full-scale compulsory schooling in communities where this intention could not have been imposed immediately without large-scale popular resistance. (Remember Victor Cousin's observation that French Catholic parishes were already providing for the education of the poor, but that this was the perfect chance for the state to leap in with mandates to entrench in law what was already being done voluntarily, as a step toward genuine Prussian-style schooling.)

Furthermore, the claim that without state-supported schools only the wealthy would be educated is unsound on its face, as it reveals a hidden premise in the case for universal state education, namely that "education" means, and can only mean, schooling, and schooling of a very particular sort. A resident of New York State may be forgiven for imagining that eighteen thousand dollars a year is not quite enough to provide a decent education for a child, but in fact we know that Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Edison, Jane Austen, Alexander Pope, and Ben Franklin—at least the equals in achievement, I dare say, of any recent New York

public school graduate—acquired almost all of their childhood learning virtually for free, and not through any grand acts of charity, but through *reading*. Illiteracy is the only real bar to unlimited spiritual cultivation, historical awareness, and the growth of practical knowledge and skill.

Frederick Douglass, as a child slave, was taught to read the alphabet by his owner's wife, Sophia Auld. Hugh Auld put a stop to this, warning his wife against such carelessness in terms that taught Douglass a most valuable lesson, one that has lost none of its relevance:

> "If you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell. A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master—to do as he is told to do. Learning would *spoil* the best nigger in the world. Now," said he, "if you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master. As to himself, it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It would make him discontented and unhappy."[2]

In other words, teaching a slave to read is handing him the key to the door marked "Humanity," a door which, in the modern conception of slavery, had to be kept permanently locked. Consider, in this light, the objections of the two greatest theorists of modern public schooling to the early teaching of literacy—or the various practical and theoretical means we have devised to discourage the development of advanced reading skills today. Though subtler and more nuanced, our neo-Fichtean or Deweyan

[2] Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (London: H.G. Collins, 1851), 35.

machinations are no different in principle from Hugh Auld's blunt declaration.

The general dissemination of knowledge and, more importantly, the general impetus to seek it, are not the effects of government coercion, which merely guarantees the universal limitation of the extent and nature of what will be learned, or rather presented. The conditions which tilt a society in the direction of generalized learning, as opposed to universal indoctrination, are (a) a political structure rooted in principles of natural equality, which means the weakening of inflexible social hierarchies that confine the majority of men to narrow and unsurpassable horizons of subservience and stasis; (b) levels of general prosperity that make some measure of leisure, intellectual endeavor, and also charitable activity, possible for the majority; and (c) a heritage or ethos rooted in certain foundational books, particularly in a moral or religious context, which create a strong familial and societal interest in the teaching of literacy and history. Modernity was in the process of satisfying these conditions, and hence in the freer nations was tending toward general literacy, *before* the spread of public schools. In short, education for the common man is a natural by-product of liberty and prosperity, not of coercive paternalism. The latter, on the contrary, tends to bring to its "masses" or "folk" not universal education, but a lowest common denominator model of child-rearing designed to restrain everyone at uniform and mediocre levels of intellectual development, combined with an indoctrination to obedience and submission.

Objection 2. *"Private education creates unequal opportunity, and is therefore unjust."*

This argument, the same one used to rationalize socialized medicine, the graduated income tax, "redistributive justice," and

the rest of the socialist agenda, has been central to compulsory school advocacy from the beginning. And while some might regard healthcare and wealth distribution—the realms of life and property—as the more pernicious instantiations of the argument, I believe nothing captures the absurd heart of progressivism more profoundly than the desire to retard human intellectual and moral development in the name of justice. Progressive elitists, not satisfied with merely determining the uniform standards of education and methods of social ranking for *all* children, while directly undertaking the moral indoctrination of *most* children, often call for the complete outlawing of private schooling, apparently without any qualms about the brazen tyranny entailed by the wish to prevent citizens from investing their hard-earned wealth—not to mention the time and effort expended attaining that wealth—on their own children's well-being.

Michelle Rhee, darling of America's educational despotism movement, whose "tough talk" posturing sometimes even fools conservatives, fondly recalls being told by billionaire investor Warren Buffet that in the name of fairness, private schools ought to be banned outright, and all children forcibly distributed to government schools by lottery.[3]

"Think about what this would mean," Rhee gushes. "CEOs' children, diplomats' children, many would be going to schools in Anacostia and east of the river [in the District of Columbia], where most of our schools are. I guarantee we would never see a faster moving of resources from one end of the city to the other. I also guarantee we would soon have a system of high-quality schools."

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[3] Michelle Rhee, "Ending Poverty through Education," at *Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity* (February 8, 2010), now available online at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mike-laracy/ending-poverty-through-ed_b_454034.html.

Rhee's effusion over Buffet's hypothesis is a brilliant illustration of how progressives think, and of what they think of their lowly subjects. "Think about what this would mean," she says—and then proceeds to think about what it would mean *for her dreams of social reform*. But let us now follow her injunction from a non-authoritarian outlook, shall we? Think about what Buffet's proposal would mean to the victims of such reform.

First of all, it would mean that private- or home-educating parents, who under compulsory school laws are already pressured to educate their children according to government standards of subject matter and achievement, would lose even the freedom to control how they go about meeting those requirements. Second, it would entail the *criminalization of parents* who reject or resist the state's manner of child-rearing. Third, the sheer randomness of the policy—children assigned to schools by "lottery"—would end even the façade of liberty by declaring that not only does the government have the authority to wrest children from their parents' care and place them under the guardianship of the state, but now even the assignment of children to particular state guardians will be determined *by chance*, thus highlighting the degree to which the masses live entirely at the whim of the ruling class.

Finally, the whole idea is grounded in the doctrinaire socialist presupposition that private property ownership, with its inevitable unequal distribution, is inherently unfair, and therefore that the state must take steps to mitigate its effects. Rhee's and Buffet's daydream is, at bottom, a classic example of "redistributive justice." Just allow the state to reallocate resources more evenly throughout the community, they muse, and then sit back and admire the social reformation. "I guarantee we would soon have a system of high quality schools," Rhee beams. Similar guarantees have accompanied the socialization of other parts of

modern society as well. The fact that the properly educational elements of public school were more effectively and efficiently delivered generations ago, when the schools had far less money and lacked many of today's coercive equalization schemes is, of course, lost on the messianic reformer. Rhee, like all others of a totalitarian bent, imagines she can guarantee this high quality because in her heart of hearts she believes that only three conditions prevent schools from being uniformly perfect now: access to unlimited material resources, increased centralization of decision-making authority, and the placement of those resources and that authority into *her hands*.

This objection to private education on grounds of inequality, and the paternalists' typically megalomaniacal solutions, are also, amusingly, a tacit acknowledgment that private education is in principle superior to public, such that the only way to remove this "unfair" advantage is to deny parents the right to choose it at all. The state coercively determines artificial standards and markers of learning, and then when citizens, through their own initiative and at their own expense, find private ways to exceed those artificial standards, the statist cries "Unfair!" The attempt to focus the objection on unequal financial advantages and expensive private schools is a ruse, as is easily shown by considering the progressive attitude toward homeschoolers or others who find *inexpensive* ways to educate their children far beyond the standards achieved by public schools. The rhetorical focus on money is merely an effort to score class warfare points against freedom. The real enemy, in the eyes of compulsory school advocates, is, and always has been, private success per se. Remember Dewey's simple equation of private learning, or non-socialized knowledge, with selfishness. When even *mental activity* is to be collectivized and redistributed in equal portions, at the expense of the highest levels of achievement for those who are capable of

it, we can be sure we have entered the realm of progressive double-speak, wherein tyranny is justice, oppression is opportunity, and the coercive stifling of some men by others is equality.

By way of explicating this point further, please allow me a brief digression. South Korea, where I have lived for several years, developed from impoverished dictatorship to economic powerhouse and democracy in barely a generation. One of the side effects of this rapid rise is that some areas of the economy have developed ahead of the government's regulatory machinery. There is still some sense of unleashed entrepreneurial spirit here, with relatively few people expecting to remain with one employer throughout their working lives, and a large proportion expecting to open their own small businesses at some point in life.

One of the most immediately striking features of Korea's hit-the-ground-running economy is its effect on education. Korea has a fully developed compulsory public school system, and one which, by the academic standards of the international schooling establishment of our time, seems to be achieving measurably better results in core subjects than is common in the West, within a shorter teaching day.[4]

The most interesting part of Korea's education establishment, however—and the dirty little secret of her public school success—is what comes *after* school: Private academies, or *hagwons* in Korean, specializing in almost every academic subject, are the main afterschool activity for most children. English language

[4] Cf. James Marshall Crotty, "Why Asian Nations Dominate Global Education Rankings," *Forbes*, May 21, 2014, http://www.forbes.com/sites/jamesmarshallcrotty/2014/05/21/why-asian-nations-dominate-global-education-rankings/. It should be noted, however, that the international rankings cited in this article were produced by Pearson, one of the giants of corporate cronyism in education, and a major purveyor and beneficiary of standardized schooling worldwide.

academies, ubiquitous in every city, town and village throughout the country, are the most famous examples. (English is a core academic subject in Korean schools.) But there are also thousands of schools—leaving aside the uncountable number of independent private tutors—specializing in math, science, art, music, and so on, offering classes for every age and skill level. Because the *hagwons* are specialized, for-profit businesses, and offered explicitly for parents who want their children to excel, there is little of the lowest common denominator undertow that inevitably drags down academic standards in a public school system, even one focused more seriously on traditional "three Rs" learning, as is still the case in Korea. Children are generally placed in *hagwon* classes according to their actual level of knowledge, rather than strictly by age cohort, and the goal, unlike that in government schools, is not primarily to keep up with the state-standardized levels, but rather to exceed them.

And, broadly speaking, it works. I began my teaching life in Korea at a well-established, professionally-run, family-owned English academy. Among my students were high-achieving elementary school children whose public school English classes involved repeating stock phrases such as "Nice to meet you" and "How's the weather?"—that was the standard for eleven-year-olds in the public system—while they were writing essays about Thomas Edison or Machu Picchu for me. Needless to say, these students were the stars of their elementary school English classes, thanks largely to their *hagwon*, where they were taught material that challenged them, in classes small enough to allow personal attention, and with testing used only as a guide-line for parents, rather than as the means to permanent public ranking.

Korea's private academies are far from satisfactory, however, as they are mostly limited to the role of supplement, rather than genuine alternative, to the public system. In other words, their

purpose and main selling point is inherently corrupt, because the curriculum at a *hagwon* is invariably designed with one eye on the spiritually degrading requirements of the standardized government-corporate vetting process. (If they eschewed that focus, they would be out of business in a minute, since Koreans have completely bought into a modernized progressive bastardization of their traditional social hierarchy, according to which personal worth *means* standardized, quantifiable success.) Nevertheless, the relatively recent and very fluid development of Korea's public vs. private education battle provides an instructive portrait of the *principles* at stake in all such battles, everywhere.

In 1980, South Korea's last dictator, Chun Doo-hwan, banned private education outright, a restriction that stood (in theory) until the law was ruled unconstitutional in the 1990s. Chun's reasoning was a clear statement of the perennial arguments against private (i.e., parent-controlled) education, namely that it gives an unfair advantage in life to "the wealthy," and that it saddles poor parents with an unnecessary financial burden.

The first of these arguments (the "unfair advantage") is the usual mantra of authoritarians everywhere who seek to control the population by suppressing the human urge to excel. People want good things for their children; they put in extra hours of work, undergo hardships, and forgo other interests in order to attain the things which they believe will give their children a better life. To you and me, these people are showing character and responsibility, and exemplify the natural, moral propensity to pursue happiness. To an authoritarian, such people and their efforts are to be despised—not strictly because they work hard and sacrifice, but *because they succeed*. Private success, which threatens to crack the authoritarians' eternal veneer of justification—"you could never make it in this world without the government's help"—is the mortal enemy of the statists. Success

that does not require state intervention on the citizen's behalf is an embarrassment to them, as it exposes their true aims, which have little or nothing to do with improving the conditions of life for the general population.

Beyond the urge to control, and the twin canards of affordability and equal access, statists typically fall back on the notion that a public system can guarantee "standards," while truly private education would leave parents at the mercy of incompetent or unethical businessmen. It is tempting simply to reply, "Better an incompetent or unethical businessman than an incompetent or unethical government." And, though stated flippantly, this really is the ultimate answer to the outcry for government regulation and control of private education. Once again, however, the Korean example sheds light on the issue.

Korea's private academies vary greatly in structure and competence. Some are fly-by-night schemes that offer little of educational value, while others are massive "cram schools" dedicated entirely to preparing generic hordes of high schoolers for Korea's disturbingly life-defining SAT; many, however, particularly at the elementary school level, emphasize personalized teaching in small classes, with a carefully selected curriculum. And with Korean parents feverishly dedicated to their children's advancement and future success, in a nation where success is determined almost entirely by standardized testing of various sorts, this market tends to sort itself out in favor of the private schools that show measurable results, as one would expect a market to do.

That last point holds the key, however, and points to the true core of the issue: Korean parents *are* "feverishly dedicated to their children's advancement and future success." Unlike most Western parents, Koreans have not been lulled into quietly bowing before certified teachers and government school boards as the only authorities when it comes to academic matters. They,

like almost everyone in today's world, have foolishly allowed government bureaucrats and corporate interests to design the basic goals and the presiding vetting process determining their children's futures. But as to the means to *fulfilling* the requirements of that artificial hierarchy, they have thus far refused to accept the state's offerings at face value. Parents here are infamous for hounding teachers with questions, suggestions, and complaints. The reason they have such a vibrant market for private education—in spite of an outright *ban* on such schools being in effect until just over twenty years ago—is that Korean parents simply refused to obey the law. They defiantly sought private lessons illegally, until, through court challenges in the early years of their newly-achieved republican political structure, they won back the freedom to use their own hard-earned money for their children's betterment.

The argument of leftists that in a private system people would be at the mercy of business interests is derived from a typical presumption of passivity or stupidity on the part of parents, and is refuted by the Korean model. Regarding the private academies, where the parents have a choice, if they are unhappy with what they are getting for their money, they say so, and they take their money and their children elsewhere.

This Wild West atmosphere can be frustrating for conscientious private teachers who feel they are being continually raked over the coals by over-anxious, sometimes unreasonable parents. There is nonetheless something refreshing about parents so deeply concerned about their children's education that they are prepared, on a moment's notice, and at tremendous expense, to *do something about it*. And remember, this is not the attitude of a brave minority, as in the West; this is the status quo. On the one hand, in this education-mad nation, the public school system is spoken of by most Koreans with the same measure of

misplaced pride that Canadians exude over their socialized medical system. It is such a dominant factor in their everyday lives that they almost invariably become habituated to regarding it as essential to their national identity. On the other hand, something else that is almost universally accepted here is that the lowest common denominator nature of public schooling itself is unacceptable, and that paying thousands of dollars a year to supplement your children's schooling with private lessons, in addition to funding the public system through taxes, is one of the basic responsibilities of parenthood.

Today, all of this is changing—drifting westward (forward?), shall we say. The main opponents of Korea's private academy system are, predictably, government and the public school teachers. The enormous success of the academies is a constant humiliation to the public schools, an open societal declaration that they are woefully inadequate and that parents will not accept what the state is offering as the final word on their children's prospects. Governments and their workers do not like to be humiliated. Their response has been to try to undermine the academies at every turn. There is a constant defamation campaign against the academy teachers, accusing them of being unqualified, and not "real teachers," because they are not certified by the state. (In other words, the accusation is that the private teachers lack the same qualification that *all* teachers lacked throughout classical Greece and Rome, the Italian Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution, not to mention throughout most of Korea's five thousand year history.) Public school teachers are mortified by parents who speak to them of a child's private academy teacher as if she were the child's "real" teacher, as in, "My son's math teacher said...." The obvious fact that this "unqualified" private teacher is a major reason the child has risen to the top of his public school class in a

particular subject is irrelevant; her lack of state certification disqualifies her as a real teacher, regardless of how much more effective she is *at teaching*.

Then there is the dogma that as businesses, the academies' only concern is making money, rather than education. (Analogous argument: Apple computers are fake, because Steve Jobs was in it for the money.) The fact that the academies work—that students who attend them generally learn at an accelerated rate, and regularly outperform their non-*hagwon*-educated public school classmates according to the public school's own standards—would, in a rational world, lead to a reconsideration of the merits and methods of the public system. In the world of the administrative state, however, where reason is regarded as The Enemy, the response to private success in areas where the government has a stake is to deny it, to obscure it, and if possible to crush it.

Compare the case of (modern) Greece, where a similar war is being waged against private afterschool academies, the *frondistiria*. Here is a recent account of the Greek "problem":

> Parents experience all the problems and difficulties faced by their children and they have to spend a significant part of their family time studying with their children and take them back and forth to private lessons and *frondistiria* [—when they should be spending family time doing what, exactly?]. The findings of various studies carried out by research firms show parents in Greece in 2008 spent a whopping 6 billion Euros in tuition to send their children to after-school lessons. This is for sure a plague that has to stop.[5]

[5] Stavroula Romoudi, "The Educational Law in Greece," at *afv.gr* (accessed on February 25, 2015),

Why is the private interest of private citizens in using their own money to supplement their children's learning "a plague" that requires curing? Parents sharing "all the problems and difficulties of their children" is now regarded as a dangerous out-break, and the proposed solutions to this horrible social disease (which used to be called parenthood) include, predictably: a longer public school teaching day; a younger age for public school entry; more money and high tech classrooms; "no more boring lessons"; and, most importantly, the reduction of parents' involvement in their children's learning. The overriding concern is that extra teaching provided for pay, and under the guidance of parents rather than government, be eliminated in favor of the exclusive mental control of the public school. The author's account of the workings of the "New School," in which knowledge is "produced" rather than "consumed," is summarized in a Deweyesque flourish:

> What is more, students will be interactive individuals in environments where intelligence is collective; their knowledge will not be kept in the brain. Nevertheless, the support and participation of educators who will present a refreshing face as professionals, and parents who will show trust in the reform and the new, totally different way of obtaining knowledge from the one they remember and received themselves when young, will vindicate the expectations of a dynamic, rationally composed idea that in the new school "the student comes first."[6]

Who came first in the old school, one wonders? What were the public school teachers *before* they suddenly became refreshingly

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http://www.afv.gr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=186:the-educational-law-in-greece&catid=120&Itemid=400.

[6] Ibid.

professional in the New School? And why should the parents be obliged to "vindicate" the public school reforms with their "trust"? In any case, it is reassuring that there will be a collective pot of intelligence in the New School, since it seems highly likely that under Greece's new "rationally composed idea," "knowledge will not be kept in the brain."

In a similar attempt to root out parental control, though one lacking the progressive lyricism of the Greek reforms, Korean public schools have recently instituted their own government-subsidized afterschool programs to compete against the *hagwons*. As these are merely extensions of the public school mentality, however, they inevitably tend toward the inherent problem of the public system, namely low standards, rather than the promotion of excellence. And as they utilize non-certified teachers, they have in effect reinforced a two-tier education system within the public schools themselves, with the certified teachers being the first-class citizens, and the afterschool teachers being explicitly second-class, and reminded of it in every way possible.

Because the private system grew up alongside the public faster than government could gain control over it, eliminating it has been a long, difficult struggle. Korean parents are simply not yet willing to accept a lower quality of education than that to which they have become accustomed. But it will likely happen, eventually. The lawmakers' and government teachers' class warfare campaign against the private academies will finally succeed, thousands of small business owners and their hundreds of thousands of employees will lose their livelihoods, and Korea's advantage in global standardized comparisons at the primary and secondary levels will dissipate. Whether it takes ten years or twenty, Koreans will finally decide, like their Western counterparts, that "free education" is enough, that the state-sanctioned professionals know what is best for their children, and that, if it

sometimes seems that the system is designed to produce an ever-lower standard of mediocrity—both intellectual and moral—well, what is one to do?

Objection 3. "*In a completely private education world, there would be no way to set or enforce standards of quality or achievement.*"

Enforcing standards of quality in the sense intended within a system of compulsory schooling—assuming it could mean anything in practice other than the forced retardation factory described in Part One—would require knowing the following, at a minimum: what every human being ought to learn, and when; what is *not* useful to human development, and may therefore be excluded from child-rearing; what knowledge or skills will be needed or useful in the future, and hence precisely what the society's future *will be*; how each individual child best acquires knowledge, under what specific conditions, and at what precise pace; which methods of fostering learning are most effective for each type of child, detailed according to the individual child's specific personal experiences, innate strengths and weaknesses, current level and source of motivation, and personal response to the particular teachers with whom he is confronted at any given time; and the most effective means of training each and every teacher, according to his or her own peculiar background, strengths and weaknesses, to utilize precisely the correct methods at exactly the right time to facilitate the highest possible level of learning for each unique child according to the teacher's (consistently accurate) judgment of that child's needs of the moment. There are indeed people who believe, or who want *you* to believe, that they actually know all of these things, and who therefore declare their fitness to enforce "standards" for the moral and intellectual development of every child in your com-

munity. It is debatable whether such people should be allowed to vote or drive a car. That they should actually be given the coercive authority to determine how every child in a community must be raised is ridiculous.

What state standardization really means in practice is utilitarian uniformity and streamlining of goals, a simplified social ranking and placement system for the administrative ease and economic predictability of the political and corporate elite. This results in school increasingly operating as a world unto itself, a set of rules and expectations answering to no real need or natural impulse, and a vetting process designed to reward successful climbers of imaginary ladders—to reward them, ultimately, with Advanced Worker Unit status to fill the void where their individuated souls and highest aspirations might have been.

Objection 4. "*The profit motive degrades the noble task of education.*"

This is the mantra typically preached by teachers' unions, the same one shouted by all government unions.[7] Apparently, the kind of profit sought by schools run as businesses is unworthy of education, whereas the kind of profit sought by teachers who work for pay and organize government unions to help them gain higher salaries and more benefits is honorable. If I find a public school teacher who teaches without pay—"for the children" as they say—and supports himself with a second job in the evenings

[7] I once worked part-time for Canada Post. The postal workers' union, affiliated at the leadership level with the international socialist movement, was forever decrying the corruptive effects of the profit motive upon the sacred mission of mail sorting. Needless to say, the inefficiency of the public mail sorters, in conjunction with their absurd demands for remuneration beyond anything commensurate with their work, has effectively nailed Canada Post's coffin shut.

or on weekends, then I will listen keenly to what he has to say about the evils of profit in education.

There is, in fact, a legitimate educational danger within for-profit education models—and these include all exchanges of money for teaching, whether in the private or public sphere. The danger concerns the relationship between teachers and parents; its highest expression is Socrates' choice not to accept payment for teaching at all. His reason, put simply, is that he did not wish to be beholden to the fathers to teach their sons what they, the fathers, wanted their sons to hear, or what the fathers regarded as "useful," but wished rather to be free to teach the truth. This is one of the most straightforward points of conflict in the ancient battle between the philosophers and the sophists. The sophists, as the Greek philosophers depicted them, were professional teachers who traveled from city to city charging a fee to teach young men how to succeed in political affairs, without regard for the true and the good. That is, they made their living by promising fathers to prepare their sons for lives of practical power and influence, whereas Socrates sought precisely to moderate the desire for political success in favor of the "impractical" philosophic life, a goal which set him at odds with the boys' fathers.

Those who would echo such lofty Socratic reasoning to defend public education do so at their peril. Think again: Socrates complains that if the fathers pay the teachers, the fathers call the tune. So what happens if the state pays the teachers? Education is reduced again to the quest for mere political usefulness, rather than truth, but now with the far greater degradation that today's sophists are not even teaching the children to forsake truth in favor of *their own* political success, but rather to forsake it in the name of *someone else's* political success. They are teaching children, over the heads of their parents, how to make themselves

useful cogs in the machinery of the progressive elite. This heightens the significance of Aristotle's observation that when a state is unwilling or unfit to attend to the proper care of children, education ought to be left in the hands of the parents, who at least have the children's best interests at heart. In short, where the issue is vested interests versus the quest for truth, much better the vested interests of a loving parent than those of a self-serving ruling bureaucracy attended to by its profit-seeking certified servants, the teachers.

So much, then, for the noble dream of non-profit education. This dream is realizable in principle, of course, but most decidedly *not* in a government school system. It is realized in practice every time a parent, grandparent, family friend, or other responsible adult seeks to help a child learn without expecting anything in return, beyond the satisfaction of watching the child grow more aware, more confident, more thoughtful, and happier. One intended result of public education is precisely to render this dream fundamentally impossible, by discrediting and debunking all teaching that is not provided by state-employed teachers.

Objection 5. "*Mothers who have careers would be forced to give them up in order to teach children at home, setting the cause of women's rights back fifty years.*"

I actually heard a version of this argument used by TV journalist Katty Kay against former U.S. Congressman Ron Paul, who was being interviewed about his book advocating home-schooling.[8] Paul's answer was a great demonstration of the power and purpose of political correctness. In short, he stridently ducked the question, citing an irrelevant anecdote about a

[8] "BBC Female Anchor Confronts Ron Paul Over Plan for Women to Quit Work for Home School," *YouTube*, video posted September 19, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7-m5PERUUpQ.

woman living in a shelter while working two jobs, but then proclaiming that if he and his wife had to raise their own children all over again, they would probably choose public school again, "even if the conditions would have been bad in our public school system when we were raising our kids." In other words, he had been reduced by a talking head's silly question to conceding the core of the position he had supposedly come to defend.

First of all, there is no reason to presume that mothers alone would or should be responsible for educating children in the case of homeschooling. The suggestion that the moral and intellectual development of one's child is a mere household chore, equivalent to dusting the living room, and hence stereotypically "women's work," is only the first of several inanities inherent in this objection. Aristotle and Plato, certainly male chauvinists in good standing, presumed the opposite, namely that the education of children was primarily a father's duty. In any case, the idea that educating a child—one's *own* child—is a thankless task which must be intrinsically less fulfilling to a woman than her career, is a sad statement on how far several generations of progressive indoctrination have carried modernity away from any serious thoughts of family, child-rearing, or the preciousness of the individual human soul. Women (and men, of course) routinely accept the shrinkage of their children's prospects and perspectives by way of public school's generic, utilitarian "standards," in exchange for the freedom (meaning license) to pursue "their own goals." In so doing, they lend credence to the harshest criticism of the modern parental attitude toward public school, namely that parents are ultimately indifferent to the educational needs of their children, selfishly seeking a glorified babysitting service to take the kids off their hands for the day.

Furthermore, the proper answer to the Katty Kays of the world with regard to the feminist "self-fulfillment versus staying home

with the children" canard is quite simple: If you don't want the responsibilities and limitations of raising a child properly, then don't make babies. No one is obliged to do so, and if your heart's priorities occupy a world detached from the freely chosen demands of parenthood, then it is just as well if you never do. If you are not willing to accept the burden of mowing the lawn and digging the weeds, then you should not purchase a home with a large yard. If you prefer to have more leisure time than a hard-driving business career allows, then you ought to choose a less time-consuming (and perhaps less financially rewarding) kind of work. Likewise with the choice to do your best by your child versus the wish to fulfill other aspirations at the child's expense.

Is this a harsh and unfair ultimatum? Not at all; I am merely deferring to a most basic tenet of logical thinking, the one about having your cake and eating it too. In this case, what is being eaten is the rightful future and intellectual potential of the world's children; meanwhile, anyone impolite enough to point this out is accused of denying women their delusional right to "have it all." A thing does not become possible simply because political correctness demands that it be so. "Having it all" is a modern euphemism for reducing children to secondary consideration at best, by leaving their spiritual development in the hands of the state, thereby forsaking the defining responsibility of parenthood. This is not a proposal to confine women to the home; nor do I belong to the camp of those who hold that women (or men, for that matter) who choose not to raise a family are somehow fundamentally flawed or unnatural. I am merely saying that adults who wish to pursue dreams that would preclude the proper and uncompromised care of children ought not to *have* children. It does not follow from this that those who do choose to have children are signing away their hopes of pursuing any interests or goals apart from those related to family life as such.

There is, however, a great difference between finding a way to develop one's talents or ideas in tandem with fulfilling the enormous responsibilities of parenthood, and simply lowering one's parental expectations in the name of making time for other priorities. The first is a measured and honest attempt to develop one's potencies without abandoning freely chosen duties; the second is child abuse practiced in the name of self-fulfillment.

Objection 6. *Ending government schooling would lead to criminal or wayward youth on a mass scale, causing social chaos.*

Aside from the underlying implication that a lack of government child-rearing means a lack of any child-rearing whatsoever, this objection may be met this way: Did the lack of government schooling lead to mass chaos in previous eras of civilization? The idea that all hell would break loose without compulsory schools seems to imply that "all hell" was indeed the condition of human society prior to the institution of compulsory schools. Was it? Fear-mongering about wayward youth run amok was a tactic often employed during the nineteenth century by compulsory school activists. The idea of a factory-based society in which some young people might slip through the cracks in normal community life and wind up engaging in criminal behavior was undoubtedly a real worry for people facing the unpredictable future of a rapidly changing economy, with family farms and small towns giving way to large industrialized cities, and young men leaving the farms behind to seek their fortune in those cities. The new always brings awkward periods of adjustment, and fears of imaginary effects that might result from causes men have not hitherto experienced. The general sense of "losing control" of existing social norms is a legitimate concern that may be exploited by those who seek power, and who may

present themselves as benevolent agents of control, security, and stability in a changing world. The fact that compulsory schooling itself has been the chief agent in the worldwide evaporation of previous "social norms" gives the lie to this fantasy of government as stabilizing force. Government schools, both in founding theory and in fact, are not guarantors of societal stability and security. They are guarantors of *ruling class* stability and security, by way of state socialization, a process calibrated to undermine citizens' independent spirit and will to self-determination.

Furthermore, there is a deeply authoritarian premise underlying the notion that compulsory schooling is needed to prevent the social problem of criminal youth. In the 1930s, *New York Times* sportswriter John Kiernan described the National Hockey League's long season, which resulted in only a quarter of the teams being eliminated from the playoffs, as being "the equivalent of burning down a house to get the flies out of the dining-room."[9] The same analogy applies to effectively forcing an entire population's youth into reform (pre-form?) schools in order to prevent a small minority of potentially dangerous de-viants from turning bad.

As a matter of historical fact, before compulsory school laws, civil societies were not disintegrating into anarchy, and the majority of young men were not engaging in criminal behavior. We can never know for certain how modern societies might have developed to the present day without compulsory schools. What we do know for certain, however, is what harm can result from late modernity's solution to the bogeyman of civil disorder, in which virtually all young men are systematically prevented from engaging in productive activity, disabused of any notions of privacy or private property, and, most importantly, detached from the centripetal moral force of the family.

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[9] Quoted in Ken Dryden, *The Game* (Toronto: Wiley, 1983), 8.

That there were some poorly raised children and criminal youth in the nineteenth century industrial city is unquestionable. Looked at from our perspective, however, after a century and a half of "progress" in child-rearing, problems that at one time must have seemed serious have faded into relative insignificance. For today the West (followed gradually by the more westernized nations of the East) has elevated waywardness and indiscipline into a "youth culture" which not only tolerates, but is in effect *defined by*, the normalization of substance abuse; the encouragement and celebration of casual promiscuity, including mainstream degradations of girls and young women that might have been thought evidence of criminal insanity a century ago, but are now fêted as self-expression and art; the mass moron-ization of taste in literature, music, dance, and the visual arts; and the evaporation of that complex network of moral principles and exemplars that ought to function as the conscience of a people. This social disintegration is at least in part a result of the progressive way of "keeping children off the streets," i.e., of universal public schooling, and it has, through the valences of democratic progressivism, gradually displaced all other forms of "culture." We live in the age of nihilistic infantilism. Our childhood mass indoctrination settles into its adult form as general listlessness and disengagement; unthinking acquiescence to encroaching tyranny; marriage undertaken ever later and ever more transiently, with child-bearing and child-rearing treated as almost unrelated activities; and a heavy reliance on an endless stream of vulgar, childish and kitschy entertainment as the only means of staving off thoughts of that abyss which now occupies the space where adults once found the meaning and purpose of their lives.

The effect of this state-indoctrinated infantilism, however, is that now there actually *is* a legitimate question about what might

happen if the public school entitlement were literally cancelled tomorrow. One thing we have learned from recent history is the near-impossibility of undoing an entrenched entitlement program. Greece bankrupted herself, and her government was finally forced to concede that the entitlement state could no longer be sustained in its current form. The Greek majority responded to their national degradation by rising up to elect a new government that promised to rescind the so-called austerity measures aimed at saving their country from further disgrace. In other words, faced with the collapse of their nation's economy, and the humiliation of begging the Europeans to save them from their self-destructive behavior—Hellas pleading for mercy from the barbarians—today's Greeks simply stamped their feet and screamed, "I want! I want! I want!"

The same reaction, on a global scale, would likely result from any immediate attempt to free the human race from universal compulsory schooling. Parents, teachers, and (given our modern deference to the childish) schoolchildren would join hands and march through the streets chanting "I want my free education!" and "Education is a human right!" In other words, the overturning of forced schooling laws would, in the short run, probably lead to chaos; but this disaster would be entirely the product of generations of coerced government child-rearing. As it happens, no such immediate liberation from government schooling could ever be undertaken in today's world. Any general return to parent-controlled child-rearing will be slow and gradual, and occur at the level of public opinion and private action long before any honorable statesman of a distant future will have the nerve to pursue serious legislative reform.

In the meantime, this fear-mongering about social chaos in a world without government child-rearing may be answered more simply this way: Could the evils that would allegedly be un-

leashed by educational freedom be any worse than the totalitarian atrocities of the past century, all of which were perpetrated by regimes that made state-controlled schooling essential to their rule, and that justified their "New Education" as a means of establishing order and preventing social chaos?[10]

Objection 7. *The modern economy is too complex and technological to expect people to learn the necessary job skills without some kind of central planning.*

This concern gives away the game on the real essence of compulsory schooling. We now simply take for granted that the primary function of education is to prepare a child to take his eventual place in the economic hierarchy; in other words, that the purpose of schooling, which will occupy the bulk of a human being's life and energy until adulthood, is to prepare the child for subservience—to teach him his duties to his superiors, as Cousin describes it, or to discern "the place in which he can be of most service," as Dewey says—rather than to make him a happy and self-determining adult. Of course most people need to learn practical skills, some of which may help them gain remunerable employment. But this practical need is obviously matched by employers' needs for young people with the specific skills suitable

[10] And of course socialist revolutionaries in the democratic world have advocated public education on the same grounds, and with the same dishonest motives. Cf. my three-part interview with FBI informant Larry Grathwohl at *American Thinker*: "Total Destruction of the U.S." (Feb. 19, 2013), http://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2013/02/total_destruction_of_the_us_an_interview_with_larry_grathwohl_part_1.html;
"American Education: Rotting the Country from the Inside" (Feb. 20, 2013), http://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2013/02/american_education_rotting_the_country_from_the_inside.html;
and "The Endgame for the Destruction of the United States" (Feb. 21, 2013), http://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2013/02/the_endgame_for_the_destruction_of_the_united_states.html.

for various jobs, and parents' interests in preparing their children for practical self-sufficiency. The solution is self-evident: Let *employers* teach willing young people any skills they do not already possess, and which the employers require, either directly (through apprenticeships or on-the-job training) or through the establishment of private schools emphasizing specialization in the required knowhow. That compulsory, tax-funded schools ought to serve as worker training facilities is surely an unacceptable situation in a society that has any pretenses of favoring freedom, as it explicitly makes corporate and/or bureaucratic interests the *raison d'être* of a coerced schooling process, thereby divesting parents of their responsibility and control over their own children in the name of mere economic efficiency. The deepest purpose of public school's standardized universal vetting process, collective submissiveness training, and arbitrary rules, has always been precisely to prepare children for socio-economic usefulness, to maintain "the proper social order," and to detach future workers from the sense of dignity and self-respect that might render them less willing to devote most of their waking lives to dull and demeaning tasks. Consider the following *apologia* for government schooling, offered by leading American education theorist William Torrey Harris in 1906, another quote made infamous by Gatto:

> Ninety-nine [students] out of a hundred are automata, careful to walk in prescribed paths, careful to follow the prescribed custom. This is not an accident but the result of substantial education, which, scientifically defined, is the subsumption of the individual."[11]

[11] Gatto, *UHAE*, 132.

In principle, the questions anyone who would defend public education in these terms must ask himself are these: Do I want to live in a society in which the interests or wishes of crony capitalists and government economic planners trump all other considerations in the raising of children? Do I want to live in a society in which such a hierarchy of interests is imposed coercively upon every human being? And do I want to live in a society in which the majority of adults have been successfully indoctrinated to accept their "proper place" in a micromanaged social order as their essential purpose in life?

"But *someone* has to do the less personally fulfilling jobs," one might object. That may be true, but it is hardly moral justification for forcing all children through a spiritual assembly line designed to find, hone, and polish society's useful drudgers. Many years ago, an acquaintance of mine was suddenly abandoned by his wife of just one or two years. Groping for an explanation, he considered the possibility that she regarded him as unable or unwilling to provide for her, to which thought he objected aloud, "I'd flip burgers for her!" For *her*—not for the ruling class, or out of a servile duty to an abstraction called a smooth-running economy. There is all the difference in the world between a man doing work that is essentially undesirable for the sake of love, and one doing such work because he has been trained to sacrifice his interests to those of his "betters." Recall Aristotle's observation about the proper motives of education—"if he does or learns anything for his own sake or for the sake of his friends or with a view to excellence, the action will not appear illiberal; but if done for the sake of others, the very same action will be thought menial and servile." Think of the Allied women who worked in munitions factories during World War II for another

example of the difference between the motive of personal interest and that of trained subservience.[12]

To demonstrate this difference with all the clarity in the world, let us return to William T. Harris, the first U.S. Commissioner of Education—true believer in German idealism, Fichte's theory of education, and Hegel's historical dialectic, and staunch advocate of compulsory schooling—for his explanation of the great moral advantage of large urban schools over small rural schools:

> There must be regularity and punctuality, silence and conformity to order, in coming and going. The whole school seems to move like a machine. In the ungraded [rural] school a delightful individuality prevails, *the pupil helping himself to knowledge by the use of the book*, and coming and going pretty much as he pleases, with no subordination to rigid discipline, except perhaps when standing in class for recitation.
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> Regularity, punctuality, silence, and conformity to order, military drill, seem at first to be so much waste of energy, necessary, it is true, for the large school, but *to be subtracted from the amount of force available for study and thought*. But the moment the question of moral training comes to be investigated, the superiority of the education given in the large school is manifest. The pupil is taught to be regular and punctual in his attendance on school and in all his movements, not for the sake of the school alone, but for all his relations to his fellow-men. Social combination is made possible by these semi-mechanical virtues. The pupil learns to hold back his animal impulse to chatter or whisper to his fellows and to

[12] See Pastor Richard Brown, "Female Munitions Workers in WWII" (November 8, 2010), http://www.clubrunner.ca/Data/7080/132/HTML/108963/FemaleMunitionsWorkers.pdf, for a typical example of the motives and experiences of those women.

> interrupt their serious absorption in recitation or study, and by so much self-restraint he begins to form a good habit for life. He learns to respect the serious business of others. By whispering he can waste his own time and also that of others. In moving to and fro by a sort of military concert and precision he acquires the impulse to behave in an orderly manner, *to stay in his own place and not get in the way of others*.[13] (Emphasis added.)

So one of compulsory schooling's most historically important advocates concedes that the arbitrary mass movement, uniformity, rigidity, and stifling of meaningful human communication in the large public school reduces the amount of "energy" available for study and thought. This intellectual reduction, however, serves a moral function, namely to stamp out the time-wasting "whispering" between people that distracts them from their silent work, and thereby to produce a "social combination," based on "semi-mechanical virtues," which functions not as a human society, but as an efficient machine in which each mechanical human-part "stays in his own place" for the sake of the smooth operation of the machine. (The great leap forward of Dewey's progressive schooling model was merely to achieve this same effect with less of the externally imposed "rigidity," by training the children to love the machine.)

Businesses that require employees with job-specific skills or knowledge should bear the responsibility for training those whom they would hire. And if there are jobs that insufficient numbers of freely educated people would willingly do under the conditions offered without having been coercively indoctrinated

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[13] William T. Harris, *Elementary Education*, in Nicholas Murray Butler, ed., Monographs on Education in the United States 3 (Albany, N.Y.: J.B. Lyon Company, 1904), 15-16.

to view their resistance to servility as selfish, then, in a non-authoritarian world, it would be the responsibility of employers—mere private citizens seeking to exchange value for value, like everyone else—to make the conditions more desirable. Would this submission to the principle of voluntarism, i.e., the lack of universal state-imposed worker training facilities, make national economies less productive and efficient? There is no way to know for sure, but I would guess that in the long run, economies might benefit from a more broadly distributed sense of practical freedom in pursuing personal goals, which would, in turn, entail a broadening of the entrepreneurial spirit, the likely result of allowing all children to be raised in an atmosphere in which their own well-being and happiness were the primary motives of their education. But if, on the other hand, the unleashed ethical pursuit of happiness (that is, of human nature) turns out to have implications or effects that might *diminish* collective economic productivity in favor of other societal priorities...well, then so be it. If you dislike this last point, and find my attitude of "examined life over material gratification" irksome, then you are welcome to live your own life according to another principle—as long as you do not seek to use the levers of government coercion to rig society as a treadmill of soulless material productivity *at the expense of other people's spiritual development*.

Objection 8. *Many parents lack the knowledge or skill to teach their own children.*

That is why, as long as there have been civilized societies, there have been schools or independent teachers of one sort or another, and presumably always will be. To return to my example of Korean education, I have often wondered how Korean society would change if the public schools were eliminated outright tomorrow, leaving non-home-based education entirely

in the hands of the private academies or tutors, thereby leaving children to learn academic subjects in a manner more typical of the world before universal compulsory schooling.

They would study at their own paces, regardless of age.

They would all receive personal attention and individualized guidance and assessment, rather than generic ranking based on meaningless age group comparisons.

Their schools would be free to focus on teaching them core knowledge without reference to standardized testing, meaning without the artificial ceiling of generic thresholds and markers of success, which would in turn allow schools to take chances on new goals, methods, or teaching materials, and to compete freely for students without the arbitrary limitation of always having to defer to government-mandated outcomes.

Their parents would be in complete control of the education process, and free to reassess their children's intellectual progress and seek out new teachers or methods at will, on a moment's notice.

Most importantly, those among them who were capable of writing essays in a second language at eleven years old could continue to progress along a similar path, unhampered by the retarding standards and narrowed avenues of the state's uniform vetting process, thereby achieving levels of real intellectual advancement that are impossible even to imagine for those teaching and learning under current restraints.

In short, the combination of educational freedom, personalized teaching, competition among educational models and schools, and parental control, would likely lead a society to a condition comparable to the early modernity outlined in my chapter on "Compulsory Mass Retardation"—the age of fifteen-year-old university scholars, twenty-four-year-old major philosophers and master poets, and thirty-year-old statesmen of sobriety,

intellectual depth, and vision. And with the added advantages of broader general prosperity and more thoroughly developed systems of republican politics, there is no telling how many more Humes, Popes, Keatses, and Jeffersons might find their way to full bloom, thus enriching communities to degrees that make Dewey's garden of individuality look like the kindergarten show-and-tell class that it has turned out to be.

Objection 9. *Many people who wish to educate their children at a private school cannot afford it.*

Let us leave aside for a moment everything history and reasoning have taught us about the potential of learning in non-school settings, at almost no expense, requiring only an older family member or guardian willing to foster an enthusiasm for reading and learning. The reason I have granted this objection its own space, separate from Objection 1, above, is that this particular notion—that private school is unaffordable for the majority—deserves attention beyond the more straightforward replies already offered, as it illuminates, in the saddest of ways, the principle of self-fulfilling doomsday prophecies on which progressivism thrives. The perception that children willing to learn would not be taught, or that poor parents wishing to have their children educated by others would have no recourse, has come to seem more real, and probably even to *be* more real, through the social distortions of compulsory public school itself.

Apart from all the directly harmful effects of the age of entitlement, perhaps its ugliest indirect (though not unintended) by-product is its erosion of the basic societal institutions that would previously have performed the role now presumptively ceded to government. In short, creating coercive state entitlements under the socialist rhetoric of overcoming capitalist greed and selfishness has greatly exacerbated private greed and selfish-

ness. Government healthcare and social security have produced generations that no longer feel responsible for the care of their own elderly family members. Likewise, welfare programs kill private charity and community projects of the sort that foster good will and a concern for the common good among citizens. This is the likely but rarely acknowledged reason why the "greedy Americans" are continuously at the top in international rankings of the most charitable people.[14] Their economy, and more importantly their national ethos, is the least socialized, so they feel least reliant upon government to ameliorate others' hardships, i.e., least dismissive of the call to individual virtue. Amusingly, but not surprisingly, this psychological effect is even noticeable within the United States herself, along party lines. The caring collectivist Democrats are far less charitable than the capitalist pig Republicans.[15] Were the Democrat-leaning states as generous as the Republican-leaning states, no country would even be close to the U.S. in international rankings of private charity. Liberality, magnanimity, and plain old fellow-feeling are inevitable victims of a public ethos built on coerced redistribution, where individuals gradually become more concerned with getting their fair share of the collective loot than with considering how they might share their own good fortune, and where everyone senses that someone else is taking care of the less fortunate, where "someone else" means "anyone but me" psychologically, and "the govern-

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[14] Cf. Adam Taylor, "Chart: The World's Most Generous Countries," at *The Washington Post* (November 19, 2014), available online at http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2014/11/19/chart-the-worlds-most-generous-countries/.

[15] Cf. Christopher Zara, "Charitable Giving By State: Are Republicans More Generous Than Democrats, Or Just More Religious?" in *International Business Times* (October 6, 2014), available online at http://www.ibtimes.com/charitable-giving-state-are-republicans-more-generous-democrats-or-just-more-religious-1700059.

ment" in reality. The politicization of benevolence entails the demoralization of individuals and, most obnoxiously, the conversion of giving and helping into politicized statements, or worse yet, political duties. The authoritarian impulse and smug self-righteousness are displacing individual virtue, the good, in the economy of human motivations.

We may see the same virtue- and community-killing effect resulting from the institution of school as an entitlement program, and for all the same reasons. Fichte himself, a university instructor in an age when professors were paid directly through tuition, is said to have been very generous in allowing promising students without means to listen to his lectures for free.[16] And why not? He wanted to teach, and young people wanted to hear his teaching—a natural match. Likewise with anyone else who cares about the dissemination of knowledge or ideas, at any level, and who finds people eager to learn, but lacking funds. Church-based schools, small private schools, home-based mini-private schools—all of these represent sensible options, typical of the pre-compulsory school era, that would unquestionably flourish over (very little) time in a freed education market, meaning one in which the state does not seek a monopoly on "affordable" (read absurdly expensive) education.[17]

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[16] *Addresses to the German Nation*, Introduction by G.H. Turnbull, xvi.

[17] See James Tooley, "Private Schools for the Poor," at *EducationNext* (Fall 2005 / Vol. 5, No. 4), for an inspiring account of how small private schools are thriving in some of the poorest slums on Earth, and outperforming their public counterparts in academic results. Available online at http://educationnext.org/privateschoolsforthepoor/. (I do not endorse all of Tooley's theories, and dislike his desire to marry his small schools project to international organizations such as the World Bank and international education conglomerates such as Pearson. That said, his research should come as a revelation to private school skeptics, and is already, happily, sending chills up the spines of state schooling defenders in Britain. See, for example,

To elaborate on this last point, let us return to the second half of Korean dictator Chun Doo-hwan's rationalization for banning private education—relieving the financial burden on families. This is the other side of the self-fulfilling prophecy element of authoritarianism. Make getting a desired good unnecessarily difficult by way of dictates, regulations, and monopolistic restrictions, and the cost of acquiring it will rise; soon only the wealthy will be able to afford it. New York's public school system annually spends $18,000 per student.[18] Needless to say, if parents had to pay that amount out of their pockets, the non-wealthy would be unable to do so. It does not follow, however, that if private alternatives were more readily available, and less regulated, only the wealthy would be able to afford a good education. On the contrary, almost anything would have to be more affordable than New York's notoriously clunky public system, and, before long, almost anything *would* be more affordable.

By way of analogy, had governments commandeered and tightly regulated the method of manufacturing and distributing personal computers back in 1980, when they were new, rare, and costly, they would still be rare and costly today. Instead, there are relatively few households in the developed world today that cannot afford to own a computer or three—and much *better* computers than the wealthiest man on the planet could have had on his desk in 1980. For the progressive, however, that fact is not

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"Professor James Tooley: A champion of low-cost schools or a dangerous man?" *The Guardian* [November 12, 2013], http://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/nov/12/professor-james-tooley-low-cost-schools.)

[18] Lam Thuy Vo, "How Much Does the Government Spend to Send a Kid to Public School?" at NPR's *Planet Money* (June 21, 2012), http://www.npr.org/sections/money/2012/06/21/155515613/how-much-does-the-government-spend-to-send-a-kid-to-school.

a satisfying case for freedom, as long as today's wealthy can still buy a state of the art model that the rest of us cannot afford. Better to force everyone to settle for 1980-level computers than to have everyone using far superior machines, but superior to unequal degrees.

Likewise with the progressive argument against private schools.

Objection 10. *Public schools teach more than mere academic or intellectual knowledge; they provide an ordered and carefully managed environment for socialization, which prepares children for life in society.*

Absolutely correct, and the ultimate argument I offer *against* allowing the state to control education. In fact, allow me to take this opportunity to emphasize once again that if the goal is, as it must be, to begin restoring the thoughts and sentiments that support liberty, then merely rescuing children from the progressives' physical buildings is not enough. Increased popular resistance to public schools will lead to increased state encroachments into the manner and method of home and private school education, particularly with regard to its moral content. Modern compulsory schooling was born of the essential progressive impulse, namely the drive to control and subjugate others. Preemptively limiting men's range of thought and choice has proved to be the most effective method of control and subjugation. And while, as we have seen, even strictly intellectual content may be used or abused to impede growth, the true heart of modern schooling is its inversion of natural moral development through the blunt force trauma of progressive prodding, pleasure, and propaganda, a.k.a. "socialization."

Knowing this, one would have to be extraordinarily naïve to imagine that statists will simply allow increasing numbers of

children to be raised entirely without the state's moral influence, which influence Fichte himself, two centuries ago, cited as the chief motive for the institution of government-controlled education. To restate a point made frequently throughout this analysis, one effect of *all* government schooling is to undermine the moral significance of the private family in the lives of children, who are to be reared not as individual souls seeking knowledge and happiness, but as the collective's submissive workers and (in democratic nations) its reliably manipulable mass of progressive voters. Given that this urge to destroy nature's shield against the state's complete absorption of the individual is the practical foundation of compulsory schooling, one should expect that any large-scale withdrawal from public schools will be met with direct mandates affecting the moral content of home education, i.e., the regulation of, and, where required, *disciplinary action against*, parents who wish to raise non-progressive children. This, after all, is the sensibility Dewey so admired among his Soviet colleagues, who defined Marxist-noncompliant parenting as a disease to be diagnosed and cured. Likewise today with Dewey's American public school heirs who, for example, seek the forced normalization of so-called transgenderism.[19] The moment denying access to girls' restrooms to any man who has chosen to "identify as" a woman today becomes firmly etched in the progressive tablet of forbidden attitudes, sexual nihilism becomes an officially protected social good that may no longer be questioned without drawing ostracism and investigation. From that moment on, one has every reason to fear edicts forcing homeschooling parents to teach this new "equal right" of gender self-identity to

[19] See my "Escape from Obama's transgender school bathrooms," at *American Thinker* (May 13, 2016), http://www.americanthinker.com/blog/2016/05/escape_from_obamas_transgender_school_bathrooms.html.

their children, regardless of their own personal beliefs on the matter.[20]

In sum, if enough families refuse to deliver their children to re-education camps, then the re-education camps will gradually be delivered to *them*—property rights, freedom of thought and association, and common sense be damned. If you still care about your children, your dignity, and the future of your civilization, you had better look this fact squarely in the eye, and take full and honest stock of all its implications.

Objection 11. *If education and civilization are in as bad a condition as you say, then how do you explain the modern world's unprecedented luxury, increased life expectancy, and technological progress?*

This question may be answered in three ways: psychologically, historically, and philosophically.

The psychological answer: The question exemplifies a common, and generally positive, human trait, namely looking at the bright side. However, we must be careful in this case not to mistake the bright side of life for an *effect* of the dim side. It does not follow from the fact that we have many good things that the underlying conditions of life are essentially good, or that we are in no danger. No one *tries* to slip on a banana peel; the moment before stepping on that peel, the walker is feeling fine, assuming nothing will interrupt his stride, and brimming with confidence in the path he has chosen. The certainty and comfort of his gait

[20] Cf. Susan Berry, "Homeschoolers Prepare to Defend Parental Rights After Supreme Court Same-Sex Marriage Ruling," at *Breitbart* (July 3, 2015), http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2015/07/03/homeschoolers-prepare-to-defend-parental-rights-following-supreme-court-same-sex-marriage-ruling/.

do nothing to diminish the reality of the banana peel, or the risk of injury should he continue walking toward it.

Consider a few simple, concrete examples of paths that seem awfully straight and smooth, as long as one avoids looking down to notice the banana peels:

Our technology is miraculous, cheap, and readily available, affording almost everyone access to endless sources of information and entertainment at the press of a button; and we have become a civilization of gluttonous passivity, with poor attention spans, weak memories, and little taste for the demanding, slow-developing, or profound.

The internet has wonderfully transformed the worlds of commerce and long-distance communication, punctured corporate oligopolies in news dissemination, and made the collected wisdom and literary art of civilization universally accessible from the comfort of our own homes; it has also opened the door to the creation of a global surveillance state the likes of which Orwell could not have imagined, effectively ending privacy and freedom of association in all but name.

The developed world has attained a level of economic prosperity that can grant manual laborers a measure of the authentic leisure and security that was possible only for the priestly caste in ancient Egypt—the leisure that, according to Aristotle, allowed the theoretical life to blossom first among that caste; and late modern man is becoming sated with his luxury, habituated to physical comfort and gain, and desirous only of more material gratification, achieved at ever-reduced costs to himself in effort, emotional engagement, and incurred responsibility.

We do not have the historical perspective at this time to decide whether our era will ultimately be remembered for the great boons of its rapid industrial-technological development, or for the horrendous abuses of natural freedom and man-made oppor-

tunity to which we have subjected one another through the agencies of this development. Centuries of philosophy, science, and statesmanship have realized some of the enormous practical and material potential of the emancipated human mind; and the very products of this emancipation have been exploited by sophists and tyrants to justify new manifestations of despotism which the pre-industrial world could never have imagined. At the heart of these manifestations of despotism is the concept of universal education as essentially a state function, and hence of human beings as essentially instruments of governmental ends, the very opposite of the political perspective that made our modern prosperity possible.

The historical answer: We seem to have a natural weakness for viewing ourselves in freeze-frame, rather than as parts of the continuum in which we are participants. This is perhaps an inevitable temptation for a species that grows in knowledge from particulars to universals—we see ourselves first, and must slowly learn to understand our place within the whole, including our moment's place within the whole of known time. This is why the progressive model of education, which aims to isolate the mind in its narrow present, and to focus our light only forward, is so dangerous. We critical theorists, historicists, and deconstructionists of systemic oppression are losing ourselves in our collective self-absorption and self-congratulation. That freeze-frame view of ourselves obscures the relation between present conditions and past developments, resulting in a tendency to attribute all desirable present effects to present causes.

Consider an analogy: A young man, thanks to hard work and family connections, gets a good job in a great company. He marries and starts a family. He earns a series of promotions that put him in a most comfortable income bracket. One day he goes to a casino with a few friends and catches a gambling fever. He

becomes increasingly obsessed with various forms of gambling, incurs increasingly dangerous debts, and becomes neglectful of his wife and children, his health, and his general well-being. Finally a friend challenges him about his behavior: "Look at yourself! You've stopped coaching your son's football team. You were teaching your daughter how to play the piano last year, but you've given that up because it interferes with your poker nights. You're getting fat, you're up to your eyeballs in debt, you're a nervous wreck, and you can barely drag yourself to work each day. It's obvious your life is unraveling, but you just can't see it because you're so caught up in your gambling addiction. If you don't make some radical decisions immediately and turn your situation around, you could lose everything."

Indignant, and defensive of his self-destructive addiction, the man answers: "What are you talking about? I gamble because it's fun. I have the money to take a few risks, so where's the harm? True, my bank account is a little depleted at the moment, but it's probably still better than yours. I still have my job, my wife, and two healthy kids. I know my luck is bound to turn around soon, and I'll start rebuilding some of the lost funds. When that happens, I plan to send my daughter to a great piano teacher, so she won't miss my lessons a bit. My wife is great with the kids, so there's nothing to worry about there. As for my health, I'm still young, I feel okay, and my blood pressure medication is taking care of the rest. Anyway, you only live once!"

The man's friend is looking at the trajectory of his life, encompassing both its past successes and its present deterioration. The man himself is gathering up the remaining morsels of his past achievement as evidence that nothing fundamental has been lost. They are looking at the same current conditions, but the friend is seeing the present within a moving continuum,

whereas the deteriorating man is clinging to a convenient illusion of stasis. In effect, he is perceiving the past as the present.

The question—"If education and civilization are in as bad a condition as you say, then how do you explain the modern world's unprecedented luxury, increased life expectancy, and technological progress?"—indicates that one is perceiving the residue of modernity's past successes and achievements as a static present. One might as well attribute Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony to Hitler and Stalin, or Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* to Theoderic the Great's jailers. The tyrant's attempt to stifle challenging new thoughts cannot always be as airtight as comprehensive social control would require. That deficiency of tyranny should not be mistaken for the encouragement of ideas. Compulsory school—particularly in democratic societies with lingering echoes of the classical liberal tradition—cannot always produce as complete an indoctrination to obedience and servitude as its overseers would like. That failure should not be confused with the promotion of individual initiative and well-being. The deepening gloom of progressive tyranny should not be obscured by those stubborn rays of past liberty that continue to brighten our day-to-day lives.

The philosophical answer: Let us return for a moment to Hugh Auld's objection to his wife's teaching the alphabet to their child slave, Frederick Douglass. Specifically, let us focus more closely on the details of Auld's argument: "He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master. As to himself, it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It would make him discontented and unhappy." I contend that the two seemingly distinct points Auld makes here are not separate arguments, but rather complementary elements of one overall belief. The literate slave would become unmanageable and of no value to his master. Why? Because his new knowledge would

make him discontented and unhappy with his lot in life. That is to say, Auld's objection to teaching a slave to read was grounded in his understanding that a discontented and unhappy slave is a less useful and controllable slave.

The notion of a contented slave may run counter to today's politically correct presuppositions, because our understanding of slavery has become inseparable from right-thinking sensitivities about racism. That is, slavery is now spoken of merely as the extreme manifestation of racial prejudice. Hence, the idea of a contented slave seems as incoherent and untenable as that of a contented lynching victim. This conceptual fuzziness is perhaps an inevitable outcome for an age that has, for reasons of unenlightened self-interest, obscured the lessons of our modern forebears concerning the ultimate meaning of property—namely *self-ownership*—while at the same time embracing paternalistic governance, with its intrinsic presumption of natural inequality, as its political status quo. Such an age, having forfeited the two key points of justice relevant to the issue of slavery—the roots of property and the belief in natural equality—has no consistent *principled* grounds for objecting to slavery; thus it is only by reducing slavery to an alternative word for racism that we can maintain our repugnance to it without having to explain ourselves in terms that have become inconvenient from our progressive point of view.

As a result of this conceptual shift, however, an important lesson in the art of slave ownership has been lost—the one highlighted by Douglass, who experienced it firsthand—thus depriving us of an essential insight into our modern smorgasbord of luxury and progress. The key to keeping a slave working and producing, rather than doubting and rebelling, is to foster in him the feeling that his life could not be otherwise, and hence that his permissible moments of ease, and even pleasure, are sufficient

recompense for his hardships. In short, one must try to keep the slave content and "happy," by never allowing him to perceive the difference between pleasure and freedom, between satiety and self-determination; for a slave who once perceived this difference would likely begin to crave the latter at the expense of the former, as Douglass began to do upon hearing his master's argument:

> These words sank deep into my heart, stirred up sentiments within that lay slumbering, and called into existence an entirely new train of thought. It was a new and special revelation, explaining dark and mysterious things, with which my youthful understanding had struggled, but struggled in vain. I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty—to wit, the white man's power to enslave the black man. It was a grand achievement, and I prized it highly. From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom.[21]

The most effective oppression is that which is perceived by its victim as a law of nature; the surest means of sustaining this illusory perception, as Fichte taught us, is pleasure. The contented slave, never fully cognizant of the unnaturalness of the conditions under which he labors, and therefore essentially *willing* to remain on the plantation, is the proper goal of the forward-looking slave owner.

On April 16, 2014, the ferry, *Sewol*, capsized off the coast of South Korea. Four hundred and seventy-six passengers and crew were aboard, including three hundred and twenty-five high school students on a school trip. Although the accident occurred during daylight hours, not far from land, and although the ship listed and creaked off-balance for a considerable time before

[21] Douglass, 35.

capsizing, there were only one hundred and seventy-two survivors. These included the captain and most of his crew—but only seventy-five of the students. In the immediate aftermath of the event, there was naturally outrage over the murderous cowardice of the captain and his crewmen who abandoned ship without attempting to rescue their trapped passengers.[22] There was also, however, another strain of concern among Koreans in the early days after the disaster, a concern that in the end was perhaps more profound in its implications than the questions regarding the captain and crew: Why did most of the students, primarily healthy, intelligent sixteen-year-olds, simply obey the crew's instructions to remain below in their cabins beyond the point when it should have been obvious that doing so endangered their lives?

Embedded in this painful, soul-searching question was a half-conscious understanding that the answer would somehow be related to the nexus between Korea's social structure and the education model through which it is perpetuated.

Korea's public schools have achieved a relatively amicable marriage of the two perspectives on the political utility of compulsory schooling that tend to pose as irreconcilable rivals in the West: the rigidly standardized, quantified vetting system, and the Deweyan alternative universe of mass socialization. Korea is living proof that these two approaches are not really the diametrical opposites their proponents would like you to believe they are, but merely two sides of the same collectivist-utilitarian coin. Children are raised to feel implicitly that the school is the world, from which it follows that the school's goals are the meaning of life. In practice, this means (a) striving to achieve

[22] See my "Captains Uncourageous," at *American Thinker* (April 21, 2014), http://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2014/04/captains_uncourageous.html.

one's proper rank within a vetting process narrowly focused on a uniform and demeaning conception of human worth: promotion to the "best" middle school, the "best" high school, the "best" university, the "best" company or government office, such that being slotted into one's proper role in the economy becomes the essence of education, and falling short of any of the "bests" along the way—the fate of the majority, of course—entails permanently diminished human worth; and (b) learning through immersion in this factory process that accepting its outcome, and one's place within it, is one's primary moral duty, and the ultimate meaning of being socialized.[23]

One recent December, the "English Club" from a local high school, about twenty-five teenagers, requested permission to visit my undergraduate presentation skills class. As that day's class was going to be devoted to a few of my students' final presentations of the semester, I told our visitors to feel free to join in the question period following each presentation. The theme of our final presentations was "Happiness." One presenter argued for the importance of not allowing social perceptions of your goals or decisions to overwhelm your search for the best life, and specifically recommended that people who feel they are

[23] People often attribute Korea's sickeningly high suicide rate to its hard-driving school and work culture. I suspect this represents a half-truth at best. Korea's social vetting process, aimed at economic utility and moral submissiveness, is in principle no different from that of all other developed countries in the modern world. The high-pressure work ethic and its concomitant suicide rate are, I believe, the result of superimposing the goals of paternalistic utilitarianism upon a society deeply rooted in family honor. In short, Koreans, unlike their Western counterparts, have not yet learned to accept their social placement and interchangeability passively. In this respect, the socialization aspect of their schooling has failed. When they stop driving so hard to achieve the top rank at school, you will know they have given up their dignity at last—as the smooth operation of the progressive machine requires them to do, and as most people in the West have already done.

succumbing to the influence of such perceptions force themselves to "take a break" from their current efforts and anxieties, in order to refocus on their true long-term interests. After the presentation, a very bright high school student asked, most earnestly, "How can I follow that advice? I'm a student; I *can't* take a rest from studying." His meaning was clear to all present: For a Korean student, there is no escape from the treadmill, no other way to live.

By very peculiar chance, I happened to have two students in my class who had dropped out of high school—products who had rebelled against the assembly line, almost unheard of in Korea—and only years later, having lived outside the system for a while, found their way into university. One of them, a man of twenty-six, tried to persuade the high school student that in reality he could gain some control over his destiny if he wanted to, but the teenager was not buying it. Confronted with real live adults who had actually chosen alternative paths in life in defiance of the standardizing machinery, this manifestly intelligent and thoughtful young man simply could not accept the truth before his eyes. He *had to* do what was demanded of him by his teachers, he *had to* accept the rules of his country's vetting process, and he *had to* accept the fate this process doled out to him.

This young man will eventually become a university senior who giggles with a combination of confusion and embarrassment when you ask him if he hopes to marry soon, as though such a thing were unthinkable for someone of his tender age. He will then spend fifty to sixty hours a week at the bland office job that has been the central purpose of his life since kindergarten. He will watch mind-numbing, sub-adolescent comedy programs on Sunday nights—not because he thinks they are funny, but because everyone watches them, and also as a means of burying his anxiety about Monday, with its routine of kowtowing to his

superiors in the hopes of ingratiating his way to the promotion he needs if he is to save money for his marriage, at thirty-two, to a woman he will openly tell you he doesn't love as much as he remembers loving the girls he dated in university, but whom his parents have urged him to marry because he must produce grandchildren within the next two years. He may live for years apart from his wife—from whom he is increasingly likely to become estranged, and then divorced—in order to earn more money to provide for his children's successful progress through the same factory school system, and to provide the endless high-tech toys and time-killing gadgets which serve the same purpose in the public school student's life that those idiotic comedy programs serve in his, namely as moral tranquilizers.

We know that as the *Sewol* listed and slowly capsized, most of the sixteen-year-old "children" sat obediently in their cabins. They nervously played smartphone games, sent cute messages to friends and family, and took pictures of one another in lifejackets. The grown-ups told them to stay where they were, so they stayed. The experts said they were correcting the problem, so they believed it. Their superiors ordered them not to try to save themselves, so they did not try—until it was too late.

Those superiors, the captain and many of his crew, were officially responsible for the security of their passengers. They were bound by moral and legal duty to protect the interests of their charges at all costs. But they did not help the passengers to escape. Nor did they encourage the people whose lives they had put in jeopardy to act independently and save themselves. They told the students to stay in their cabins, and then, when it was apparent that the ferry could not be righted, they abandoned ship, leaving their obedient dependents trapped, buried at sea.

In the early days after the disaster, Korea was shaken by sadness and horror out of our age's universal moral numbness,

and into that realm of heightened emotion and supervening sensitivity that can sometimes lead to sudden accesses of self-discovery. For an all too brief moment, Koreans rediscovered the poetry in life. They almost instinctively hit upon the metaphor in this tragedy, the figurative sense that illuminates the literal world with a light that prefigures real understanding: That ship was their nation; its fate, theirs.

Then the moment passed. The *Sewol* disaster became a real-life Orwellian Two Minutes Hate, with the captain and owner of the ferry serving as a pair of Goldsteins. It also became a platform for political grandstanding, with opposition parties and their supporters trying to pin the accident, and even the criminality, on the governing Saenuri Party. The moment of self-discovery was lost—indeed, the fury of the invective that displaced any serious soul-searching in the public discussion was suggestive of a psychological defense mechanism, or a convenient distraction. The light of truth, in this case, was too painful to examine further, so the Koreans allowed it to flicker out.

Now, predictably, the worst has happened: The tragedy has been incorporated into the paradigm of the status quo. A year after the disaster, I attended a pops concert at which the final item on the program was a piece of pop-tearful schmaltz dedicated to the *Sewol* victims, accompanied on a screen behind the orchestra by a slickly sentimental barrage of stream of consciousness animation celebrating the dear memory, not so much of the dead, but of the nation's collective sadness. The music, and even more so the animated images of crying teenagers, empty school uniforms, and heart-shaped tears, reveled in mock melancholy and ersatz wistfulness over the lost students, inviting the audience to congratulate itself for feeling so deeply, for regretting so earnestly. The music ended, the audience applauded, and then they turned on their smartphones, checked their chat messages,

and carried on with their Saturday night plans. Korean life looks fine, with the *Sewol* story now just another part of the nation's comforting, sentimental self-portrait.

And here we rediscover our own poetic imaginations, and our own analogy. For as the tragedy that briefly revealed Truth has become just another layer of Korea's self-satisfied cocoon, so has Korea become the world. We are all wont to look at our advanced amusements, treasures, and gratifications, and say, "Well, a society that can provide me with all this must be doing alright." And so we take pictures of ourselves as a cold, merciless sea progressively engulfs us. Meanwhile, the captain and crew up above reassure themselves that *they* are safe.

How happy we look, how innocent, and how trusting.

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Conclusion

I began this examination of the meaning, sources, and history of public education with the young Benjamin Disraeli's famous description of state schooling as "tyranny in the nursery." Should we not be surprised, then, that Disraeli himself, barely a generation later, became a leading player in the development of his own nation's compulsory school laws, relenting at last before the global push to "insure implicit obedience" to paternal government, as he had once put it?

No—or no more surprised than we should be to see what has gradually become of the entire civilized world since German idealism began its siege against Western thought and classical liberalism. Philosophical ideas are that potent. Politics and public sentiment, history's proximate movers, are merely the playthings of ideas. Powerful thoughts, gradually disseminated, create societal waves whose impetus may be irreversible until they have exhausted themselves, perhaps only after having eroded much in their path that had once seemed immovable. Disraeli's eroded principles on government schooling are a microcosm of the fate of late modern man. We have collectively given up the ghost—human nature—before the promise of a tidily micromanaged life, slowly trading away reason, freedom, and morality for the comforting, enslaving, protective embrace of the state.

In calling for private action against public education, I have made a special appeal to the Hamlets among us, and particularly to those inclined to object, "But it's too late to save civilization

now." Allow me to say more directly, here at the end, that I do not disagree with that sentiment. It may truly be too late, a judgment some will regard as fatalistic, but only because they have been trained to political near-sightedness, as have we all, to some extent. We may be living modernity's final scene. The main action having come and gone, our loss complete, we merely await a Fortinbras to issue his final lament on our fate.

Europe, the spiritual fount of modernity itself, and of the era's defining glories—political equality, economic liberty, the dignity of the individual, all supported by the twin miracles of unleashed science and ennobling art of unprecedented sophistication—has been eagerly pursuing its own demise for a hundred nihilistic years. Today, the continent that bequeathed us this civilization, with its elevating religion, its novels, its symphonies, and its philosophies of freedom, subsists as a crumbling café for aging pseudo-intellectuals. Having gradually devised and disseminated the theoretical means to its own and the world's undoing, our global-benefactor-cum-pompous-hothouse-flower, in its impractical vanity and its socialist self-emasculation, has placed itself at the mercy of any slightly militarized nation, faction, or household that should happen to form designs on its territory, geographical or mental. As medieval Islamism rears its fanatical head, and resumes cutting off those of the infidels, the European café's leading big thinkers and big-thinking leaders seek to outdo one another with eloquent declarations of surrender. Europe, home of the Christian enrichment and elevation of women, now responds to uncivilized hordes of men molesting and mutilating girls in the name of religion by warning its own daughters not to provoke the madmen, and certainly not to complain about their actions. (That the most prominent voice in Europe's world-historical cowering before Islamism is a German, a woman, and

the leader of a Christian political party, is powerful proof that God enjoys a good joke.)

Meanwhile, Russia, somewhat foolishly thought tamed by the brutalities of three generations of Marxist internationalist leadership, lives in thrall to a thuggish demagogue whose smug self-assurance has captured his humbled nation's hearts and hopes. Though a lifelong member of the very establishment that destroyed their country, he has nevertheless subverted their nascent democratization with romantic imagery of renewed greatness, and has begun to encroach upon his neighbors, and to seize the global initiative from an America neutered—economically, militarily, and spiritually—after several years of fundamental transformation by, of all things, its own homegrown cadre of Marxist internationalists.

China, the only major one-party state willing to learn from its mistakes, has temporarily forsaken the failed Maoist methods still idealized by many Western intellectuals and activists, in favor of adopting a facsimile of the corporatist economic model of the New World's progressive century. Hence, paradoxically, as the totalitarian state slowly conditions its population to the subtler enslavements of soft despotism—a "free market" without private property rights, consumerism without self-ownership, freedom of movement without genuine self-determination—so the ostensibly free world is racing headlong in the opposite direction, right into the oppressions of full-on Maoist tyranny: effective one-party rule, with elections orchestrated as public performance only; government regulation of, and retribution against, politically undesirable speech and thought; university reconstituted as society's attitude-correction cooperative and government activist training center; and the aggressive fostering of moral and political self-censorship, achieved through ubiquitous surveillance and social exposure, micromanagement of

public pieties via government child-rearing and state-compliant mass media, and the constant threat of public ostracism for those accused of displaying any of an ever-growing list of attitudes deemed unprogressive.

Throughout the so-called democratic world, from East to West, men have been conditioned, through generations of progressive ideology, propaganda, and coercion, into accepting what we might euphemistically call an instrumentalist view of their own lives and significance. That is to say, they have grown to accept that they are merely someone else's tools, and that this is as it should be—in fact, that there is no conceivable alternative.

"*Of course* the state should have first claim on the fruits of my labor, and the right to determine how much I shall be permitted to keep for my own use; after all, I work for the collective. *Of course* the state should decide how and whether I may pursue medical treatment for my physical ailments or those of my loved ones, and control the timing and limits of such treatment; after all, I live at the whim and mercy of the state. *Of course* my exchanges of goods and services with my fellow citizens must be conducted according to state directives regarding how and with whom I may engage in such transactions; after all, my choice to partake in 'economic activity' is a tacit relinquishing of all private conscience and preferences to the state, which owns and operates the 'market.' *Of course* the ends and means of all child-rearing—that is, of the development and dissemination of knowledge, morality, and life goals throughout my society—must be determined and overseen by the state; after all, only the state has the expertise and resources to manage the vitally important task of cultivating cells for the social mind and workers for collective progress. For who else but the state itself would know best how to prepare people for the lives it requires of them? And who else but

the state should have final say in the use and disposal of its own rightful property, namely us?"

Such is the reasoning of very late modernity, civilization on its death bed. Finally too tired to fight, bereft of noble aspirations or desires, she craves only the ease of non-resistance, while she drifts gradually into the semi-conscious haze of the peaceful, collective, mutual parasitism of today's progressive totalitarian world—our brilliantly conceived artificial substitute for the war of all against all that Hobbes believed would result from the breakdown of civil society. To be more precise, the great coup of progressivism's reversal of nature is precisely that civil society did *not* break down; rather, it was incrementally starved until it withered away, leaving in its wake only the omnipotent state itself—the antithesis of civility—to stand, with the reassuring smile of a palliative care doctor, between aging modernity and the prospect of a painful struggle for survival. Civilization, weary of life, is willing itself to sleep.

But what of The United States of America, for generations the final spiritual home of all people of any nation who believed in liberty and the promise of modernity? Her fate was perhaps sealed in a manner befitting a land built on the principle of self-determination. In 2012, a major world-historical shift was, for the first time, propelled by a democratic election, as America put liberty itself to a plebiscite. Faced with the choice of re-electing or rejecting a Marxist president supported by the Communist Party, who had promised to "fundamentally transform" (read "eviscerate") her, and then spent his first term aggressively fulfilling that promise, America opted, in a free vote, to let him finish the job. With that vote, modern civilization's last sentinel officially stood down. As of this writing, she faces an upcoming presidential election in which one of the two mainstream parties staged a nomination contest between a seventy-four-year-old socialist

whose voter base consisted of radicalized youth protesting for free tuition, free abortions, and free drugs, and a sixty-nine-year-old authoritarian elitist despised and distrusted even by most of her supporters. Meanwhile, the other major party, in its zeal to crush its hated constitutionalist minority—liberty's dying voice—has pursued a devil's gambit, ceding whatever remained of its conscience to the personality cult of a narcissistic sociopath, a lifelong supporter of the governing establishment who, like the Russian strongman he admires, has rebranded himself as an outsider promising to renew the country's greatness. The party leaders calculated that if this lunatic candidacy imploded, they would be able to sweep in with a handpicked savior who could not have won the support of the party's freedom-loving grassroots through normal channels, while if it survived, they would still have achieved their primary mission of quashing the last-gasp constitutionalist uprising, in defense of their beloved progressive status quo.

In short, the nation of Washington and Jefferson, modernity's great political achievement, is being roughly shepherded by its bipartisan ruling establishment into the false trichotomy of progressive mobocracy, progressive plutocracy, and progressive suicide cult. America's long, slow descent appears to be accelerating into a death spiral.

Neither exceptional foresight nor exceptional pessimism is required to observe that the world's short-term political prospects—and by short-term I mean at least the next three or four generations—are bleak. Our age's foundation, which may still have felt solid as recently as 1900, when post-idealist progressivism was just beginning to gush freely from its academic hegemony down into political dominance, is now, to adapt a Churchillian construction, a mire resting in a bog within a swamp. Today, with self-erasure masquerading as philosophy, infantilism

as morality, animalism as love, and fantasy IOUs and indoctrinated serfdom as a global economy, there appears to be no traversable path back to reason.

All, however, is not lost. Civilizations do decline and fall; to believe ours will be the exception is to give credence to the defining folly of progressivism. But the death of a civilization is not the death of mankind. Humanity continues, and a fresh round begins. The intervals of decay and tilling that inevitably occur between history's peaks of cultivation and discovery are not mere empty spaces. They are spanned by the lives of real human beings. We are, so it seems, the first generation in such an interval. This unfortunate position in no way absolves us of the responsibility of carrying on with life to the best of our abilities, regardless of immediate practical efficacy. Someone must do the tilling.

We have, first of all, a responsibility to our own souls, which in the long run is a duty more pressing than any historical struggle, for the eternal outweighs the temporal in significance as surely as the material outweighs the immaterial in bulk. But to care for your soul means to pursue the happiness suited to human nature to whatever extent is possible within your practical circumstances. In a more rational time, that pursuit might include direct political action aimed at supporting or strengthening the institutions of earthly freedom and justice. When general social deterioration has reached levels that seem to render such action futile, however, we are forced to retreat from the failed apparatus of common welfare to the private task of attending to the well-being of those souls within our immediate range of effectiveness and affection. In other words, we turn to education, which is both our noblest natural means of caring for ourselves and one another, and the only plausible path to any future restoration of civilized life.

A man sentenced to an indefinite prison term can do no better than use his period of confinement to set about improving his mind and character. If he is never released, he will nevertheless have made the happiest use of his time and energy. If he *is* released, he will reenter society a better man, more prepared to live well. Such is the standard of life and choice before us today—and by "us," I mean those who refuse to relinquish their minds to tyranny, whatever may be imposed upon their bodies.

I have just given a capsule account of the death of modern politics. But politics, however inescapable in practical fact, is not the essence of life, a heartening truth never more apparent, nor indeed *truer*, than when one has the good fortune to encounter another human being in the one realm most capable of transcending our contemporary political ruins, namely the realm of thought and learning. For all the hopeless moral collectivism, economic despotism, and irrational progressivism definitive of our age taken as a whole, there always remains the unique individual, at least in theory touchable beyond all those barriers our ruling establishments have created to prevent or dilute natural human contact.

Socrates, in the hours before his execution by poisoning, sat in his cell discussing the immortality of the soul with his friends. The pleasures of rational thought and the enrichment of the beautiful souls in his midst were his final rebuttal to the (democratic) state that, by condemning him to die, had exerted its ultimate power over his physical existence. His soul remained unharmed, and his final efforts were aimed at ensuring that his students might achieve a similar victory.

Modern political injustice may be more insidious and pervasive than anything conceived of by our ancient predecessors. For today's authoritarians have solved the riddle of Socrates, discovering that true social control requires imprisoning the

souls, rather than merely the bodies, of one's victims. They have learned that if a true man may never be completely subdued, then the key to lasting power is to subvert the natural development of true men. And yet even now, nature is capable of prevailing to some degree, in however diminished a form. I have enjoyed friendly relations with individuals, including students, from every region of the world I have just described as fully or incipiently tyrannical. When I teach John Locke to Chinese graduate students, help a Russian military reservist improve the logic of his argumentative writing, or advise a French girl struggling to adjust to life as a foreign student in Asia, there is no political abyss between us, no death of civilization thwarting our conversation. Such direct human contact, the most natural thing in the world, is still somewhat possible, even during a moment of political decay, and though always filtered through the nature-suffocating veil of universal educational suppression.

Souls, in their highest nature, are apolitical. The specific threat of government schooling, as I hope to have shown, is that its founding purpose and practical effect is to restrict access to that highest nature, precisely in order to prevent the emergence of the most liberating thoughts, and the most spiritual community, which belong to that realm beyond politics. The danger of that realm, to the paternalist, is that it reveals to men their natural aim—the true human good—and therefore clarifies for them the proper uses and limits of political power, which in turn exposes progressive authoritarianism as the unnatural scheme it has always been. This is why all progressive states feel the urgent need to curtail or filter the most intimate natural contact between human minds, particularly as this contact might affect the young. Children must never be exposed to pleasures that form habits of private virtue and intellectual longing, for such habits may become insurmountable obstacles to the complete social control

the totalitarian craves. The oppressive fetters of which Humboldt wisely warned, and which he predicted would "compress men together into vast uniform masses," were, and are, specifically fetters on the mind.

There will be no large-scale political revival for this age until a substantial plurality of minds have broken free of the artificial spiritual restraints of government schooling, and rediscovered the natural world of intellectual freedom which is our birthright, but which has long been concealed from us. To cultivate that revival, we must first prepare the soil, a task which, though requiring patience, is most rewarding. To teach a young mind over the head of the state is implicitly to reassert the proper hierarchy of social existence, in which government is our servant, rather than our master. This, in fact, was the great wisdom of modern political philosophy before progressivism overturned it to make way for unrestrained will to power. A return to nature in this all-important regard demands, above all else, families prepared to deny the state's claim on the souls of their children—not to deny it merely in theory, but to deny it in practice.

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