

What is the Purpose of an Education?

*“Bees cull their several sweets from this flower and that blossom, here and there where they find them, but themselves afterwards make the honey, which is all and purely their own ... so the several fragments he borrows from others, will transform and shuffle together to compile a work that shall be absolutely his own....”*¹ Montaigne (1580)

Paraphrasing John Stuart Mill, Frederick Hess² stated, *“The State’s interest is making sure that we have educated citizens who are equal to the requirements.”* (2023)

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Applied Education Foundation
Promoting Education in the Useful Arts & Sciences

¹ Student portfolios – in contrast to assessment test scores – showing their individual work at the end of twelve years of effort, could be their honey.

² Director of Education Policy Studies at the American Enterprise Institute.

³ In this and all my other essays, I will periodically add applicable supplemental information as new information becomes available. Therefore, this published year refers to its first release to the public.

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Introduction

What is education supposed to accomplish? First and foremost, it is to help prepare citizens to be self-determined. Otherwise they may become a burden to society due to social maladjustment that manifests in countless ways; or they may be easily manipulated by influential and deceitful people who prey on the less fortunate. In being able to provide for themselves, citizens subsequently contribute to social wealth and harmony.

Another thing education is to provide citizens is the knowledge of living in a free society, under a constitutionally representative government, respecting the rule of law, and in a free market economic system so they may help steer it in the right direction, either as informed citizens or as representatives.

The purpose of education must include the ability to pursue an economic livelihood of one's choosing. It should be seen as a symbiotic concept in that the individual requires a career that provides an income sufficient to support a healthy life on one side of the equation, yet education also needs to train individuals to be useful to a country's economy and social well-being. LaPrade et al. (2019, p. 1) sum it up well:

Skilled humans fuel the global economy. ... Throughout economic history, talented humans have been a source of innovation and advancement – their skills the impetus for economic growth. ...

The labor force has a significant impact on national and regional economic vitality. Without skilled workers, organizations struggle to innovate, deliver value to citizens and shareholders, grow their businesses, and create new jobs. ...

Regional economies lacking sufficient quantities of skilled workers struggle to retain and recruit industries that provide high-skilled and high-paying jobs. Regions left with mainly lower-skilled, lower-wage jobs can subsequently experience a drop in GDP, reduced tax revenues, and increased dependence on public services.

This is a concept largely missing from the U.S. education system. The report goes on to address the need for both technical and behavioral skills.

To expand upon this, the purpose of education must also include the ability to efficiently and effectively research information when faced with challenges; the ability to reason and see multiple angles (*perspective*, or as it is referred to in science, *frame of reference*) to challenges; the ability to transfer learning in order to innovate and resolve challenges; enable individuals to discover or learn things for themselves (e.g., using heuristic techniques); and the ability to be agile and adapt⁴ to overcome life's challenges. All other

⁴ See <https://forbesbooks.com/adaptability-quotient/> to better understand the importance of adaptation. While this article addresses it from an institutional perspective, institutions are made up of people who are the ones that must adapt. The Industrial Revolution in Britain and the U.S. demonstrates populations with significant numbers of citizens capable of high levels of adaptation. It is significant to note that this was before public education commandeered our youths' formative years with college preparation.

educational pursuits may be supportive, but at the secondary school level, they are subordinate to this general effort. This is what life demands of us, even though some, such as academics, may be insulated from it.

* * *

The question, what is the purpose of an education? – in very general terms – is a complicated one since it means different things to different people, demonstrating there can be no one-size-fits-all approach. In essence, education must be as complex as society since it is to prepare individuals for participation in it. However, at the personal level, what education means is an individual concern that is as unique as individuals may be, and individuals are free to expand their minds as far and wide as they desire once the fundamentals are acquired.

Yet, when it becomes a social or public question, this narrows things down considerably since there are very general needs that every citizen has in common, which is a thorough grounding in literacy and numeracy at the primary level. As individuals advance in education there are still common elements everyone needs, such as the understanding of civics – an absolute necessity in a free republic – and preparing for an economic livelihood. However, there are those in the educational establishment that assert education is to develop a well-rounded person⁵. While this is a noble objective, academia has lost sight of what it means to pursue a “noble” life. I think this becomes self-evident when we see how miserably education fails in this goal. Instead of providing an undercurrent of virtuous development in individuals, academics, especially in post-secondary education, inculcate nihilism, which is the antithesis of virtue and nobility.

A Valued Place

Herrnstein and Murray (1994) asked: What is the role of education in our society and how best can we achieve it?

How should policy deal with the twin realities that people differ in intelligence for reasons that are not their fault and that intelligence has a powerful bearing on how well people do in life? The answer turns us back to the ancient concern with place.

The broadest goal is a society in which people throughout the functional range of intelligence can find, and feel they have found, a valued place for themselves. For ‘valued place,’ we offer a pragmatic definition: You occupy a valued place if other people would miss you if you were gone. The fact that you would be missed means that you were valued. ... One way of thinking about policy options is to ask whether they aid or obstruct this goal of creating valued places. (p. 535)

⁵ See Gewertz, Nov. 15, 2017:

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/high_school_and_beyond/2017/11/college_leaders_preparing_students_for_careers_isnt_top_priority.html?cmp=eml-contshr-shr

Herrnstein and Murray's book, *The Bell Curve*, was an excellent work, but its fundamental perspective was based on a flawed theory of measuring IQ in order to explain the order of society. While IQ may very well predict school outcomes due to the *optimization effect* that has evolved, it does not effectively measure economic outcomes of individuals. However, there is a caveat to this: Society has become addicted to credentials, so it stands to reason that if one's future is dependent on a credential and if credentials are controlled by a bureaucratic monopolistic system, individuals will need to possess a certain *type(s)* of intelligence to make it through the funnel-effect bureaucracies and monopolies always create. But individuals who are not crushed by the weight of this system and who discover their talents and pursue them with gusto, are not too infrequently far more successful than many with credentials, which reveals the flaw in using IQ to measure "intelligence" and attempt to predict outcomes – in particular, economic outcomes. People with credentials are taught to think within a box while those who are rejected by the credentialing establishment frequently think outside the box, which is where innovations and inventions frequently come from.

Addressing the question "What is the purpose of an educational system?" is the starting point in redesigning education to fit the *real* versus *artificial* needs of individuals, which in turn serves society. "Real" must be distinguished from "artificial" since our current system is, for the most part, grounded in artificial *status*-oriented credentials that serve primarily to act as a test for literacy and numeracy skills in contrast with sound foundational instruction in useful knowledge that serves individuals and society. As just one piece of evidence, we know this is true because the Gallup/Lumina poll (2015) reveals the vote of no confidence in a college degree by the general public and college graduates.⁶ Therefore, it is extremely important to determine what is required to make an educational system function properly for its intended purpose. What that purpose is must be defined.

Peterson (interview on April 2019, published on Feb. 2, 2020, at 1 hour and 11 minutes into the interview) speaks to the subject of "value" in the case of a "valued goal," which gives an individual hope in making something more of himself. He points out that positive emotion is achieved by moving toward the valued goal in contrast to attainment. "It's not satisfaction that motivates people, it's hope! There's a special neurophysiological circuit that mediates hope and it activates when it observes that you're moving toward a valued goal. The more the valued the goal and the faster your progress towards it, the more the circuit is activated." Peterson explains that this is part of what the "higher" in "higher education" is meant to bring out of people.

Morality in a Free Society

"The worth of a state, in the long run, is the worth of the individuals composing it."

John Stuart Mill

⁶ "Only 13% of Americans strongly agree college graduates in this country are well-prepared for success in the workplace." Only 6% of college graduates agree with this statement.

<http://www.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/182867/america-no-confidence-vote-college-grads-work-readiness.aspx>

The purpose of an education system is, very generally speaking, to prepare individuals for citizenship in a free society and a self-determined economic life grounded in ethical behavior. Of course, preparation for citizenship in a free society and ethical behavior go hand in hand since freedom is not possible where morality is absent. A totalitarian dictatorship would then be required to restrain a licentious populace.

If citizens are ill prepared for liberty, they will not be able to discern the potential negative ramifications of their actions upon society. They will perceive liberty as meaning “I can do whatever I want.” They cannot distinguish between the opposing concepts of *liberty* and *anarchy*. Liberty encompasses the principle of self-determination but within the boundaries of socially responsible behavior; e.g. “My rights end where your rights begin.” Whereas anarchy encompasses the concept of everyman for himself, with restraints on actions being determined by whoever has the greater might. The rule of law is absent and people must defend their lives and property as best they can. The rule “Might makes right” then prevails. This cannot fall within the principles of *liberty*.

In between liberty and anarchy is a dictatorship run by an individual or by a faction. Under this system of government, power is at the discretion of those in control for the period of time they are able to possess it. No one has rights; they simply have “privileges,” which is at the discretion of those in power. The absence of rights means no one is safe since government power can and will be used to oppress those who are not of the contemporaneous popular political persuasion.

If citizens are ethically ill-prepared for citizenship, they will add force to the natural tendencies of humans which is immorality. They will therefore contribute to Thomas Hobbes’ (1588-1679) two famous dictums that life outside civil society would be “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” plus “The condition of man ... is a condition of war of everyone against everyone;” i.e. a Hobbesian battleground.

Both the contemporaneous political Left and Right believe in “ethical principles” but from **very** different perspectives. In Chapter X of Russell Kirk’s book [*Concise Guide to Conservatism*](#) (1953), Kirk offers a window into what distinguishes these differences in regards to the purpose of education. The Left sees education as a means of “socializing” individuals into individual units of the mass; whereas the Right sees education as a means of preparing individuals for freedom and self-determination in any environment they find themselves. The Left requires all children pass through the public school system where they have control over the indoctrination methodologies of collectivism. The right requires a grounding in classical principles first experimented with in Athens of antiquity and finally climaxed in the Renaissance, or the Age of Reason, whose highest goal was to provide pathways for individuals to pursue virtue. These principles are the foundation of the American system.

The Founders understood that a virtuous individual is capable of maximizing his potential in a complex, dangerous, uncertain, and ever-changing world. Though he may not have control of the world, he has control over the way he responds to it in his thoughts, words

and actions. The person pursuing virtue (and it can be said, no one ever completely arrives at perfection), contributes to the best chance for a society to live peacefully and prosperously to the degree that can be achieved in such an imperfect world. It is to this point of *imperfection* that the Left's arguments revolve around. They believe that they can make society perfect through social engineering schemes. Those on the Right know that this is not possible and therefore place their efforts into developing strong and independent minded individuals, but who are capable of discernment in knowing the limits of their rights and who respect the rights of others.

Robert Owen's (1771-1858) experiment is a case against the Left's ignorance. Owen lamented the lack of morality when he attempted to found a society based on socialistic government at New Harmony, Indiana. The experiment failed within a short period of time due to the majority of its citizens being unable to overcome their selfishness. He felt humans needed a lot more time to develop virtue before they would be ready for socialism. While I do not advocate for socialism due to its destructive tendencies, Owen's observations and conclusions demonstrate the need for morality being observed by citizens if social harmony, accompanied by a higher standard of living for all, is to prevail.

The Need for Moral Education

The moral decay of the U.S. is a serious problem that requires serious attention if the health of society is to be recovered and thereafter sustained. Since the evidence of this malady is overwhelming, there is no need to enumerate the long list of social evils that are overwhelming our society. *Gaslighting*,⁷ a tactic being used extensively during the Trump 2020 reelection by the Democratic Party, embodies this. Anyone with a rational mind can see the devastation such moral decay engenders.

Johnson (2002) considers Epictetus – a Stoic philosopher who lived from around 50-130 A.D. – one of the greatest moral teachers in history. The works of Epictetus offer a great deal of scholarship on the subject of virtue, morality, and ethics. The other Stoics of that era are also important to this end, as are the Humanists of the Renaissance and Natural Law philosophers of the Enlightenment period. From these sources and many others, morality should be a topic to cover in an educational program.

I would like to use Epictetus, based on Johnson's lectures, as a case study for what might be utilized in a class covering morality. Another figure that Johnson covers is Plutarch (c. 46-120 AD) and his renowned work, *Moralia (Morals)*. This too should be a source of research for moral education. In addition, Marcus Aurelius and Seneca were two other Stoics whose works should be analyzed for contributions to a moral education.

Before analyzing Epictetus's works, I would like to address the reason the moralists have been excluded from philosophical studies. The Greco-Roman moralists have typically been left outside the purview of "philosophy" due to the fact that they apply philosophy

⁷ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/gaslighting>

to the real world, as opposed to philosophy being about “ideas” in the abstract sense. This trajectory of philosophy began with Diogenes Laertius (believed to have lived in the first half of the 3rd century AD) who wrote the *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* and who disregarded the Greco-Roman moralists as “philosophers.” As Johnson points out, having written the first book on the history of philosophy, Diogenes actually constructed its form, which has, in large part, been unchanged ever since. Johnson states, from Diogenes perspective:

Philosophy is understood, not as the pursuit of wisdom but as a matter of learning, of scholarship. Moral exhortation, in other words, doesn’t fit, and moral transformation doesn’t even make it to the screen. Now this is not only to be found in the ancients, like Diogenes Laertius, a similar outlook is found in the modern compendium *History of Philosophy* by Frederick Copelston. (Lecture 24)

We need to correct this flawed perspective and place morality and its application to the real world as the beginning and end of philosophy, since it is of true service to mankind. All other metaphysical and abstract concepts may be interesting, but most of it is the pursuit of splitting hairs and delving deep into the weeds that few find their way out of, which explains the lack of interest philosophy garners.

We see here the ancient Greek influence over modern academia of shunning the useful arts and sciences, and embracing the “pure” arts and sciences as the only “worthy” pursuit for an academic. While this may have been perfectly appropriate in a slave-based system where aristocratic free citizens had a tremendous amount of leisure time at their disposal, it is utterly inappropriate for academics to embrace such a lifestyle and such an attitude today. The slave owners of antiquity owed nothing to their slaves; whereas the academic community, supported by public monies, is the servant of society, not its master.

Having provided a brief explanation of what happened to applied philosophy, let’s proceed to the example Epictetus offers in establishing moral instruction in a comprehensive education.

Epictetus was born a slave and was owned by a former slave. He too was eventually emancipated. He was physically disabled and poor his whole life. He was a Stoic philosopher preaching about the pursuit and application of virtue. Until his death, he taught Stoicism to students, hoping for the moral transformation of them.

He taught about philosophical theories but believed theory was useless without the practice of virtue. Theory was easy to learn and debate, but the moral transformation of an individual to a virtuous life was difficult to put into practice. Johnson compares Epictetus to a coach who *trains* his students – in contrast to simply offering lectures on theories – providing moral exercises for students to perform and be challenged by. In this way they could become habituated to moral behavior, thereby putting them into practice in their daily lives. His strategy was to train students to think rightly through extensive repetition of these exercises. Repetitiveness in the pursuit of any endeavor is the only

way to master that pursuit. Whether a ballet dancer, a car mechanic, a physician, or pursuing virtue, lectures do not provide the means of mastery. Only practice can achieve this with lectures on theory merely providing some guiding principles to help steer thought in the right direction. As one who has instructed the martial arts, I can say unequivocally, this is a hard-cold fact that cannot be deviated from.

Epictetus advocated the practical use of logic to determine what is real and what is not, thereby helping individuals discover their role in life. In his Discourse *On Things That Are Under Our Control and Not Under Our Control*, he points out that through our ability to reason, we can become free and not be slaves to illusions and our passions. However, he points out that, instead of seeing things rightly, humans tend to waste their time on things they have no control over, which then actually hold them back. Individuals need to learn what is within their control and what is not, and then act accordingly.

The over-reliance on rhetoric and argumentation can lead to vanity rather than the discovery of truth. Cicero had said that one could not be a true rhetorician if not virtuous.

In Discourse II, 20, Epictetus criticized Academicians for their skeptical ways – i.e. that real knowledge is not possible – and their inability to make judgments, and for sophistical arguments they used. He criticized the Epicureans for their hypocrisy, where they stated people should withdraw from society, while at the same time Epicureans were engaging with society. He exposed the contradictions of many philosophers of his time, and his accusations still hold true for the sophists, relativists, skeptics, and postmodernists that dominate academe today.

Even those who contradict propositions that are true and evident are obliged to make use of them. And indeed, one may almost give as the strongest proof that a thing is evident that even he who contradicts it finds himself obliged to make use of it. For instance, if one should deny that any universal statement is true, plainly he cannot help asserting the contrary. ‘No universal statement is true.’ Slave, this is not true either: for what else is your assertion than, ‘If a statement is universal, it is false?’ Again, if one comes forward and says, ‘Know that nothing is knowable, but that everything is unprovable,’ or another says, ‘Believe me, and it will be to your advantage; you ought not to believe a man at all’; or again, if another says, ‘Learn from me, man, that it is impossible to learn anything....’ What difference is there between such persons and ... those who call themselves Academics?⁸

Epictetus points out that such positions provide grounds for people to argue against virtue and thereby justify immoral and antisocial behavior. This, not too infrequently, costs those in the lower socioeconomic sectors the greatest losses. Of course, nothing has changed in this regard between Epictetus’s day and our own. We hear the same arguments spew forth from the halls of academia. In large part, this is due to academics’ disconnect from the real world. Only by living in the purely abstract, theoretical world

⁸ <https://howtobeastocic.wordpress.com/2016/02/20/epictetus-vs-the-epicureans-and-the-academics/>

can one become so out of touch with reality. This helps explain why academics, while giving lip service to the issues of the needy, are unable to make headway in the pursuit of equity.

In explaining Epictetus's understanding of human behavior, Johnson states, "What humans are inclined to do is to prefer theory and word play over actual performance and action." This being due to the difficulty of putting virtue into practice and the ease and pleasure of playing word games, as can be seen in high school and college debate teams. However, an education that does not lead to application is useless. To merely recite or parrot petty arguments or positions of historic thinkers is empty and vain. "A Stoic is a Stoic in deed." Johnson states, "Having opinions, even learned ones, is not what being a Stoic is about. The gap between book learning and virtue among [Epictetus's] students is a constant theme in his diatribes."

In discussing Epictetus's view on acquiring theoretical knowledge that has been accumulated over the centuries, Johnson states, "This is the world of the academy: That you can learn all there is to know about everything and all the opinions there are about everything and never reach, finally, a decision of your own about what is true or not." This is a valid statement to argue against the amount of instruction that currently passes for "education" in the public system.

In the end, Epictetus believed that the transformation of life, not only for oneself, but for the benefit of humanity, is the goal. This should be the goal of a comprehensive education for citizens.

A current powerhouse in the case for virtue is Professor Jordan Peterson. He offers an abundance of very wealthy guidance in its pursuit. I invite the reader to visit his website⁹ to read and listen to his essays and lectures.

One essay in particular, that is both terrifying and revealing, demonstrates the need for virtue more than any other proof one can use in modern history: How did the Nazis indoctrinate the German people to the extent they did? I think Peterson contends, as do I, that it was a lack of virtue in sufficient numbers of people who had sufficient conviction to say NO, regardless of the consequences, when authority figures ordered them to perform unethical acts, whether large or small.¹⁰

The Optimization of Power Through Particular Dominant Talents

If citizens are ill prepared for economic participation in society, there will be a higher percentage of the population that will live in poverty and will potentially burden their communities with the need for social services. Living on the margins of a society that has optimized certain individual attributes for particular interests is an extremely insecure place to exist. History is full of certain talents dominating civilizations. Here are a few:

⁹ <https://www.jordanbpeterson.com/about/>

¹⁰ *Hell, One Step at a Time* <https://mailchi.mp/jbpdaily/the-new-jbp-weekly-1550597?e=72fa6583fa>

- In Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt, the talents of scribes dominated society. Talents of literacy and numeracy provided the ladders to success through bureaucratic or priestly positions in society. Such knowledge was coveted and guarded so the scribes could retain an elevated status in society.
- During the feudal period of Medieval Europe, abilities in scholarship were seen as inferior and irrelevant; therefore, scholars were marginalized with the primary safe harbor for their talent being in the monasteries. Martial abilities held sway and great warriors were rewarded with the expansion of their landholdings. Those without these abilities were relegated to the margins as inferior and ignoble people and therefore of less consequence. Their “inferiority” relegated many to the status of serfs, a less humane form of slavery.
- During the Italian Renaissance, attributes such as financial abilities and craftsmanship became optimized talents and therefore those with these talents dominated society of that period through the trade guilds and the banking system (the Medici family being the most influential family in banking and politics of the period).

We see similar forces playing out today, but under a new dominating talent – academic, in contrast to scholarship. The contemporary academic must possess the ability to memorize a great deal of data and recall it under the pressure of time for testing purposes. This is very different from a scholar that doesn’t rely on memory or time, but is able to research information, use intuition and reason to deduce significance and meaning from the information, and then deliver useful and novel conclusions to others in an intelligible manner.

Whether it was the gifted warrior, banker, craftsmen, or academic, the common theme throughout history is the optimization of society by those who manage to corner the market on political power. The society then pours most of its resources that are beyond its foundational needs, into the interests of the dominant faction(s). To guard against this, the American Founders established a political order that dispersed authority, but over time, political power became more and more concentrated in the Federal government to the point where barriers to the type of corruption we see coming from academia were leveled and with that leveling, the floodgates to public wealth were opened to this faction.

To prove this point, we merely need look at the propaganda and marketing efforts that have grown the education industry **far** beyond the needs of society. The percentage of the school age population attending college at the turn of the last century was in the lower single digits, but now, approximately 60% of high school graduates apply, while 40% of Americans between 25-64 had a college degree in 2013 (Lumina Foundation). However, only 28% of the jobs require a college degree (BLS statistics April 18, 2016).

Now that our academic community has cornered the market on political power it diverts as much of our resources as it can to its own narrowly tailored uses. It’s prejudicial

toward interests outside its domain and either ignores them, as it does for most walks of life, or is relentless in its attacks against perceived competing interests, such as capitalism or religion. It strives to be the focal point of communities like churches and civic organizations used to be.

Given this situation, academics rationalize their behavior by identifying the vast majority of citizens as “stupid,” though it is politically incorrect to admit this publicly. Being “stupid” means they are undeserving of public resources beyond the bare necessities – but even here the system falls far short of providing what is needed. Since the academic establishment hoards the majority of educational resources, it stands to reason that the majority of citizens will be left to fend for themselves in a vast economic sea with no compass or rudder with which to navigate. When large numbers of these marginalized citizens fall prey to forces that land most heavily upon the undereducated, the academics avoid criticism by deflecting toward capitalists who are said to be at fault. They must therefore be punished and forced to surrender their resources to the redistributors of wealth (i.e. bureaucrats who came from academia) who then, after providing themselves with high salaries, give to those that the educational system failed to prepare for economic life. However, one thing academics do expend a great deal of their resources on is preparing students for political participation – that is, for statist political participation so that they will vote “correctly” in elections. I believe the insanity emanating from academia over President Trump’s 2016 victory proves this point beyond doubt.

The foregoing explains the need in preparation for full participation in society. Educational resources need to be divided so as to serve the whole citizenry rather than a minority. The various sectors need equal respect, consideration and resources invested in them so that all may flourish in a free society.

Educational Reformers’ Thoughts

With such distinctions outlined, let us look deeper into the question the title of this essay asks and also consider what some of the renowned educational reformers had to say on the subject.

To answer this question, Blanc (1866) begins the process by using an old maxim “‘Read, write, and reckon! Why, good Heavens!’ you will doubtless exclaim ‘what else can one learn at school if one does not learn that?’” In arguing against the status quo, Blanc pointed to the flaw in reasoning of the educator-clerics of his time:

Well, ask these most learned and most acute gentlemen, they will manage to prove to you that, after all, profane knowledge is of quite secondary importance, and that the main point is to inculcate in children a love of order, to bend them to habits of discipline, in short, to give them a sound religious education. As if there were a fatal antagonism between the ability to read and a love of order! (p. 4)

A similar argument has been made against education that is not dedicated to college preparation. Take out the idea of *religion* and insert the concept of *a well-rounded*

individual in its place and the argument remains the same. After all, in the education community, Progressive *statism* and *social gospel* indoctrination replaced Christianity in the latter part of the 19th century and early part of the 20th.

In his role as editor for *American Annals of Education & Instruction* in 1830, Woodbridge, makes an astute observation in pointing out the real reason for education when he spoke of the *Productive School* movement of Germany and Switzerland of his day:

The leading principle of this system, is that which its name indicates – that **the child should be regarded** not as a mere recipient of the ideas of others, but **as an agent capable of collecting, and originating, and producing most of the ideas which are necessary for its education**, when presented with the objects or the facts from which they may be derived. (p. 13) [Emphasis added]

This sums up the concept of *transfer of learning*. The purpose of primary education is to provide the tools for individuals to be self-learners rather than dependents of others who hand knowledge to them in a prepackaged, neatly designed outfit that merely requires the donning of garments made by someone else. In other words, it is to prepare people who can think for themselves rather than to rely on others to think for them. This, of course, was the antithesis of the Progressives when they were reinventing an education system.

Prior to the public education system requiring youth to attend school until 16 years of age, they were trained either on the farm or by an apprenticeship program outside the public domain. Therefore, they were economically prepared for the world. This is a critical piece of information when arguing against the belief that education must be general, in academic terms, with no consideration for life after high school, other than college. Historically, a general education was primarily for those who were academically talented and who would not need to work for a living due to the wealth of their families. This demonstrates that while a general liberal education, in its current form, through the secondary and postsecondary years is certainly viable for some, it is not suited for the vast majority of individuals, and to assert that it must be projected upon all, demonstrates an ignorance of real-world needs and how a society and economy really function.

Spencer (1860) analyzed the purpose of education for individuals:

Our first step must obviously be to classify, in the order of their importance, the leading kinds of activity which constitute human life. They may be naturally arranged into:

1. Those activities which directly minister to self-preservation;
2. Those activities which, by securing the necessities of life, indirectly minister to self-preservation;
3. Those activities which have for their end the rearing and discipline of offspring;

4. Those activities which are involved in the maintenance of proper, social and political relations;
5. Those miscellaneous activities which make up the leisure part of life, devoted to the gratification of the tastes and feelings. (pp. 17-18)

It is highly recommended that the reader review Spencer's (1860) concepts on these subjects. He provides an excellent analysis on the purpose of education from a libertarian (i.e. classical liberal) perspective.

Wong's (2016) analysis of college admissions and the perversion of high school students' preparation for it reveals how an understanding of the purpose for education has been lost.

In 2011, close to 200 higher-education professionals from selective institutions across the country gathered at the University of Southern California to come up with a plan to reshape college admissions. "The values and behaviors this system signals as important, and its tendency to reward only a narrow band of students," a [report](#) on the meeting concluded, is crippling the mission of education. It's also undermining "the social, economic, and civic vitality of our nation's future." The gathering confirmed the growing consensus—even among those intimately involved in the most notorious aspects of admissions—that the system is in desperate need of reform. The intense competition it fuels undermines students' well-being; pressures applicants to fine-tune their test-taking skills and inflate their resumes; and distorts the purpose of higher education.

Instead of preparing themselves for college—or more importantly, for life—students spend all of their pre-college years preparing themselves for the moment of admission. "What we want is to have students who want to come and work hard because they can leverage their experience at the university and do something after they leave," said Wesleyan University President Michael Roth. "One of my predecessors used to say to students, 'If these turn out to be the best four years of your life, we've failed you.'"

Roth didn't participate in the USC conference, but he agrees with its tenets. "I think that that's the missing part now—this consumer mentality [of], 'Oh, I got in and now I get to enjoy the exclusive club,' rather than 'I got in, and now I get to use these resources to do something after the university.'"

This is just one example of many that informs us we have a broken educational system that may very well be beyond repair. It's like an old building that would take far more effort to renovate than to tear down and build anew. One that would also allow for incorporation of new innovative methods and systems.

Once society's understanding of the purpose for education is lost, the educational system is up for grabs and is vulnerable to whoever controls the reins. Individuals are no longer

part of the equation; other than the funding they bring. Walters (2020) sums it up when looking at California's dilemmas:

California has a very fragmented approach to education – a collection of institutional silos that only occasionally communicate with each other and often are more competitive than cooperative.

That fragmentation is very visible in the perpetual conflicts between traditional K-12 schools and parent-directed charter schools, and in the battles among the three systems of public higher education over academic turf.

Disunity's victims are students seeking educations to prepare them for careers and places in society, who struggle to know what high school classes they must take to apply for college, or which community college courses are transferable to four-year institutions.

It may prove helpful to consider what educational reformers of the past have offered to further delve into the question of the purpose of education. Of course, social issues such as these must be considered based on the context of the times. Therefore, what was appropriate in a given age probably isn't fully transferable to our times. However, analyzing what was taken into consideration in the past can help us reflect on what has changed and what is still needed – that is, what is time and place dependent versus what is timeless for all.

Montaigne's Thoughts on the Purpose of Education

Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592) makes an important point about the hardships youth must go through in order to prepare them for life:

[Parents] are too tender, and their natural affection is apt to make the most discreet of them all so over-fond, that they can neither find in their hearts to give them due correction for the faults they may commit, nor suffer them to be inured to hardships and hazards, as they ought to be. ... And yet there is no remedy; whoever will breed a boy to be good for anything when he comes to be a man, must by no means spare him when young, and must very often transgress the rules of [conscience].

Considering the acquisition of useful knowledge and character development, Montaigne (1580) had this to say:

After having taught him what will make him more wise and good, you may then entertain him with the elements of logic, physics, geometry, rhetoric, and the science which he shall then himself most incline to, his judgment being beforehand formed and fit to choose, he will quickly make his own.

Speaking on the time that should be devoted to education, Montaigne said:

The boy we would breed has a great deal less time to spare; he owes but the first fifteen or sixteen years of his life to education; the remainder is due to action. Let us, therefore, employ that short time in necessary instruction.

Perhaps this was a time when what was taught was better absorbed by students due to better teaching methods and/or better selected topics without the excessive, overwhelming, and superfluous information we see today. Therefore, far fewer years were required to accomplish the goal than what currently passes for education – i.e. quality over quantity. In addition, wise men understood that too much education – i.e. the exclusive book learning type – actually dulls the mind. They understood there is not only a point of diminishing returns, there is a point of detrimental effects. We observe this today in how dysfunctional so many in our society are due to too much and/or the wrong type of education. Stanovich (2009) reveals how the education system promotes and rewards algorithmic type thinking (i.e. computer-like) but avoids rational thought.

Comenius' Thoughts on the Purpose of Education

Lang quotes Comenius (1592–1670) regarding memorization: “This objective teaching must really furnish the mind with new ideas, not fill up the memory with mere words. Schools and teachers make themselves guilty of a pernicious pedantry if they substitute a knowledge of words in place of the knowledge of things.” (p. 24)

“Knowledge of words” is synonymous with memorization of data. This is the road our current system still marches down, like good soldiers following ancient and antiquated orders without question, while utterly ignoring all the great reformers’ arguments against excessive concern with minor details and rules – i.e. the superfluous information that may be useful only to the specialist of a given field of study.

Comenius states, “[T]he intellect was scarcely ever nourished by the actual facts, but was filled with the husks of words, with a windy and parrot-like loquacity, and with the chaff of opinions.” (pp. 78-79) Is it possible that besides educational content, the problem with public education is the lack of abilities of many teachers or the lack of a proper education provided to them before they became teachers? This leads to the question: Would we be better off with prerecorded lectures by gifted instructors in their respective fields of expertise to provide the necessary instructions which can then be followed up with on-site teachers who act as moderators that coordinate progress through lessons, discussions, and then answer questions for students?

The reason educators fall prey to memorization from one generation to the next, in spite of every argument to the contrary, is due to the ease of teaching raw and disconnected data and assessing a student’s memorization of it based on form as opposed to function. Humans, like all animals, seek the path of least resistance, or the path of ease.

Comenius concludes Chapter XI, “Hitherto There Have Been No Perfect Schools,” with these words:

How many of us there are who have left the schools and universities with scarcely a notion of true learning! I, unfortunate man that I am, am one of many thousands, who have miserably lost the sweetest spring-time of their whole life, and have wasted the fresh years of youth on scholastic trifles.¹¹ Ah, how often, since my mind has been enlightened, has the thought of my wasted youth wrung sighs from my breast, drawn tears from my eyes, and filled my heart with sorrow! How often has my grief caused me to exclaim: Oh that Jupiter could bring back to me the years that are past and gone!

But these prayers are in vain. Bygone days will never return. None of us who is advanced in years can grow young again, commence his career anew, and, furnished with a better method, pursue it more successfully. Of this there is no question. One thing alone does remain, and that is to give those who come after us such advice as we can. By showing how it was that our masters led us into error we shall be able to point out the way in which such errors may be avoided. (pp. 79-80)

This sums up the reason for the Applied Education Foundation.

Comenius (1633) said, “For what is the foundation of the whole state? Surely, the development of the young” (preface of 1907 reprint, p. 20). Comenius provides moral reasoning for education:

Education is indeed necessary for all, and this is evident if we consider the different degrees of ability. No one doubts that those who are [less capable] need instruction, that they may shake off their natural dullness. But in reality those who are clever need it far more, since an active mind, if not occupied with useful things, will busy itself with what is useless, curious, and pernicious; and, just as the more fertile a field is, the richer the crop of thorns and of thistles that it can produce, so an excellent intelligence becomes filled with fanciful notions, if it be not sown with the seeds of wisdom and of virtue; and, just as a mill-stone grinds itself away ... and often cracks and breaks, if wheat ... be not supplied to it, so an active mind, if void of serious things, entangles itself utterly with vain, curious, and noxious thoughts, and becomes the cause of its own destruction.

What are the rich without wisdom but pigs stuffed with bran? What are the poor who have no understanding of affairs but asses laden with burdens? What is a handsome though ignorant man but a parrot adorned with feathers....

For those who are in any position of authority, ... it is as necessary to be imbued with wisdom as it is for a guide to have eyes, an interpreter to have speech, ... or a sword to have an edge. Similarly, those in subordinate positions should be educated that they may know how to obey their superiors wisely and prudently, not under compulsion, with the obedience of an ass, but of their own free will and

¹¹ Not a lot has changed since 1633 given the lack of confidence the public and, in particular, businesses have in the quality of our educational system.

from love of order. For a rational creature should be led, not by shouts, imprisonment, and blows, but by reason.¹² (pp. 55-56)

We have already shown that every one ought to receive a universal education.... But do not, therefore, imagine that we demand from all men a knowledge (that is to say, an exact or deep knowledge) of all the arts and sciences. This would neither be useful of itself, nor, on account of the shortness of life, can it be attained by any man. For we see that each science is so vast and so complicated ... that it would occupy the lifetime of even the strongest intellects if they wished to master it thoroughly by investigation and experiment. ... It is the principles, the causes, and the uses of all the most important things in existence that we wish all men to learn.... (p. 70)

If only educators of the various disciplines understood that much of what they teach is superfluous to the vast majority of students. Experts have need for deep and broad knowledge in the area of their expertise, but other people have no such need. Comenius was aware of this tendency of overloading curriculum even in his day.

Comenius asks a valid question, “how many of those who undertake to educate the young appreciate the necessity of first teaching them how to acquire knowledge?” (p. 87) This is hardly considered by most educators. They feel it is their domain to hand out prepackaged knowledge that they think is important. One must ask the question, what is more important, memorizing data that may or may not be used in one’s lifetime, or knowing how to seek out and acquire whatever data/knowledge one will surely need which will be revealed as one’s life unfolds?

The next ability needing to be acquired is to know what to do with the information that has been learned in school – i.e. how to reason.¹³ This is something most educators have not learned how to do for themselves because subjects are not taught with analogies that help reveal reasoning. It’s as though educators have been of the opinion that someone else did the reasoning, now here are the facts, and that’s all students need to know. If this were to be the extent of education, then somewhere between 6 to 8 years of formal

¹² A distinction is required here. It is fairly well known that when educational reformers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were designing the bureaucratic educational system we still labor under, the Social Efficiency Progressive reformers incorporated concepts of indoctrinating youth to be subservient and obedient citizens (*subjects* of the State would be a better definition) to comply with government dictates and be obedient workers like drones in a beehive. This is not what Comenius is suggesting, as he makes clear. There is a difference between a beast of burden, such as an ass, that needs constant supervision to ensure work is being accomplished, and a thinking, rationale being who recognizes that an orderly system requires grades of authority for a system to function efficiently and effectively. As long as an authority treats a subordinate with due respect and consideration, and the subordinate complies with well-reasoned directions, an orderly and cordial relationship between them can be realized. An educational system needs to incorporate these principles since they are foundational to a thriving society and economy.

¹³ While reason and intuition provide the highest level of wisdom and abilities to transfer learning, they are complicated gifts. Reason can be taught indirectly through analogies until it is absorbed; whereas intuition cannot be taught, but, rather, comes from one who has strong reasoning abilities coupled with a good imagination that is strengthened by experience in a given domain. The ability to intuit or sense connections that elude most people demonstrates this level of wisdom.

elementary training would suffice for the vast majority. Individuals could then get on with their lives and therefore retain far greater psychological stability.¹⁴ I say this because individuals, who do not fit the academic mold, could then avoid the years of torture that the current poorly designed system puts them through. Other, healthier avenues could then be developed and pursued.

In Chapter XIII, Comenius reflects on the need for order in society. “We find on investigation that the principle which really holds together the fabric of this world of ours ... is none other than order...” (p. 93) The German idea of order that the Progressives instilled in our system and the traditional American perspective are quite different. It may be said Americans subscribe to an ordered-chaos social view (where experimenting, innovation and risk taking are considered an integral part of our culture) whereas Germans tend to demand everything be in its proper place regardless of all else. Having made this distinction, it is necessary to address the concept of order as it relates to relationships between individuals, groups of individuals, and between the private sector and government. We must look to our Founding principles to address this fundamental but very important subject when designing curriculum as it relates to social order. We must also analyze the deviations from our Founding principles and the negative effects it has had on our country – in other words, the disorder it has caused.

Comenius recommends looking to “the operations of nature” for guidance in discovering order. “Very aptly does Cicero say: ‘If we take nature as our guide, she will never lead us astray,’ and also: ‘Under the guidance of nature it is impossible to go astray.’ This is our belief, and our advice is to watch the operations of nature carefully and to imitate them.” (p. 100) Hence the reason Natural Law philosophers of the Enlightenment looked to nature for guidance; and it is from them that our Founding principles were laid.

Locke’s Thoughts on the Purpose of Education

John Locke (1632-1704), in his great work *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, offers a foundational consideration in all things related to education:

That which I cannot too often inculcate is, that whatever the matter be about ... whether great or small, the main ... thing, to be considered in every action of a child is what influence it will have upon his mind; what habit it tends to, and is likely to settle in him: how it will become him when he is bigger, and if it be encouraged, whither it will lead him when he is grown up.”¹⁵ (p. 86)

¹⁴ “The US Department of Health and Human Services reports that as many as one in four adolescents experience mental health challenges; however, as many as three out of four of this group do not receive the support they need.” See *Supporting the Mental Health Well-Being of High School Students*, Croft, Hayes, and Moore, ACT Center for Equity in Learning, Jan. 2020. Also, see *Students Who Feel Emotionally Unprepared for College Struggle in the Classroom*, Stoltzfus, *The Chronical of Higher Education*, Oct. 8, 2015. Also, see *Overwhelmed: The Real Campus Mental-Health Crisis and New Models For Well-Being*, *The Chronical of Higher Education*, 2020.

¹⁵ Consider the way we handle the entertainment side of education – sports in particular. We teach egotistic tendencies and many coaches are more concerned about their own reputation than about the health of their athletes. This culture is pernicious and creates self-centeredness and a disregard toward one's fellow man. We would do well to heed Locke's advice. I do not wish to disparage sports, since, besides developing a

Quick's (1894) reaction to this position is interesting and it demonstrates the lack of moral grounding in the purpose of education. If educators were instructed in civics and virtue, Quick may never have written the following words:

Here we see that Locke differed widely from the schoolmasters of his time, perhaps of all time. A man must be a philosopher indeed if he can spend his life in teaching boys, and yet always think more about what they will *be* and what they will *do* when their schooling is over than what they will *know*. And in these days if we stopped to think at all we should be trodden on by the examiner. (p. 228)

Yet this philosophical approach of Locke's must be the goal, otherwise we really need to reconsider if the educational system is, as currently designed, a social good. The lack of such a philosophy is the crux of our problem with education. And Quick's reference to "the examiner" ruining a student's future if the focus is on development of the person instead of the cramming of data in the brain, reveals the dysfunctionality of our educational system.

We refer to knowledge as valuable but for the most part ignore *what makes a human truly civil* and *how he may contribute to society* based on enlightened self-interest, both of which in turn make society civil. The Stoics of antiquity believed that rather than attempting to force change upon society, as do-gooders tend to behave, it is better for individuals to change themselves in the direction of virtue, which in turn will order society properly by diffusion. This can be understood when we contrast the nature of do-gooders with true philanthropists or altruists such as Benjamin Franklin or Andrew Carnegie who acted out of their love for mankind and contributed much of their wealth to help man's condition rather than asking mankind to change for them.

Basedow's Thoughts on the Purpose of Education

Lang (1891) informs us of what the famous 18th century educational reformer, Johann Bernhard Basedow (1724–1790), had to say about the purpose of educating youth.

Some General Principles. – 1. "The aim of education shall be to prepare children to a generally useful, patriotic, and happy life." Happiness Basedow would define in the words of John Locke: "*A sound mind in a sound body* is a short but full description of a happy state in the world."

2. Education is the harmonious development and exercise of the child's powers.

3. The aim of culture is "the formation of character."

4. Instruction forms an important and necessary part of the general plan of education. Still it is relatively of least importance. The formation of character is of greater worth. Instruction that does not educate is of no value whatever. (p. 21)

strong body, if they are taught with strong moral lessons being the primary purpose of sports, then it would be a wonderful contribution to education. But currently, it deviates far from this purpose in so many cases.

Many educators believe that they are developing character through mental disciplinarian type of instruction (that is, teaching form without function) coupled with statist type of indoctrination where the individual's purpose is primarily to serve the State and its latest fads.

As it relates to principles of instruction, Lang quotes Basedow: "The primary object of education should never be forgotten. ... 'Not much, but downright useful knowledge, which can never be forgotten without proving a great loss to the individual.'" In other words, superfluous information that has little use to the average individual is to be avoided since it simply clouds the minds of students with an overwhelming amount of information and robs them of time that should be used in productive ways. This is extremely important to consider since students are unable to discern the useful from the superfluous, and an excessive amount of data simply becomes a ball of confusion. One must then question which is the lesser evils: utter ignorance or too much information? Personally, I would say it's a tie; the evils simply manifest in different ways.

Thomas Jefferson's Thoughts on Education

Jefferson wrote a great deal on the subject of education. Rather than quoting everything he said, it is better to cite some of his writings on the subject since his deep insight provides an extremely important Enlightenment perspective that U.S. foundational principles are grounded in. While some of his suggestions may be dated, his principles are timeless. My source of these works is from *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, The Library of America, Literary Classics of the United States, 1984.

1. A Gentleman's Library: To Robert Skipwith with a List of Books, Aug. 3, 1771.
2. An Honest Heart ... A Knowing Head: To Peter Carr, Aug. 19, 1775.
3. On European Education: To John Banister, Jr., Oct. 15, 1785.
4. Education of a Future Son-In-Law: To Thomas Mann Randolph, Jr., Aug. 27, 1786.
5. The Homage of Reason: To Peter Carr, Aug. 10, 1787.
6. A System of Education: To Peter Carr, Sept. 7, 1814.
7. Report of the Commissioners for the University of Virginia, Aug. 4, 1818.

John Stuart Mill's Thoughts on Individual Talents

"Mill asserted the importance of personal development and the negative impact of conditioning and conformity which he believed tended to stunt or stifle individual development. The liberty he proclaimed was one in which all individuals are equally free to develop innate talents and abilities. He assumed that individuals will naturally tend to be drawn toward what they are good at doing and this natural ability, freely allowed to develop, enhances and contributes to all society."¹⁶

Mill was also a staunch defender of freedom of speech. In describing the excellence of Purdue University under the leadership of former Governor Mitch Daniels and its

¹⁶ <http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Mill,+John+Stuart>

grounding in *applied learning* (“true to the 1862 Morrill Act’s emphasis”), Will (2015) points to the University of Chicago’s principle that uphold Mill’s opinion.

“[E]ducation should not be intended to make people comfortable, it is meant to make them think.” The statement says “it is not the proper role of the university to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable or even deeply offensive,” and it endorses “a solemn responsibility not only to promote a lively and fearless freedom of debate and deliberation, but also to protect that freedom when others attempt to restrict it.”

... Scientists and engineers live lives governed by the reality principle: Get the variables wrong, the experiment will fail, even if this seems insensitive; do the math wrong, the equation will tell you, even if that hurts your feelings.¹⁷

An important responsibility of any educational effort must be to include this principle and to encapsulate it with Will’s words “freedom of speech, by which truth is winnowed from error, is most reliably defended by those in whose intellectual pursuits the truth is most rigorously tested by reality,” which is the cornerstone of Natural Law philosophy of the Enlightenment era and which John Stuart Mill embraced most enthusiastically. Without this foundational principle being understood and embraced by citizens through a proper education, liberty and the rule of law do not stand a chance of being passed on to posterity.

Jordan Peterson’s Thoughts on the Purpose of Higher Education

Peterson is one who always seeks answers to hard questions through first principles and axioms. He sets the example of what education should offer students: Analyze first principles and use facts and the material world to provide analogies through which truth may be discovered. Students can learn incredibly effectively through this methodology. An outstanding interview with Peterson, that shows him using first principles extensively, takes place at the Hoover Institution, Uncommon Knowledge hosted by Peter Robinson, *The Importance of Being Ethical*, April 29, 2022:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DcA5TotAkhs>

Currently, educators work in the factual and material world with little understanding of axioms, first principles, fundamentals, etc., and focus primarily on material things, facts, or simple tools that help people navigate, generally speaking, in a fleeting material world (think of mathematical computation, which is a convenient tool but which is not at the level of first principles, though computation is rooted in first principles). But change is grounded in unchanging first principles. But since academia is ignorant, in large part, of first principles, they operate only in the dynamic changing realm that is difficult to wrap one’s arms around. Rather than focusing on the material world, facts, and the simple tools, we need to focus on first principles and then use the material world, facts, and

¹⁷ It is highly recommended to read John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty* (1859) to gain a deeper insight into these principles.

simple tools as analogies with which to teach. Think about this: If the material world is always changing, why teach something as though it's extremely important when in actuality, it is fleeting? It's not unlike computer science: Think about those who were "experts" in the 80s compared to what computer scientists need to know today. What was known has "fled" and what is known is "fleeting." Why do we force students to embrace the fleeting while ignoring that which it is all grounded in and does not change?

In an outstanding interview hosted by Stephen Blackwood, Peterson shares his thoughts on *What is the "Higher" in "Higher Education."* Rather than expound upon Peterson's most eloquent explanations, I ask the reader to listen to the entire interview. It is well worth while. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tsuhsfk6Kk>

In his 2017 lecture series [Maps of Meaning, in lecture 6, Part 2, Story and Metastory](#), Peterson explains that while pursuing a task/goal, the brain is designed to marginalize awareness of much of the world except that which the person is focused on. This attribute extends from minute tasks to long term goals. At minute 42:00 he begins this explanation.

Peterson points out that, to our mind, the world is made of "tools" (facilitators) and "obstacles" (that which gets in the way of your goal seeking) rather than simply made of material objects, which is the classical explanation for how we perceive the world. Peterson believes that we perceive the meaning of objects in relation to their usefulness or their barrier tendencies while pursuing our individual goals. He uses the word *pattern* to explain our perception of objects as tools – i.e., meaningful or useful patterns.

Peterson states: "Whether something is a tool or an obstacle matters to you and you act on things that matter to you. Irrelevant things don't matter to you because if everything mattered to you, you'd be in trouble. From a cognitive perspective, this is definitely an advantage. ... The basis of your cognitive knowledge is learned irrelevance – i.e., what to ignore." As long as there are no obstacles and the proximate world is constant at a given moment, the mind is able to ignore everything other than what's at hand. However, "If something goes wrong, an indeterminate set of those irrelevant entities have now become relevant. That's the problem! Invisibility disappears.

"We live in a landscape of relevance, which is different than living in a landscape of facts. ... The classic scientific idea is something like: 'You perceive a universe of facts and derive conclusions and act.' No, you don't! You perceive a landscape of pre-categorized relevance that's dependent on your ethics. That brings up real questions like: What ethic best structures your perceptions? Well! That is **the** real interesting idea as far as I'm concerned!"

Given the fact that scientists and bureaucrats perceive things as a universe of facts and objects explains why educators teach to the world of facts and objects rather than for useful, and therefore relevant, knowledge. They believe that memorized facts will allow individuals to derive conclusions from those facts and thereby act appropriately, which is wrong. The transfer of learning does not work this way.

Peterson's insights help explain why some students do well in school and many do not. There are those who are far less sensitive to the need for relevance and therefore blindly follow what they are told by the educational establishment; and there are those who are far more sensitive to the need for relevance and therefore reject the establishment's assertions. Much of what passes for education is irrelevant and many students see through the smoke and mirrors and reject much of education and therefore it becomes largely invisible to them. Rather than being perceived as a useful tool, the education institution is seen as a barrier to the way they wish to live their lives. These students may not have an alternative that offers comparable type of rewards (unless they are entrepreneurial), but they know education, as currently practiced, definitely erects huge barriers that will not serve them in the end. In other words, they see the institution as requiring them to expend a great deal of their time and effort on something that will not provide a return on their investment, other than the sheepskin.

Students who do not fit into the academic community, and therefore quit school, may know they are abandoning the path to a highly successful life, but, after all, they feel abandoned by the education establishment that has ignored their abilities and/or desires. They are caught between a rock and a hard spot and must pick between the lesser of evils, realizing that since the education system has nothing for them, it is better to leave as soon as they are able in order to do more productive activities, such as making money in a job.

Here again the education establishment attacks them with ruthless and relentless force since those individuals who quit school, will not be allowed to pursue alternative education pathways since the lack of a high school degree will close most doors to them. Even private sector education establishments, including apprenticeships, demand a high school degree. And then we wonder why large segments of certain minority groups feel marginalized and angry. Marginalized whites also become resentful and angry and therefore develop antisocial behavior, but they are typically ignored, unless we hear about a mass shooting, in which case, the Left attacks the right to bear arms rather than the cause of the individual atrocious act. However, ignoring the problem or assigning fault elsewhere will not make the problem go away. But it does divert attention away from the real problems and real solutions, and therefore kicks the can down the road.

Barriers to Full Participation in the Community

Stephen Gould, in his book *The Mismeasure of Man*, stated "I wanted to call this book *Great Is Our Sin* – from Darwin's line, cited as an epigraph on my title page: 'If the misery of our poor be caused not by the laws of nature, but by our institutions, great is our sin.'" Indeed, our educational institution is a major contributor to the misery of our poor through the erection of barriers to essential credentials for full participation in society. Credentials need not be "academic" oriented since an academic type of credential is not needed by the vast majority of people and it doesn't always pay as well as many other credentials. The problem lies with the education cultural structure. Accreditation institutions dictate what is required from educational institutions, with their requirements being academically biased. Money that flows to educational institutions must pass

accreditation institutional muster. Therefore, to have access to capital, educational institutions must satisfy academically biased curricula, which only a minority of our population has the talents or need for. Therefore, the majority of citizens have little to no access to useful credentials since they are not available due to lack of funds.

Accreditation institutions protect the belief in “status” and “prestige” which are illusions supported by the educational establishment to justify its institutional structure. Rather than motivating prospective students through a quality education that employers covet, current academic marketing strategies focus on the status a degree bestows upon the recipient which is then supposed to provide economic success. Economic income statistics are typically compared to levels of education, which reflect the market demand for status more than the attainment of skills and competency. In order for status to remain prestigious however, only a minority of people can be allowed to possess college degrees, otherwise its “specialness” loses all meaning since once such a market is saturated, the value of its credential, for the most part, is lost. This is exactly what happened to the high school degree when we look at its evolution from the 1830s – when the high quality of high schools bestowed prestige upon a very small minority – through the 1970s when graduate numbers peaked and quality was lost. The same dynamics are currently playing out for college degrees: graduate numbers are increasing while quality is decreasing. This is due primarily to the inflexibility of a monopolistic type of market structure that surrounds it. A one-size-fits-all approach does not work; therefore status and prestige must make up for educational shortcomings, i.e. the lack of skills and competency.

Another way to express this idea is: Those who can, do; those who can't seek status and prestige through credentials and awards. Unfortunately, our education institutions have been optimized primarily for status seekers. High school and college degrees are not designed to maximize ability in a given field or even in general terms; their offerings, besides statist indoctrination, are maximized for recognition, envy, adoration, reverence, and importance, which is what titles and awards were created for. Whereas those who find such ornaments as ego builders, see them as meaningless, preferring to blaze their own trails, finding rewards and a sense of self-worth through their own activities and accomplishments regardless of the approbation, ridicule, or indifference of others.

Preparation for Hardships

Let's consider the Greenland Vikings' demise as a case that helps reveal the inadequacies of contemporary education.

Around the year 1000 AD, a group of Norsemen from Norway, led by Erik the Red, established a colony in Greenland. For almost 5 centuries they flourished there. Then suddenly, around 1500 AD, the settlements were abandoned. Nobody knows exactly why. It can be speculated the Inuits absorbed them in their societies; or that they sailed away to their deaths or to new lands; or that they returned to Europe on a vessel used in the Norse trade in walrus ivory and gyrfalcons.

To discover what really happened, the documentary, [*Secrets of the Dead: The Lost Vikings*](#) (Corp. for Public Broadcasting), follows a group of scientists intent on determining the actual cause of the loss of the Greenland Norsemen. Famine, they concluded, is the most likely cause of the failure of the Norse community.

The Norsemen settled in Greenland during the Medieval warm period, and were predominately a pastoral people. To support a herding community, Greenland required a sufficiently long hay-crop growing season to support the nutritional requirements of the animals. This warm period offered the ideal conditions for such communities to flourish. Their population grew over time, reaching up to 6000 residents.

In the late 14th early 15th centuries, things began to change. Core samples from the Greenland glacial ice sheet revealed that Greenland experienced a mini-ice age around the time the Norsemen disappeared. The hay-crop growing season diminished dramatically which reduced harvest yields and eventually led to a critical point that prevented livestock from surviving the long winters. When the animals perished, so too did the means of survival for the Norsemen – or so it is speculated. The year 1410 was the last communication that came from the Norse community.

The Norse culture was, in essence, at odds with the conditions that eventually enveloped them, and they were unable to adapt to the changes. Yet the high arctic Inuit, who arrived on Greenland after the Norsemen, during the 12th and 13th centuries, survived this mini-ice age. Their hunting prowess and their familiarity with requirements of extreme harsh and cold conditions, allowed them to endure. It is possible some of the Norsemen joined with the Inuit in order to learn how to adapt and survive, but their small numbers would have been absorbed into the Inuit culture. Given the rigidity of the Christian Church of that period and its abhorrence of outside beliefs, it probably would not have been acceptable to associate with the Inuit. Perhaps genetic analysis of current Inuit DNA would reveal if there is any Norse genetics within them.

Though settlements ended, no human remains of the last generation were found in the Norsemen's dwellings. This implies that the settlements were abandoned by the latest survivors, but it is not known where they ended up.

This historical event provides evidence of the need to retain sufficient historical technological knowledge in the living memory of people. Gradual and sudden catastrophes demand dramatic adaptation to changes. COVID-19 provides an example of a sudden catastrophe (though it was manmade due to fear and manipulation); while the Norse Greenland residents experienced a gradual catastrophic event that evolved over a period of years. Hunting and gathering technological knowledge might have allowed the Norse community to survive like the Inuits. With a continuously changing climate, we will inevitably experience another ice age. Will we, or isolated groups, be able to adapt to the changes? Educational curricula will determine this.

Let's consider the Great Depression of the 1930s as another case that exposes the inadequacies of contemporary education. The Great Depression would probably have

been a recession rather than a depression had education provided an applied studies program in the useful arts and sciences for the majority of the population. Money isn't always required to circulate for an economy to work – it simply makes it more efficient. Consider depressions prior to the 20th century – i.e. prior to massive public education for secondary grades – when many people living in rural environments produced for their own needs or exchanged excess products for other goods and services. Barter is certainly an option during difficult times, but if one has nothing to barter, due to the inability to produce anything or offer a useful service that can fulfill a need, then there can be no exchange. This is the social condition of the 20th century due in large part to an education system that confiscates young people's time during their formative years through compulsory laws and prepares them for nothing but college or a career in an educational field. But the vast majority of people will not attend college or will not graduate, which leaves them with little to trade with, other than entry level labor.

If they do acquire training that is valuable, it is so highly specialized that if their sector experiences difficulty and individuals are laid off, they are, more often than not, incapable of taking a job of any substance outside their sector due to their inflexibility, which then frequently leads them to the welfare line. Think of U.S. steelworkers in the 1970s whose jobs were lost to Japanese and Korean competition due to these countries' investment in up-to-date equipment that American companies could not afford due to unions' demands for exorbitant wages. When many of the steelworkers were laid-off, they had nowhere to turn but the welfare lines. These workers experienced a severe depression in their sector, with a great deal of social deviant behavior resulting – many never fully recovered from the circumstances. The 20th century had created a large population of incompetent citizens who then required government welfare intervention to care for them and then we ask the question *why* when the answer is right in front of our face.

Autor et al. (2016) analyze disruption on economic sectors of the United States and its effect on those impacted by the disruption. They use our trade with China to demonstrate the economic shock and hardships caused by major disruptions:

China's emergence as a great economic power has induced an epochal shift in patterns of world trade. Simultaneously, it has challenged much of the received empirical wisdom about how labor markets adjust to trade shocks. Alongside the heralded consumer benefits of expanded trade are substantial adjustment costs and distributional consequences. **These impacts are most visible in the local labor markets in which the industries exposed to foreign competition are concentrated. Adjustment in local labor markets is remarkably slow, with wages and labor-force participation rates remaining depressed and unemployment rates remaining elevated for at least a full decade after the China trade shock commences.** Exposed workers experience greater job churning and reduced lifetime income. **At the national level, employment has fallen in U.S. industries more exposed to import competition, as expected, but offsetting employment gains in other industries have yet to materialize.** Better understanding when and where trade is costly, and how and why it may be

beneficial, are key items on the research agenda for trade and labor economists. (Emphasis added.)

Autor's summary of the situation reveals a citizenry ill prepared for change and adaptation, which reveals an educational system that is failing its citizens. Major disruptions of this magnitude are never pleasant or easy to deal with, but negative impacts can be minimized if society is well prepared, as the Boy Scout motto embodies.

Of course, free trade is, generally speaking, good policy. However, with free trade must come fair trade, which helps provide for the "offsetting employment gains in other industries" referred to by Autor. If the principles of free and fair trade are not in balance, negative economic disruption with long-term effects will be the outcome. Having said that, the only responsible course of action from an educational perspective is to prepare every citizen for such disruption so that when they do come – and they most certainly will – citizens can adapt, relatively seamlessly, to the changing environment. This requires less abstract theory in the classroom – though certainly not the elimination of it – and more applied instruction in the useful arts and sciences.

To get this point across, let's reference a statement attributed to Charles Darwin, the source of which a web search was unable to find. Regardless, it is a good maxim: "It is not the strongest of the species that survives but the most adaptable." One source attributes its origin to a professor's speech:

Megginson presented his own idiosyncratic interpretation of the central idea outlined in Darwin's "On the Origin of Species":

Yes, change is the basic law of nature. But the changes wrought by the passage of time affects individuals and institutions in different ways. According to Darwin's Origin of Species, **it is not the most intellectual of the species that survives; it is not the strongest that survives; but the species that survives is the one that is able best to adapt and adjust to the changing environment in which it finds itself.** Applying this theoretical concept to us as individuals, we can state that the civilization that is able to survive is the one that is able to adapt to the changing physical, social, political, moral, and spiritual environment in which it finds itself.

Here we may see foundational principles upon which an education system must be designed and used to prepare youth for full citizenship. Quick adaptation based on the ability to transfer learning – near and far – is critical to survival and the health of society.

War demands this of us more than at any other time. Kliebard (2004) reveals the necessity of citizens' preparedness for war. He discusses public education war efforts during WWII.

When the Conference on War Problems and Responsibilities of Illinois Schools and Teacher Colleges was held on December 17, 1941, on the University of

Illinois campus, a comprehensive outline of the schools' role in the war ahead was outlined. ... Youth should receive training in first aid and must participate in scrap-metal and paper collection drives and Red Cross work. ... Additionally, in times of shortages, consumer education must be strengthened. Vocational training and the subject matter of such courses as physics and mathematics should be reoriented so as to place "greater stress upon aeromechanics, aeronautics, auto mechanics, navigation, gunnery, and other aspects of modern warfare." Subjects like biology and home economics should be redirected toward training in nursing and first aid. ... [T]hese are the kinds of measures that one might expect schools to take as a country entered into a major war. Later publications recommended similar efforts (Educational Policies Commission, 1943; National Education Association, 1943).

The course that the curriculum took was generally in the direction of those recommendations. (pp. 200-201)

This is important education that should never be stopped, though it may not need quite the amount of time dedicated to it during peacetime. During periods of peace, such education should have an indirect application – such as what Scouting teaches – but which could immediately and easily be transferred into direct military training when needed. Martial arts instruction should be given serious consideration given its mental and physical health benefits coupled with personal self-defense and war preparation.

There are lessons we can learn from Vietnam. Those who were the common foot soldiers experienced the greatest number of casualties per capita which was attributable to those who were least prepared for war, while those who were in the special forces – who were sent behind enemy lines in the most dangerous circumstances – experienced the least number of casualties due to their preparedness.

Given the number of wars the U.S. experienced throughout the 20th century, there is a high probability one's son(s) will face the ugly reality of war. Mankind is still too primitive to gamble on the naïve notion that we have progressed beyond that possibility. And it is sheer stupidity to bury one's head in the sand and take the position that "My son won't have to go to war." This demonstrates a complete lack of concern for one's child due to a mindset of denial, rooted in irrationality.

While there is no government agency that keeps statistics on gun ownership, a study conducted by a team at Columbia University¹⁸ estimated that one-third of Americans own at least one gun. Of course, many of these gun owners are target shooters and/or hunters. In 2011, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service reported there were 13,674,000 hunters at least 16 years old.¹⁹ This is the largest militia in the world and if called to arms, if we were to be invaded, no army in the world could come close to matching our numbers or abilities. Since it is illegal to possess firearms in most nations, Americans would outperform any army that could be mustered that might be foolish enough to attack us. This is the greatest

¹⁸ <http://injuryprevention.bmj.com/content/early/2015/06/09/injuryprev-2015-041586>

¹⁹ <http://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/fhw11-nat.pdf> page 59.

deterrent there can be for a nation to consider invading this continent. In particular, hunters make the best soldiers since there are many similar skills required for both hunting and war, which is one reason why feudal lords throughout history, kept hunting for themselves on their own lands. In addition, hunters were the most highly decorated soldiers in WWI and WWII – e.g. Sgt. York and Sgt. Murphy respectively. Therefore, hunting becomes a matter of national security. Yet both our friends and enemies, foreign and domestic, want to see us disarmed and to outlaw hunting. Food for thought when we consider the right to bear arms.

Another scenario related to war is its aftermath in countries that were leveled by the effects of war. Those who lived through the two world wars of 20th century Europe and faced the hardships of no food, water, clothing, shelter, etc., will tell us how ill prepared they were for such conditions. While it is very difficult to be fully prepared for such conditions, it would certainly be helpful to be somewhat prepared to lessen the effects of such a blow.

Another catastrophic event that could happen might be a pandemic where a large percentage of populations are annihilated, such as occurred due to the bubonic plague outbreaks. Whole regions of continents were wiped clean of human presence and civilizations ended – the fall of Rome being a perfect example. Yes, the Germanic invasions devastated the Western Roman Empire, but plagues were the primary cause of sending Europe back to the “stone age,” in a manner of speaking. One might say the invasions coupled with the plague was the “perfect storm.” Again, if one is in a state of denial with the belief “this can’t happen today,” I have some “prime property” I would love to sell you at “a real discount.”

Thomas Jefferson wrote a letter to [John Page \(July, 15, 1763\)](#) on the subject of hardships, expressing the idea that perfect happiness is not possible on this plain of existence and that hardships will befall everyone at various points in their lives. Therefore, it is imperative that every individual prepare themselves for hardships in order to soften the blows when they fall.

I think Denis Diderot, editor of the *Encyclopedie* – a 28-volume masterpiece of the French Enlightenment, written between 1751-1772 – offers a respected vision of the need for such a work from multiple perspectives, but for one very important reason. Kors (1998) provides a summary:

The *Encyclopedie* was a sanctuary of all acquired human knowledge and experience that would provide a bridge to the future that would be a barrier against any new dark ages. Diderot wrote, “A new barbarian invasion could come – the last one destroyed all European learning – but if one copy of the *Encyclopedie* survived, the human mind will be able to reconstruct human knowledge.” He believed that because the *Encyclopedie* reflects the essential Baconian and Lockean vision that one can communicate not merely what we know, what *we believe* we know, but one communicates *how* we came to know it on the basis of what experience and experiments one has come to know *what* one

now knows. Communicate that and method, along with conclusion, and knowledge has been secured.

This is why the current teaching method of memorizing for tests is inappropriate for an educational system; explaining why the inductive reasoning process by which discoveries took place is the appropriate means of instructing students if we hope it will have a lasting impression that can be transferred to the real world. Obviously this means the superfluous data that our teachers are currently commanded to teach needs to be eliminated.

An Analogy of the Extreme Sort

In a speech delivered on February 15, 2017, at a Hillsdale College National Leadership Seminar in Phoenix, Arizona, Meyer²⁰ (2017) addressed the contemporary failures of the intelligence community and the subsequent fallout from the politicization of these failures as it relates to the Trump-Clinton election. He then goes into explaining the purpose of gathering intelligence and its subsequent use. This explanation offers lessons for what each individual needs in order to navigate the challenges of living in a civil society. Granted, individuals may not face such extreme circumstances to contend with, but Meyer's explanation is a good analogy of how individuals must plot a course for themselves armed with good information, combined with good rational judgment.

[B]efore addressing the question of why these [intelligence] failures have occurred, we need to define clearly the role and purpose of our country's intelligence service, with a focus on how intelligence really works when it's working properly.

Just utter the word "intelligence" and most people conjure up images of spies, secret satellites peering down on foreign cities and terrorist camps, and rooms full of young technocrats reading private emails and listening to private conversations. These images are accurate, but they reflect the *tools* and *techniques* of our intelligence service, rather than its *purpose*. To understand its purpose, think of a jumbo jet flying at night through turbulent skies—thunder clouds, lightning, other airplanes streaking in all directions and at all altitudes. To navigate through this, the pilot and his crew rely on their radar—the instrument that paints a picture of their environment, enabling them to see what's going on around them and what lies ahead so they can chart a safe course. Radar doesn't tell the captain and his crew what to do, but it gives them the accurate information they'll need to make good decisions.

Our intelligence service is our nation's radar. Its purpose is to provide the president and his national security team with an accurate picture of what's going on in the world and what's likely to happen in the days, months, and years ahead.

²⁰ Meyer had served in the Reagan Administration as Special Assistant to the Director of Central Intelligence.

The assumption is that if the president and his team have this information, they can chart a safe course for our country. And if they can see the distant future soon enough and clearly enough—and if they don't like what they see—they can take steps to change the future before it happens.

Good intelligence is a combination of information and insight. Information is the raw material, while insight is the finished product. Sometimes this insight takes the form of a top-secret report that alerts the president and his team to something that's about to happen, such as a terrorist attack or the military invasion of one country by another. At other times it is a National Intelligence Estimate, whose purpose is to provide an overall assessment of a major issue—such as North Korea's nuclear bomb program or the rapid growth of Africa's middle class—along with a prediction of its future course.

The key to producing good intelligence lies in getting this combination of information and insight right. Intelligence work is like science. You don't collect information randomly and then stare at it in hopes that something important will pop up.²¹ You start with a thesis—in other words, you decide what you want to know. Then you send your collectors out to get it. This is why the key to producing good intelligence lies in asking the right question, rather than in just poring over what's been randomly collected in hopes that somewhere in the pile of reports and intercepts on your desk you'll spot something important.

Let me give you an example of how this worked during the Reagan administration. From the end of World War II until 1981, every president's objective had been not to lose the Cold War. If things were no worse when a president left office than when he took office, he'd done a good job. But President Reagan didn't want to tread water—he wanted to win the Cold War. In other words, he switched from defense to offense. So Reagan's great director of Central Intelligence, William Casey, asked the CIA's Soviet Division two obvious questions: *Where is the Soviet Union weak?* and *Where is it most vulnerable?* The answer he received was: *We don't know. No one's ever asked this before.* Our spies had been so focused on Soviet strengths—infantry divisions, nuclear missiles, tanks, submarines, and so forth—that we had no intelligence on Soviet weaknesses, such as its imploding economy. Under Casey's leadership, we refocused our collection efforts and, not surprisingly, found all sorts of Soviet vulnerabilities that hadn't been grasped because no one had bothered looking for them. President Reagan used these weaknesses and vulnerabilities to put more and more pressure on the Kremlin. Eight years later the Berlin Wall came down, and two years after that the Soviet Union ceased to exist.

In the intelligence business, just as in scientific research, a thesis sometimes turns out to be wrong. The collectors can't find what you want, because it isn't there.

²¹ Yet our education system does exactly that. Tremendous amounts of raw data are to be memorized over many years with no reference to context (Meyer refers to it as a thesis) with the expectation that “the smart people” can recall it readily whenever the need arises. Meyer's analogy dispels this theory once and for all.

When this happens—and it happens to even the best scientists and intelligence officials—you must abandon your flawed thesis and re-think the issue. If you refuse to do this, you're like a scientist who continues to insist that the Earth is flat—or a president who continues to insist that ISIS is like a “junior varsity” team.

When the collectors have done their work—when they've told the analysts what they want to know—the intelligence process shifts from gathering information to creating insight. It's the difference between shopping for food in the supermarket and actually cooking dinner.

Insight is the product of knowledge, experience, and, above all, good judgment. You cannot say something insightful, or even something intelligent, on a subject or issue about which you don't know anything. So, the most senior intelligence analysts must be among the world's most knowledgeable individuals in their fields of expertise—the Mideast, Russia, China, nuclear weapons, economic development, etc. And they must have that one elusive and unquantifiable skill that so often brings success in every venture: the ability to spot a pattern with the fewest possible facts—the ability to look at what's known and combine this with their own knowledge, experience, and good judgment, to come up with a new idea or insight. This is the skill we see in great scientists like Albert Einstein, in great entrepreneurs like Steve Jobs, and in great intelligence chiefs like Bill Casey.

How to find and distinguish good and useful information, plus how to develop good judgment, i.e. wisdom, and then to effectively use information to a desired end is what education is really all about. Memorization of data is not the way to get there. The analogy of the purpose of education with intelligence information gathering and decision making is really what everyone must do on a constant basis. The national security may or may not be at stake, but the security of every individual is constantly at stake.

Conclusion

When considering the purpose of education, many issues come into play. The needs of individuals must be first and foremost, which requires consideration of differing talents/abilities/intelligences along with the various economic paths open to citizens. The interests of the community must also be taken into consideration, since society can only be as moral as the people that compose it, but the interests of individuals must precede “public” interests. In between the individual and the community is the realm of civics, where individual rights and liberties, coupled with equality before the eyes of the law and under the rule of law, must prevail. Civics must teach civil behavior – i.e. virtue – within a society for prosperity and harmony to prevail so that the standard of living may rise for all. And finally, the defense of one's system of government requires preparation for war. Nothing deters aggression from others like physical, mental and moral strength.

Besides preparation for life, all education at some point must lead to occupational training in order to prepare individuals for an economic life. Whether it is during

secondary education, associate's level, undergraduate level, or graduate level, all roads must lead to a career if we hope to be an equitable society where everyone achieves access to a decent economic opportunity. Otherwise many will become wards of the State through the welfare or penitentiary systems.

Secondary school years need to be the primary period that most individuals receive professional training since college is inappropriate or useless to most. The belief that individuals cannot make a career choice in secondary school is not accurate. There are many who go through an undergraduate program and still do not know what career to pursue. There will be an undecided population, but this is to be expected. Therefore, educational programs must take the various populations into consideration, which requires various and flexible program designs.

The education level at which an individual starts a career orientation is dependent on interests, talents, and the industry one commits to. The belief that the more education one receives, the better, is a fallacy propagated by the educational establishment to make it appear as though its products/services are superior to all other choices in the market – and they have been largely successful in brainwashing citizens to believe this is an unquestionable truth. In the scheme of things, once an individual has thoroughly developed numeracy and literacy skills, the sky is the limit. With a strong foundation established, an individual can research whatever is desired and then pursue the practice of it in a multitude of venues. Once it is sufficiently understood and transfer of the knowledge is within one's grasp, an individual is then capable of applying it to economic opportunity.

With this clearly understood, the reformation of education can be seen as a monumental task, but one that is not insurmountable. It will take clear thinking from people outside the academic community, since stakeholders are, in so many cases, incapable of seeing the forest for the trees. It will take vision grounded in contemporary research but coupled with Enlightenment principles of humanism, which avowed that all men are created equal. And with the understanding that statism, progressivism, liberalism and socialism are at odds with the proper ends of education (that is, the individual is the primary purpose for education rather than for the State, i.e. the collective) we may develop a new system designed to fulfill these humanistic ends.

Appendix I

Education and Ideology

Jordan Peterson

July 13 2020

Imagine a system dedicated toward a particular goal: the education, for example, of young people. An educator with a belief system is construing the world in a simplified manner, but is intending to use those simplifications (and is justifying their utility) in relationship to their effectiveness in providing education. A valid educational institution has a purpose, which transcends the narrow interests of those who run the institution. It is therefore not predicated appropriately on the power that only serves, say, the teachers or professors. It has a purpose outside its own existence, and that purpose is generally and genuinely social value.

An education system that is functional teaches those who are exposed to it to conduct themselves in a successful manner in situations outside the institute itself: they learn to read, and to write, and to think critically, and to act in a socialized manner, and to compete, and to cooperate. And all these skills generalize beyond the narrow confines of what makes a given teacher capable of rising in the hierarchy of “power” that hypothetically characterizes the patriarchal institution. A hierarchy is a tool whose function transcends its own existence.

As a system becomes corrupt—degenerates, say, into mere order—its external function is increasingly sacrificed to the narrow self-interest of those who have come to occupy the safe, secure, predictable and, sometimes arbitrarily powerful niches of the institutional hierarchy. This is not to say that this is the defining characteristic of human organizations in general. There is virtually no view that is more cynical. Such a perspective denies the very notion of competence itself, as well as making light of the genuine desire to help, and to mentor, and to improve, and to create, and to reduce suffering, and to constrain malevolence. Such a perspective entirely denies the existence of the good (and I believe that is its fundamental purpose and motivation).

To the degree that a system remains honest—predicated on belief, rather than ideology—

progress in the bureaucratized system remains dependent on ability to educate. The algorithms of belief suit the stated and planned intent. But then imagine, further, that the system can be gamed. Simplifications that merely mimic the provision of education emerge. These simplifications purport to educate, but what they really do, for example, is increase the probability that the simplifier will move up the hierarchy of education provision, while simultaneously ensuring (for example) unearned moral superiority, convenient identification of enemies, and the opportunity to vengefully hurt and destroy.

The holder of a valid belief system regards anomaly and error as a call to investigation and update. The goal isn't stabilization of personal position within a hierarchy, or demonization of a perceived enemy, or moral justification for vengeful action undertaken against the externalized locus of enmity. The goal is to get the job done, and explaining anomalies away does not accomplish that task.

The person who wants the job done also assumes that he or she or the people in their carefully curated connection network are up to the job, as well, so that if the problem is accurately and forthrightly identified, human ingenuity will find a way to solve it.

https://www.thinkspot.com/feed/single_post?psid=dluNd1

Appendix II

I think Lawler (2014) does a very nice job of explaining the various needs and perceptions of the purpose of education. He provides:

What is the purpose of higher education? You can find seven philosophies of education in today's conversations and arguments. The list isn't exhaustive and there is, of course, some truth to each.

1. *Aristocratic Platonism* argues that leisurely contemplation is for the few and work is for the many. The few live outside the "cave," while the many are completely formed by the "city's" process of socialization. For the latter, education is vocational and civic-minded. For the former, education consists of seeking the truth, and the truth is discovered primarily by attending to the words of the philosophers in their "great books."

2. *Aristotelianism or Stoicism* insists that education should be directed toward the soul of all rational men and woman, but especially leaders. It aims for the rational and habitual cultivation of moral virtues, the spirited virtues of courage, generosity and magnanimity, but also the more graceful social virtues having to do with manners, morals, and wittiness. A rational man has an appreciation for cultivated leisure, but he knows that his life is for more than that. He lives by an honor code shared by rational men and women everywhere that allows him to know who he is and what he's supposed to do, even in the most difficult and lonely situations. So the point of classical education is to produce men like Atticus Finch or Admiral Stockdale or, most of all, the irreproachably generous and magnanimous George Washington.

3. *Middle-Class or Technical Education* focuses higher education *on* preparing free beings for work. The goal is for students to acquire flexible skills and competencies that allow men and women to flourish in the global marketplace. Education for contemplation or "knowing oneself," in this view, is a self-indulgent luxury. We should privilege the STEM majors not out of love of theoretical physics and mathematics but for their techno-productivity. If the traditional subjects—such as literature or philosophy—are to be taught, it's only because they offer students indispensable competencies such as critical thinking or effective communication; their actual content is of little interest or relevance. Traditional liberal education was once needed to breed gentlemen. As higher education becomes more democratic, we need to ensure that students waste neither time nor money.

4. *Political Correctness* asserts that the point of higher education is to eradicate racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism. ...

5. *Literary Liberal Education* emphasizes the importance for those pursuing literary careers of studying the classical Greek and Roman authors in their original

languages. Advocates of this approach don't believe that the classical authors are right about everything but they're strong where techno-democracy is weak. Our writers should think of themselves as sustaining distinctions that correspond to crucial aspects of the soul or the greatness of human individuality. Those distinctions otherwise become trivialized in a society where metaphysics, theology, and poetry lose ground, and where all language tends to get flattened out in a techno-direction.

6. *Democratic Liberal Education* argues that higher education should teach "civic literacy." The premise of democracy is that each of us is not only a free being who works but a free citizen who has the responsibility of sharing in ruling. To that end, advocate[s] argue, higher education must teach the "self-evident" principles of the Declaration of Independence and how they've been explained and applied by our leading statesmen. Because our Declaration is philosophic, even civic education can't just be about our "cave."

7. *The Augustinian Biblical-Christian View* begins, in the spirit of St. Augustine, with the insight that both work and contemplation are for everyone. None of us sinners [are] too good not to work, and all of us were made to know God and the good for ourselves. Tocqueville reminds us of the Puritans, who made a rather high level of public education available to everyone. Their intention was partly technical, but it was also driven by the thought that every creature should be able to understand the Bible for himself or herself. And we should remember the great achievement that was the American system of secondary and higher ... education, where ordinary working-class men and women (including, of course, lots of recent immigrants) were given a rather classical, text-based liberal education.

I think all these philosophical narratives should flourish in various places around the country. The goal should be to preserve the diversity that is the saving grace of American higher education.

https://www.mindingthecampus.org/2014/05/15/seven_competing_views_of_higher_education/

Appendix III

St. John's College Classical Studies

It should be seriously contemplated to make such a program as St. John's the curricula of choice for those who are scholarly in nature and/or who will pursue the professions. In addition, such a program truly prepares individuals for leadership positions in society way above and beyond any other course of study extant in the U.S.! It teaches rational thought in contrast to algorithmic abilities that most other colleges are focused on, other than Hillsdale College, which also has outstanding programs.

“At the heart of St. John's College undergraduate program is a liberal arts curriculum focused on the most important books and ideas of Western civilization. Following a reading list that includes many Great Books, all classes are conducted seminar-style, with faculty facilitating the discussion. Our liberal arts undergraduate program is a truly comprehensive education that is perhaps the most rigorous in America.”

Life Doesn't Have Majors, Neither Does St. John's

The St. John's curriculum defies the conventional separation of human knowledge at most colleges. Students discover the myriad connections between literature, science, philosophy, math, music, and language by reading the books that investigated and established these disciplines.

WHAT SUBJECTS DO STUDENTS STUDY AT ST. JOHN'S?

St. John's offers a bachelor's degree in liberal arts. If the St. John's program were to be analyzed by credits into major and minors it would correspond to two majors, one in history of mathematics and science, and the other in philosophy, including metaphysics, ethics, and political theory. The minors would be in classical studies and comparative literature. Beyond these fields, students also explore language, history, politics, law, economics, music, art, theology, math, science, and psychology.

Remember, St. John's students don't have to choose subjects - students study them all.

CLASSICAL STUDIES AND GREEK

Freshmen begin by learning the elements of ancient Greek grammar. By the end of the year, freshmen have learned enough Greek to translate with the help of a lexicon and notes.

HISTORY, POLITICS, LAW, AND ECONOMICS

Around the table and outside the classroom, students discuss ancient ideas that have shaped our world—especially relating to history, politics, law, and economics.

LITERATURE

Students study great works of literature at St. John's. Through seminar and language tutorial, students learn to deeply understand assigned readings and apply what they've learned in the world.

MATHEMATICS

Students study original and influential works of mathematics, demonstrating hundreds of theorems to one another in class.

MUSIC AND THE ARTS

Students at St. John's engage with great works of music and art. They take two years of music but the opportunities to sing, play, and dance extend far beyond the classroom.

THE NATURAL SCIENCES

St. John's students study physics, biology, and chemistry through books and experiments that help them face difficult, basic questions and to see how they might be answered.

PHILOSOPHY, THEOLOGY, AND PSYCHOLOGY

At St. John's, students get to know themselves inside and outside the classroom as they explore some of the most interesting minds of the Western world.

READING LIST

Great Books Curriculum

St. John's College was founded in 1696 and is best known for the Great Books curriculum that was adopted in 1937. While the list of books has evolved over the last century, the tradition of all students reading foundational texts of Western civilization remains. The books read at St. John's include classic works in philosophy, literature, political science, psychology, history, religion, economics, math, chemistry, physics, biology, astronomy, music, language, and more.

Freshman Year Reading List

Homer: *Iliad, Odyssey*

Aeschylus: *Agamemnon, Libation Bearers, Eumenides, Prometheus Bound*

Sophocles: *Oedipus Rex, Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone, Philoctetes, Ajax*

Thucydides: *Peloponnesian War*

Euripides: *Hippolytus, Bacchae*

Herodotus: *Histories*

Aristophanes: *Clouds*

Plato: *Meno, Gorgias, Republic, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Symposium, Parmenides, Theaetetus, Sophist, Timaeus, Phaedrus*
 Aristotle: *Poetics, Physics, Metaphysics, Nicomachean Ethics, On Generation and Corruption, Politics, Parts of Animals, Generation of Animals*
 Euclid: *Elements*
 Lucretius: *On the Nature of Things*
 Plutarch: “Lycurgus,” “Solon”
 Ptolemy: *Almagest*
 Pascal: *Treatise on the Equilibrium of Liquids*
 Nicomachus: *Arithmetic*
 Lavoisier: *Elements of Chemistry*
 Harvey: *Motion of the Heart and Blood*
 Essays by: Archimedes, Fahrenheit, Avogadro, Dalton, Cannizzaro, Virchow, Mariotte, Driesch, Gay-Lussac, Spemann, Stears, J.J. Thomson, Mendeleyev, Berthollet, J.L. Proust

Sophomore Year Reading List

Hebrew Bible
 New Testament
 Aristotle: *De Anima, On Interpretation, Prior Analytics, Categories*
 Apollonius: *Conics*
 Virgil: *Aeneid*
 Plutarch: “Caesar,” “Cato the Younger,” “Antony,” “Brutus”
 Epictetus: *Discourses, Manual*
 Tacitus: *Annals*
 Ptolemy: *Almagest*
 Plotinus: *The Enneads*
 Augustine: *Confessions*
 Maimonides: *Guide for the Perplexed*
 Anselm: *Proslogium*
 Aquinas: *Summa Theologiae*
 Dante: *Divine Comedy*
 Chaucer: *Canterbury Tales*
 Machiavelli: *The Prince, Discourses*
 Copernicus: *On the Revolutions of the Spheres*
 Kepler: *Epitome IV*
 Livy: *Early History of Rome*
 Palestrina: *Missa Papae Marcelli*
 Montaigne: *Essays*
 Viète: *Introduction to the Analytical Art*
 Bacon: *Novum Organum*
 Shakespeare: *Richard II, Henry IV, The Tempest, As You Like It, Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, King Lear, and Sonnets*
 Poems by: Marvell, Donne, and other 16th- and 17th-century poets
 Descartes: *Geometry, Discourse on Method*

Pascal: *Generation of Conic Sections*
Bach: *St. Matthew Passion, Inventions*
Haydn: Quartets
Mozart: Operas
Beethoven: Third Symphony
Schubert: Songs
Monteverdi: *L'Orfeo*
Stravinsky: *Symphony of Psalms*

Junior Year Reading List

Cervantes: *Don Quixote*
Galileo: *Two New Sciences*
Hobbes: *Leviathan*
Descartes: *Meditations, Rules for the Direction of the Mind*
Milton: *Paradise Lost*
La Rochefoucauld: *Maximes*
La Fontaine: *Fables*
Pascal: *Pensées*
Huygens: *Treatise on Light, On the Movement of Bodies by Impact*
Eliot: *Middlemarch*
Spinoza: *Theologico-Political Treatise*
Locke: *Second Treatise of Government*
Racine: *Phèdre*
Newton: *Principia Mathematica*
Leibniz: *Monadology, Discourse on Metaphysics, Essay on Dynamics, Philosophical Essays, Principles of Nature and Grace*
Swift: *Gulliver's Travels*
Hume: *Treatise of Human Nature*
Rousseau: *Social Contract, The Origin of Inequality*
Molière: *Le Misanthrope*
Adam Smith: *Wealth of Nations*
Kant: *Critique of Pure Reason, Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*
Mozart: *Don Giovanni*
Austen: *Pride and Prejudice, Emma*
Hawthorne: *The Scarlet Letter*
Dedekind: *Essays on the Theory of Numbers* Articles of Confederation, Declaration of Independence, Constitution of the United States of America
Hamilton, Jay, and Madison: *The Federalist*
Twain: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*
Wordsworth: *The Two-Part Prelude of 1799*
Essays by: Young, Taylor, Euler, D. Bernoulli, Ørsted, Ampère, Faraday, Maxwell

Senior Year Reading List Supreme Court Opinions

Goethe: *Faust*

Darwin: *Origin of Species*
 Hegel: *Phenomenology of Mind*, “Logic” (from the *Encyclopedia*)
 Lobachevsky: *Theory of Parallels*
 Kafka: *The Metamorphosis*
 Plato: *Phaedrus*
 Tocqueville: *Democracy in America*
 Documents from American History Hamilton, Jay, and Madison *The Federalist* Lincoln:
 Selected speeches F. Douglass: Selected speeches
 Kierkegaard: *Philosophical Fragments, Fear and Trembling*
 Wagner: *Tristan and Isolde*
 Marx: *Capital, Political and Economic Manuscripts of 1844, The German Ideology*
 Dostoevsky: *Brothers Karamazov*
 Tolstoy: *War and Peace*
 Melville: *Benito Cereno*
 O’Connor: Selected stories
 William James: *Psychology, Briefer Course*
 Nietzsche: *Beyond Good and Evil*
 Freud: *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*
 Baudelaire: *Les Fleurs du Mal*
 Booker T. Washington: Selected writings
 Du Bois: *The Souls of Black Folk*
 Husserl: *Crisis of the European Sciences*
 Heidegger: *Basic Writings*
 Einstein: Selected papers
 Conrad: *Heart of Darkness*
 Faulkner: *Go Down Moses*
 Flaubert: *Un Coeur Simple*
 Woolf: *Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse*
 Poems by: Yeats, T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, Valéry, Rimbaud
 Essays by: Faraday, J. J. Thomson, Millikan, Minkowski, Rutherford, Davisson,
 Schrödinger, Bohr, de Broglie, Heisenberg, Mendel, Boveri, Sutton, Morgan, Beadle &
 Tatum, Sussman, Watson & Crick, Jacob & Monod, Hardy

Recent preceptorial books have included:

For seven weeks in junior and senior years, seminar is suspended so that students may choose elective classes called preceptorials.

Marquez: *One Hundred Years of Solitude*
 Russell: *An Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*
 Shakespeare: *Measure for Measure*
 Laozi: *Daodejing*
 Hegel: *Philosophy of Nature*
 Melville: *Moby Dick*
 O’Connor: *Wise Blood*
 Gibbon: *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*
 Heidegger: *What is Metaphysics?*

Proust: *Remembrance of Things Past*
Nietzsche: *Gay Science*
Arendt: *The Human Condition*
James: *The Portrait of a Lady*
Dostoevsky: *The Devils*
Avicenna: *The Metaphysics*
Zhuangzi: *Zhuangzi*
Flaubert: *Madame Bovary*
Bach: St. Matthew Passion
Feynman: *QED*
Camus: *The Stranger*
Borges: *Ficciones*
Lorenz: *Studies in Animal and Human Behavior*
Essays, Poetry, Music, and Art by: Einstein, Manet, Al-Farabi, Dickinson, Al-Razi,
Locke, Voltaire, Ibn Majja, Duchamp, Ibn Sina, Hill, Hume, Al-Ghazali, Rousseau, Ibn
Tufayl, Montaigne, Ibn Rushd, Herbert, Donne, Hopkins, Stravinsky

See St. John's College website at: <https://www.sjc.edu>

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