

THE RIGHT TO BE EDUCATED —  
PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS

by

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### 3: *The Right to be Educated— Philosophical Reflections*

What is education? Certainly the concept embraces more than schooling, since the school is only one institution invented to accomplish the purpose of education. Then too, we must admit that not all schooling makes an authentic contribution to education. Sometimes the instrument fails to achieve its end.

Education is an aspect of human development. But the concept of the development of the person is wider than education, since much development occurs unsought as a by-product of activities done for their own sake. Moreover, development can be negative—for example, a person can be taught to lie, to violate the rights of others, and to indulge habits damaging to himself. One remembers the waifs in *Oliver Twist* who were trained in vices. Such development could hardly be called “education.”

Education is the purposeful development of the human person. Development is the end in view, the objective intentionally pursued by education. At least the educator must aim at development. If the one who is being educated also aims at it, he begins to participate actively in the process of his own education. Self-education is a real possibility, not a contradiction in terms.

Education is a positive development of the person. Development is directed toward what is conceived to be the true end and good of the person. Human good is realized both in

the individual and in the community. Education aims toward the betterment of persons and communities. Without a standard of human good, no education is possible. All education is implicitly dominated by a philosophy of man, an understanding of what man is and what he ought to become.

The development involved in education is not mere transient change. If two equally strong and healthy boys are sleeping, then it may be impossible to distinguish which of them has been trained in gymnastics and which has not been trained. But when the boys awaken, a simple test will answer the question; since the one who has been trained will have a ready ability for athletic feats, while the boy without training will lack such ability. Similarly, each field of knowledge presents the possibility of a ready ability. For example, to know a language is to have a ready ability to read, write, speak, and translate it. To know mathematics is to have a ready ability to solve mathematical problems. To know medicine is to have a ready ability to treat and cure diseases.

In its most general sense, then, education may be defined as a deliberate attempt to develop in a human person any ready ability that he can exercise for the true good of himself or others.

### COMPLEXITY OF EDUCATION

In a very simple human culture there is little need for education. Children acquire the abilities they need spontaneously by imitation. Without a written language and division of labor, each couple incarnates the fullness of the culture, actuates it in their daily acts, and passes it on to their children without making any deliberate effort to do so.

With a division of labor beyond that found within each family, a problem presents itself. Either each separate task will be hereditary and the various aspects of the culture will become the property of different groups, or some deliberate

effort will be made to pass on the various abilities to those who do not acquire them by spontaneous learning. To the extent that the latter solution is adopted, there is a beginning of primitive education.

As techniques become more sophisticated, education becomes more necessary. Simple and easily imitated techniques are gradually modified into complex, efficient, but difficult to imitate processes. At a certain point in this evolution, a stage is reached where the technique can no longer be acquired by direct imitation. First a ready ability for the simpler, less efficient forms of the technique must be gained. The first ability is a vehicle for transition to the more sophisticated ability of the evolved technique. To aim specifically at the transitional ability, using it merely as a stage in the process of development, is to engage in activity that is purely educational. However simple the culture, formal education begins at this point.

Sometimes the lack of a ready ability is not due to the complexity and difficulty of the behavior of those who exercise the ability. A small child cannot share in making decisions for the community, not because of technical difficulty, but because of his lack of sufficient knowledge, proper attitudes, and spiritual capacities. Not merely past experience, but also common cultural meanings must be transmitted symbolically by stories, legends, myths, rituals, and object lessons. The ability to act in a community presupposes and gathers into itself a whole host of meanings and values that belong to the spiritual dimension of the culture.

As time passes, man's acts become more and more significant in both dimensions. His technical acts gain greater and greater power through ever more complex instruments. The ready abilities for such acts become ever more difficult to acquire. Social acts gain greater and greater meaning through ever more complex and self-conscious extensions of spiritual culture. The gaining of the status of full membership in society becomes a task ever more difficult.

Thus as man progresses, the proportion of his life that

must be devoted to formal education grows greater and greater. The ready abilities take longer to acquire, but they are increasingly significant and indispensable. We may imagine the process of development reaching its ultimate limits when individuals will spend almost all their lives developing abilities which will be exercised only for a very brief time. Nevertheless, the few acts that will be performed will be so effective and so filled with human meaning that the life-long education needed to perform them will be worthwhile.

### EDUCATION AND HUMAN LIFE

Looking at education in this way, one can see that denial of it is tantamount to denial of human life itself. Once culture reaches a level at which education is necessary; no one without it is able to participate in his community as a full member, for he lacks the ready abilities to perform the acts that are most effective and meaningful in his society. The denial to anyone of educational opportunity automatically limits his role in the society. He is, as it were, consigned to a certain earlier and lower level of cultural development and prevented from reaching the frontier of present-day life and activity. It is little wonder that a society that degrades certain groups always restricts the educational opportunity of those against whom discrimination is practiced. The right to education is the foundation of all the rights of the person to live as a free and equal member of his community.

Written language may not have been invented as an instrument of education. From one point of view, it presents a large and basic challenge to the more educated part of the community. Since the ready ability to read and write is a key to so many other abilities, those who are more educated can hardly feel that they are doing justice to those who lack this ability until every reasonable effort has been made to eliminate illiteracy. Whatever else belongs to the "elementary and fun-

damental" part of education, certainly instruction in reading and writing belongs to it.

From another point of view, written language is the most powerful instrument of education. Discoveries and thoughts that are recorded are less likely to be lost, and they can be spread widely and quickly. The past becomes more fixed, less subject to revision; and hence genuine cumulative progress becomes possible. The abstract symbols of language make possible a larger community of shared, human meanings and the development of a social structure based on the intelligent articulation of legally stabilized rights and duties. From written language grows civilization. And civilization is a school, an institutionalization of education.

In considering illiteracy, we would make a serious mistake to imagine that the problem is simple. There are many levels of ability to read and write. The mere ability to vocalize written phrases helpful for daily life is precious, but minimal. If the written language is to attain its full power as an educational instrument, literacy of a rather high order must be the aim of the general elementary education. Reading comprehension, including especially the logical analysis of argumentative content, is necessary if the ability to read is to be used as a tool in self-education. Moreover, even the most skillful reader needs a good library.

The right to a free elementary education therefore includes the right to instruction in reading and writing up to a solid level of ability, and the right to use free public libraries.

Taken by itself, this conclusion is not very sweeping, for it deals with the issue only at a general level. Further specifications may be introduced if a nation as a whole is economically in advance of the most undeveloped peoples. For if there is some margin of resources that can be used for more than minimal education, then it is a strict requirement of social justice that these added resources be used with justice to every citizen. Each child to be educated must be regarded as a person having an absolute dignity, as an irreducible bearer of value,

not merely as a potential contributor to some larger political, ideological, cosmic, or religious design.

Moreover, basic education is a good that must be distributed with equality, and any failure in equality of distribution demands restitution. This remains true even if the fault was committed at some time long past by one group in the society against another.

In the United States, for example, the grave injustice of Negro slavery, with all its associated evils, was practiced for centuries. Still today the children of this injustice—together with other groups in the population whose ancestors were also treated unjustly—suffer such great cultural deficiencies that a merely proportional allocation of educational resources is far from just. Yet it remains that the best schools are generally to be found in the most prosperous areas while the poorest schools are generally to be found where the children of injustice live.

In such a situation, the right of the culturally deprived to education certainly ought to mean their right to the best education available—the best school buildings; the best equipment; the best books; the most intelligent, best trained, and most experienced teachers. Of course, those who at present enjoy great and unjustly held advantages will say that such a proposal is unfair and impossible to put into practice. Nevertheless, if as much genius were used in finding ways to rectify injustice as is used in finding ways to do injustice and to rationalize it, a way surely could be found to achieve the restitution of education that has been unjustly withheld.

I have used the situation of the United States to illustrate this point. I use this illustration both because I am familiar with the American scene and because otherwise a citizen of another country might excuse himself by pointing out that I am insensitive to the tear gas in my own eye, and impolitely attentive to the speck in his. But having admitted the inadequacies of America's achievement in regard to social justice, I must point out that similar situations seem to exist everywhere

in the world. For in every society there are the exploited. And everywhere those who profit from injustice receive a large part of that benefit in the form of a far larger than average share of educational opportunities.

A key in this matter is that we must not think in static terms about the possible. In the field of human action, what a small and poor heart finds impossible, a larger and better heart finds possible. Resources are not a fixed quantity; they can expand so that injustices can be rectified with only a temporary halt to the increasing advantages of the prosperous. If only the rich and the comfortable do not become richer and more comfortable, then justice can be done to the deprived. Moreover, while social justice in education is a matter of strict moral obligation, justice also is a worthwhile investment which will bear fruit in increased future productivity and in social stability.

In nations where it is possible, the right to basic education should be understood to include more than what is essential for making a living. If all of a man's activity is aimed at gaining the bare necessities of life, he has little chance to enter upon the endless creative process characteristic of advanced human culture. Obstacles of various kinds stand in the way of trying to communicate ultimate ideals and values in the common educational process. But there are fewer obstacles in the way of a better distribution of the chief instruments of the first steps toward self-transcendence. For these instruments are those of play and of esthetic experience, and neither ideological nor political conflicts need prevent the expansion of education to include them.

Play should include all kinds of games and sports—to be engaged in, not merely to be watched. If we use imagination in writing rules and setting qualifications, every child might find some form of play to which he could devote his self-discipline and in which he could excel. Accomplishment should receive public recognition, not only as a stimulus to effort, but even more because play, which is an adult's *recreation*, is a child's *work*.



Esthetic experiences also should be cultivated in a wide range of abilities to perform and to appreciate. How many who would have been great artists have never been discovered in childhood, have never been disciplined? To what loss to us all? How to combine freedom and discipline is the great question of modern life. The problem of the esthetic sphere is simpler: how to unite creativity with high standards of excellence. Yet it seems certain that a life lacking esthetic cultivation is not well disposed to receive the higher and more complex cultivation of moral and spiritual discipline.

### EDUCATION ACCORDING TO MERIT

Beyond the elementary or fundamental level of education, the right to technical and professional education should be according to merit—that is, according to individual ability. The proposition seems self-evidently true, but its meaning is far from clear.

A young person whose parents were not themselves technically and professionally trained is likely to seem less able to profit from such training himself, even if his native ability is high. Does an educational system simply accept applicants on the basis of developed qualification, or must an attempt be made to equalize advantages? If the former, technical and professional education can produce something of a new elite class, even in a “classless” democratic society. If an attempt is to be made to equalize the position of young people from less advantaged backgrounds, the demand of justice in education presupposes a transformation in society that will permit all children to profit from an equal wealth of cultural experiences. No civilized society has attempted such equalization.

Another problem arises from the indefiniteness of the concept of the “technical and professional.” If only a few established areas are recognized, competition for education will be limited to those areas. If, on the other hand, the aim is to find some area in which *every* student can be given a technical or

professional education, then the number of fields must be expanded indefinitely.

A related problem concerns standards within established fields. An area such as medicine may be well organized with very high educational standards. The result may be a shortage of persons able to exercise limited medical skills.

Although this last problem is complex in the concrete order of political and social action, it is comparatively simple conceptually. Many persons of limited ability could be trained to exercise certain medical skills. Undoubtedly, their work would not be as satisfactory as that of a fully trained physician. But such medical care could be superior to no medical care at all. Accordingly, the principle of a right to professional training according to merit seems to imply that some who are not now admitted for such training—for example, in medicine—probably should be given access to it. Even if they were less able and standards were somewhat lowered, the result could be justified so long as the end for which the profession exists were better served on the whole.

A solution to the other problems seems to presuppose some theory of justice by which to balance the rights of the individual and the welfare of the community as a whole. The right to education is not an immunity, and so its corresponding duty requires performance, not mere avoidance. To fulfill such a right, society must allocate some part of the available resources, which are always inadequate to demand.

Of course there are some forms of technical and professional education that have an unquestioned social value. In these cases, the allocation for education can be viewed as an investment. The ready ability developed by education is a capital asset for the society. As long as the productivity of this form of investment is greater than that of possible alternatives, the expenditure is justified in purely economic terms, and no conflict between individual rights and social welfare arises. Thus dentists and elementary school teachers are educated, because their training is a sound investment.

But what of the technical and professional education required to engage in space exploration, historical research, or philosophic speculation? Clearly, each society estimates according to its own sense of values the extent to which there is a right to education in such fields. If an educational program does not terminate in a ready ability for some activity that is already socially valued, then any claim to a right to such education is not likely to be honored.

Such discrimination on the part of society may seem reasonable enough, and perhaps it is. Yet at some point the perspective must shift, or individual persons will become mere cogs in the social machine. This point is illustrated very clearly by the problem of hard-core unemployment.

As technology progresses, unskilled and semi-skilled workers are more and more replaced by automatic machines. Of course, the quantity of output is not fixed, and the machines themselves must be manufactured; thus automation creates many new jobs. But the new positions require ever-rising qualifications. Not everyone is naturally apt to be an engineer. Fewer and fewer people having special natural aptitudes developed by longer and longer technical education are producing the increasing output in a more and more efficient way. What is to become of the displaced unskilled and semi-skilled workers?

Some can be retrained for other tasks. In many cases, there is no lack of native ability. An imaginative and vigorous effort at education can restore these displaced persons to the dignity of productive work. Such an approach is necessary not only within each nation, but also on a world-wide basis. The developed, technologically advanced nations are displacing the citizens of undeveloped nations from their economic roles.

Measures which stave off starvation are not sufficient to meet the standards of justice. A person ought not to be condemned to misery merely because he committed the sin of being born in an undeveloped land. Those who have resources owe him technical education. Men of every nation have the

right to share in the dignity of productive work. The universalization of opportunity for technical education is far more urgent than further technical advances.

More serious is the problem of the increasing proportion of persons who cannot be trained for any productive role. There always has been a small group of such persons—individuals of very low intelligence, the physically disabled, and those suffering from other severe handicaps. The boundaries of this group are socially defined, however. Advancing technology seems to be tending to increase the size of the group. The tasks required by more sophisticated technology are more complex, require more education, education for which a smaller proportion is apt.

A static approach to this problem will mean that society will regard this group as an increasingly large dead-weight. If human life is respected, the weight will be dragged, though reluctantly. If respect for life falters, the temptation will grow strong to practice euthanasia on such useless individuals.

A dynamic approach to the problem would seek to alter its conditions through education, not only of those displaced by advancing technology, but also of those consuming goods and services. Although material goods are closely linked to technological development, services are related less directly to it. Anything one individual can do for another may be a valuable service if the human significance of the act is appreciated by the one who receives it. In a world made more and more impersonal by technology, inventiveness is needed to find new ways in which those lacking aptitude for professional and technical work can preserve their personal dignity while offering services to others. Education must teach the value of service by instilling the ready ability to appreciate what even the least able of us can offer.

We may imagine a band of travelers crossing a trackless desert. A few are far ahead and making rapid progress, while others straggle behind, and some are barely crawling through the hot sand. Such is mankind. The primary task of profes-

sional and technical education is not to accelerate the progress of all, for then their relative positions would become even more widely separated. Rather, education should be used to draw the band together. The pace of the stragglers must be improved. None may be left behind. Even those who cannot continue the march must be brought along. Their contribution could be to cheer the rest with good humor and to remind us all of where the trek is headed—lest in the haste to make progress everyone forget this most essential point.

### EDUCATION BY PARENTS

The primary right to decide what sort of education shall be given is assigned to the parents. Why to the parents? Why not to the larger community, which also has an interest in the matter?

The answer to this question lies in the manner in which persons originate. Our understanding is distorted by individualistic and mechanistic images which conceal the real continuity in the process by which persons emerge from persons.

Even from a purely biological point of view, the new person is not a new beginning of human life. The living substance of the father and the living substance of the mother join to form the beginning of the new individual. At first the new life is most intimately united with that from which it has been formed. Then, gradually, step by step the new organism grows apart, distinguishing and separating itself from its mother. Birth is merely a memorable moment in a long, slow process of separation. Even after birth the life of the infant is closely united for some months with that of his mother.

The complexities of the process of sexual generation should not blind us to the essentials. Human life comes from human life, just as truly as life comes from life in the simple organisms that reproduce by a straight-forward process of fission.

Psychic and spiritual life also arises from pre-existing life.

Parents not only become one flesh in their children; they also become in them one mind and one heart. To be a father, to be a mother is more than physical reproduction. The parent not only must give the beginnings of physiological life, but he must give all the beginnings—at least, the beginning of all the beginnings. Parents must provide for their children the ready ability to educate themselves or to receive education from others.

Here, once more, we see why the right to education is so fundamental. To refuse education is to strangle new life in its beginnings. The right to education and the right to life are inseparably linked. Education is the psychic and spiritual equivalent of conception. To withhold education is to commit a kind of psychic and spiritual abortion.

Thus education belongs to procreation as its psychic and spiritual aspect. Parents are naturally concerned with the education of their children, because the children are sparks from the fire of the parents' own life, sparks that will burn on when the parents themselves have died.

While the child is unable to exercise his freedom and depends upon someone's care for the beginning of his life, the responsibility and the right naturally falls to the parents, because the psychic and spiritual life of the child is most closely united with the life of his parents until the child achieves independent personhood by distinguishing himself from them. The emerging person cannot be interfered with by outsiders to any greater extent than any other member of the community may be interfered with by another, because the child may be resolved into two functions: his identity with his parents and his independent personhood. To the extent that the child is one with his parents, no one may interfere with the existence of the child any more than he may interfere with the existence of the parents themselves. To the extent that the child is an independent person, he is a self, a free and equal member of society. He himself can determine the directions his own education will take.

**EDUCATION AND AUTHORITY**

But to say that the parents, or the person himself when he becomes capable, have the primary right and responsibility in regard to education is not to deny that within the educational process itself there is need for legitimate authority. One cannot learn anything from another unless he is willing to be led. Even if one reads a book, he must accept at its true value the authority of the author. Between the lack of an ability and the acquisition of it is a void that can be traversed only by trust. The teacher is a better judge of how to learn, because the teacher knows and the student does not. Educational anarchists, who would exclude all authority from learning and leave everything to the spontaneity of the children, confuse the ideal of autonomy which may be achieved at the end of education with the condition of the human person who comes to be from another, and after not having been at all.

Thus the fundamental commitments that will determine the kind of person the child will be must be reserved to the parents. Not every detail of the educational process, but the kind of education the children will receive is for the parents to decide. The state may seek to remove children from the influence of their parents, to impose a system of values and a meaning of life that the parents do not accept. This is the sort of interference which violates the basic right of the parents to control the education of their children. Coming to be from their parents, children must begin life in the likeness of their parents' psychic and spiritual selfhood, not according to the pattern of some utopian or scientific blueprint for a better humanity.

The point is worth stressing because it is fundamentally important. Over and over again those who have set out, confident in their blueprint, to remake mankind have sought to seize control of education. If only the children were brought up as the dreamers and planners desire, then their entire

scheme could be a success. Thus there is a totalitarian effort to break the continuity of human life. The parents are regarded as mere suppliers of a human raw material to be shaped and formed into the new humanity in the educational factories of the state.

### EDUCATION AS "PRODUCTION"

The conception of education as a form of production is insidious and widespread. It appears wearing only a thin disguise in the least likely places. Again and again in modern times liberal social reformers have turned hopefully to the schools. The "openness" and "flexibility" of young minds offer the hope that reforms resisted by the caution and rigidity of the older generation can be brought about by the proper cultivation of a new outlook in young people. Those who make a profession of condemning indoctrination seem to be insensitive to the fact that they also make use of it whenever they seek to accomplish social changes by turning young minds and hearts against the beliefs and attitudes of their parents.

The concept of education as production also appears in some efforts to develop "scientific" pedagogy. Medicine often serves as a model. As medicine has achieved scientific status by basing itself upon chemistry and biology and by utilizing the experimental method proper to science, so it is thought that education can achieve scientific status by basing itself upon psychology and sociology and by engaging in pseudo-scientific experimentation.

The difficulty with this project is that education should be concerned with the reality of the integral human person, and man transcends the determinacy of nature. He is not merely what is already given, for he *exists*—his being is creative self-determination. The self comes to be through its own effort, through its own acts, through its own ingenuity or dullness, through its own choices and omissions. Man is the only crea-



ture who makes history, for the person composes his life and is author of the material of his own biography.

Psychology has attained scientific status precisely to the extent that it has abstracted from the existential reality of man and has concentrated on aspects of human life that are common to man and other animals or on aspects in which man fails to achieve his potentiality for freedom and falls into the causally determined patterns of neurosis and other forms of psychic disease. Of what is uniquely human and truly personal there is no science of psychology, although there are philosophical anthropologies which emphasize the characteristics of the person. These anthropologies do not provide a basis for a scientific pedagogy, but they do point the way toward an appreciation of the unique dignity of individual lives.

Similar remarks can be made concerning sociology. The sociologists have developed techniques for describing with some degree of accuracy certain aspects of society. But the techniques of sociology are most effective when the data collected are most abstracted from human meaning—for example, a compilation of demographic statistics. When sociologists enter into more sensitive territory, their conclusions tend either to pretentious statement of the obvious and trivial or to deceptive clarification of the arguable and ambiguous.

Surely in “sciences” of psychology and sociology there is little ground for pedagogy. Little ground, but some. For there are aspects in which education is not dealing with the person as *person*. A public authority needs to know how many seats must be made available in order to provide them when they will be needed. More significant, empirical psychology is gradually revealing the possibilities and limitations of the human organism for various forms of learning. But such matters are not the areas in which occur the great battles of educational theory and practice. In these conflicts, science has little to contribute. The real issues invariably concern philosophical assumptions about the nature of man and the ideals of human existence.

In a field such as medicine, a great part of the work is purely technical, and the decisions concerning policy can safely be left to those who have technical expertise. The ends of the medical profession are generally well understood and agreed upon by both the medical profession and the public. In a field such as law, a great part of the work is not technical, and thus decisions concerning policy cannot be left entirely to experts. The entire public has a stake in the making of law and in its execution. Education is nearer to law than it is to medicine.

### EXPERIMENTATION IN EDUCATION

For this reason, the public at large, and especially parents, should not relinquish the right to a role in forming educational policy for the community. When psychological and sociological jargon is used to create a seeming technical expertise, the "layman" should not timidly admit his incompetence to judge. Of course, there is such a thing as expertness about the technique of teaching reading, for example; and those who have not studied the matter would overreach themselves if they attempted to criticize technicalities of method. But there is not any expertness on questions such as the extent to which an established culture should be preserved, or whether boys and girls should be mixed together and given the same educational experiences, or what general theory of pedagogy should be adopted. Here teachers and officials overreach themselves if they attempt to reserve for "expert" determinations such questions of educational policy, questions concerning which the judgments of parents are as likely to be sound and have more claim to be followed.

Extensive efforts to make use of the experimental method in education often mean a false reduction of education to technique. Experiment has its place primarily in the technical field;

it can be applied only in an analogous and restricted sense in the existential domain.

In strict experimentation, the experimental material must be expendable. That is why medical experiments that cannot be performed on human beings can be done on animals. In education one can never take the attitude that the person who is developing through the educational process is an expendable sample. If experimentation with the human body must be strictly limited, how much more strictly must we limit human experimentation involving the mind and soul.

Again, in strict experimentation it is essential that generalization be possible. Unless the experiment is really typical of a general class, no significant application can be made of the results. In education the more one approaches the existential center of the personality the less generalization is possible, and the more the uniqueness of the person dominates the reality. Pedagogy which has a real basis in generalization will have to keep its distance from the creative center of personal self-determination.

Then too, strict experimentation requires that one have a very clear understanding beforehand of what is being sought by the experiment. Accurate means of determining if the expected result has been forthcoming are also necessary. In education "experiments" often are undertaken with little or no idea of the precise result that is sought and with no means to measure many important effects. Or at times, the entire educational process is subverted by the requirements of the experimental technique, since only factors that are readily measurable are considered valuable. Whatever the educationists may wish, the most easily tested kinds of learning always have an advantage over the acquisition of more subtle values in a regime dominated by experiment.

Experimentation has a limited role in education, because some strictly technical problems of methods can be investigated in this way. Even here, there should be a cautious re-

gard for the fact that although the teacher or the investigator may have a new class to work with every year, the children who have been subjected to a new technique must live with its good and bad effects. Thus changes in education should be introduced cautiously with the conviction that the new factor is simply better and with the intention that it should be permanent. Of course, if the results lead to a different judgment, then a further change or a return to the old pattern may be warranted. Such cautious change can be called "experiment," provided the word is used in a merely analogous and restricted sense.

### NORMS AND VALUES IN EDUCATION

If the right to education implies a right not to be treated as a subject for experimentation or as raw material for the production of some model of humanity designed by the overconfidence of social engineers, that is because the person exists as a self-determining source of creatively free activity. The right to education is the right to human education, not merely to training for a social role.

But if as human persons we are self-determining, that does not mean we can make ourselves out of nothing or that we exist with no reference to realities that antecede us and transcend us. Here we touch upon the most critical problem of contemporary philosophy: how to reconcile the originality of human existence with objective norms and values. We cannot deal with this problem here. The question is too important and too difficult to be handled incidentally near the end of a brief essay on another topic.

But it is certain that there are some objective norms and values and that the education to which every person has a right is an introduction to the appreciation of them as much as it is an introduction to the world of facts. If one could educate a child omitting altogether any introduction to a world of val-

ues, it would be a grave wrong to do so, for his life would be robbed of meaning. In fact, no education is possible that does not include inculcation of values. The only question is whether the values to which the child is introduced are authentic and integral or partially illusory and more or less mutilated.

Some have imagined that the whole problem can be evaded by allowing the child to develop his own sense of values through his own experience and to make and alter his own commitments as he wishes. The errors in this view are many. To begin with, this approach itself embodies certain values on which it puts an extreme estimate—for example, the values of personal experience and individual freedom. Then too, allowing the child to learn by his own experience in this most important area seems to depreciate its significance even in comparison with matters such as diet and hygiene where a similar approach is not followed. Finally, a child cannot learn the lessons of experience in a situation where he is shielded by his parents and society—as he certainly will be in any advanced culture—from suffering the full effects of his choices. If the child is to learn by living, then the initiation of his acts cannot be free while the results are cushioned by responsible intervention.

Thus it is fitting that a declaration of the right to education also assert that education should inculcate a respect for the rights of others, an attitude of cooperation toward the efforts of men to establish an international community, and a love of peace. The child may not understand immediately from his own limited experience how important these values are. But mankind as a whole has gained some insight by painful experience, by reflection, and by criticism. No one can be forced to accept and commit himself to values, but no one developing toward the moment of full responsibility and commitment should be deprived of an introduction to basic and important values such as these.

However, a difficulty arises because every system of education presupposes an entire world view, not merely a few values

concerning which there is very common agreement. Some systems of education are religious. They embody an outlook and system of values determined by a fundamental conception of God and of man's relationship to him. Other systems of education are not religious. They embody an immanentist view of the world and a system of values determined by a concept of integral personality, or self-conscious authenticity, or loving interpersonal relations.

I do not wish to argue here which of these approaches to education might be correct. In fact, I think any of them can become a fanaticism and that an ideal outlook would include many limited values, none identified as the absolute good. But my point is that any system of education is committed and that at least implicitly it inculcates its commitment. There is no such thing as educational neutrality. The only way to be neutral is to avoid personal relationships altogether, but no one can teach another without relating to him on some basis or other.

Some have imagined that an official position of neutrality can be maintained with regard to ultimate questions. The schools would teach only what is objective, while parents and churches would supply whatever else they might wish. But the very determination of what is to be considered objective presupposes an evaluation. What is more important, this manner of resolving the problem may do more to form the minds of children than anything that could be said. Though it is oversimple to say that the medium is the message, perhaps it is true that the system is the evaluation.

The system of education must give reasons for studying and it must teach students some way of dealing with conflicts within themselves and of establishing relations with teachers and fellow students. The inescapable moral aspect of the educational process itself must be conceived by teachers and school officials within some ultimate framework that gives a meaning to human life as a whole. A so-called "neutral" system will in fact be dominated by the religious (or areligious) out-

look which happens to have the support of a consensus of those determining educational policy. Neutrality will obtain only in regard to the relatively insignificant issues that adherents to the consensus are willing and able to compromise among themselves. Such a neutral system will not be neutral in regard to the worldviews of those who differ radically from the common ground of the consensus.

The right to education and the right of parents to determine the kind of education thus implies a duty of the community to fully respect the plurality of ultimate value-systems among its citizens. The imposition of a single public school system clearly violates the basic rights of all who do not fully adhere to the consensus embodied in that system. The mere toleration of free schools does not fully satisfy the rights of those who do not accept the common, secular philosophy of life. Only when every philosophy of life is treated on a par will the right to education be fully met. The community of course can require that certain abilities be inculcated. That is the reasonable meaning of saying that elementary education should be "compulsory." But the duty of the community to supply education will only be fully met when the public recognizes and acts on the basis of the equal right to public support of every parent for the kind of education he chooses for his children.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The right to education includes a right to religious education. For whatever else religion may be, it is a subject matter that involves several ready abilities that belong to a full and ultimately happy human existence.

Yet religious education is not merely a matter of information. The primary modality of religious education is neither to inform nor to form, but to challenge. The religious teacher preaches a message which conveys a vocation and demands a

response. The individual himself must determine his reaction: either to accept the message and to respond to the vocation or to reject the message and to turn away.

In this domain the duty to educate does not fall upon civil society. Freedom of religion, however, does require that civil society maintain the conditions in which religious education is possible. Those who believe—as well as those who disbelieve, for disbelief too is a religious commitment—can then freely present to one another what they hold.

Perhaps partly because of the excesses and the failures of religious teachers in the past, many men of our day fear religious education as if it would detract something from what is properly human. This is a mistake. Religious teaching cannot contravene man's freedom, because religion gains its effectiveness only by being willingly accepted. Religious belief need not take man's heart away from the tasks of humanity, for faith adds new dimensions of meaning and urgency to the fulfillment of these tasks.

Thus, the right to education and the right to religious freedom meet and complement one another. There is no question about the right of those who wish to limit their worldview to an immanent and humanistic perspective to accept such restrictions. But, at the same time, there should be no question that those who see in the whole of human life a divine pedagogy by which man is raised to share in the life of God have a right to believe in that for which they hope, and to fulfill in their charity their life's mission of communicating to others the gift in which their own hearts rejoice: the ready ability to search for God.