

EDUCATION

THE great books assembled in this set are offered as means to a liberal or general education. The authors of these books were educated men; more than that, they typified the ideal of education in their various epochs. As their writings reveal, their minds were largely formed, or at least deeply impressed, by reading the works of their predecessors. Many of them were related as teacher and student, sometimes through personal contact, sometimes only through the written word. Many of them were related as divergent disciples of the same master, yet they often differed with him as well as with one another. There is scarcely one among them—except Homer—who was not acquainted with the minds of the others who came before him and, more often than not, profoundly conversant with their thought.

Yet not one of the writings in this set is specifically a treatise on education, except Montaigne's essay *Of the Education of Children* and Dewey's *Experience and Education*. Some of these authors speak more or less fully of their own education, as does Marcus Aurelius in the opening book of his *Meditations*, Augustine in his *Confessions*, Descartes in his *Discourse on the Method*, and Boswell. Others refer to their educational experience in fictional guise, as does Aristophanes in the argument in the *Clouds* between the Just and Unjust Discourses; or Rabelais when he tells of Gargantua's schooling in Gargantua's letter to Pantagruel. Sometimes they report the way in which other men were trained to greatness, as does Plutarch; or, like Gibbon, Hegel, and Mill, they describe and comment on the historic systems of education.

In still other instances the great books contain sections or chapters devoted to the ends and means of education, the order of studies, the nature of learning and teaching, the training of statesmen and citizens; as for example, Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Politics*, Augustine's *Christian Doctrine*, Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*, Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, and the psychological writings of James and Freud.

But in no case is education the principal theme of these books, as it is for most of the works cited in the list of

Additional Readings, among which will be found treatises on education by authors in this set.

EDUCATION is not itself so much an idea or a subject matter as it is a theme to which the great ideas and the basic subject matters are relevant. It is one of the perennial practical problems which men cannot discuss without engaging in the deepest speculative considerations. *It is a problem which carries discussion into and across a great many subject matters*—the liberal arts of grammar, rhetoric, and logic; psychology, medicine, metaphysics, and theology; ethics, politics, and economics. It is a problem which draws into focus many of the great ideas—virtue and truth, knowledge and opinion, art and science; desire, will, sense, memory, mind, habit; change and progress; family and state; man, nature, and God.

This can be verified by noting the diverse contexts in which education is discussed in the great books. In each connection we shall find some of the special questions which together make up the complex problem of education. For example, the nature of teaching and learning is examined in the wider context of psychological considerations concerning man's abilities, the way in which knowledge is acquired, and how it is communicated by means of language or other symbols. Different conceptions of the nature of man and of the relation of his several capacities surround the question of the ends of education. In this context questions also arise concerning the parts of education—the training of man's body, the formation of his character, the cultivation of his mind—and how these are related to one another.

The whole theory of the virtues and of habit formation is involved in the question whether virtue can be taught or must be acquired in some other way, and in related questions about the influence of the family and the state on the growth of character. These questions are also asked in terms of general political theory. Different views of the state are involved in questions about the division of responsibility for education among various agencies. Questions about the purpose of education, and what sort of education shall be given to the diverse classes in the state, are differently raised and differently answered in the context of discussions of different forms of government.

Though they are far from exhaustive, these examples should nevertheless suffice to make the point that there can be no philosophy of education apart from philosophy as a whole. It may therefore not be a disadvantage to find the discussion of education in the great books almost always imbedded in the context of some more general theory or problem.

ONE OPINION FROM which there is hardly a dissenting voice in the great books is that education should aim to make men good as men and as citizens. "If you ask what is the good of education," Plato writes, "the answer is easy—that education makes good men, and that good men act nobly, and conquer their enemies in battle, because they are good." Men should enter upon learning, Bacon declares, in order "to give a true account of their gift of reason, to the benefit and use of men"; while William James stresses the need for "a perfectly-rounded development." Thus it would seem to be a common opinion in all ages that education should seek to develop the characteristic excellences of which men are capable and that its ultimate ends are human happiness and the welfare of society.

Within this area of general agreement there are, of course, differences which result from the different views that are taken of man's relation to the state or to God. If the good of the state takes precedence over individual happiness, then education must be directed to training men for the role they play as parts of a larger organism. Education then serves the purpose of preserving the state. Of all things, Aristotle says, "that which contributes most to the permanence of constitutions is the adaptation of education to the form of government The best laws," he continues, "though sanctioned by every citizen of the state, will be of no avail unless the young are trained by habit and education in the spirit of the constitution."

Rousseau seems to take a similar view when he calls for a system of public education run by the state. Its object is to assure that the citizens are "early accustomed to *regard their individuality only in its relation to the body of the state, and to be aware, so to speak, of their own existence merely as a part of that of the state.*" Taught in this way, the citizens, Rousseau claims, "might at length come to identify themselves in some degree with this greater whole, to feel themselves members of their country, and to love it

with that exquisite feeling which no isolated person has save for himself.”

If happiness cannot be fully achieved on earth, then whatever temporal ends education serves must themselves be ordered to eternal salvation, and the whole process of human development must be a direction of the soul to God. “What did it profit me,” Augustine asks in his *Confessions*, “that all the books I could procure of the so-called liberal arts, I, the vile slave of vile affections, read by myself and understood? . . . For I had my back to the light, and my face to the things enlightened; whence my face, with which I discerned the things enlightened, was not itself enlightened. Whatever was written, either on rhetoric, or logic, geometry, music and arithmetic, by myself without much difficulty or any instructor, I understood, Thou knowest, O Lord my God; because both quickness of understanding and acuteness in discerning, is Thy gift; yet did I not thence sacrifice to Thee.” Wherefore, Augustine concludes concerning this stage of his learning, “it served not to my use but to my perdition.” But Augustine does not therefore conclude that, under no circumstances, can liberal education be put to good use. In his treatise *On Christian Doctrine*, he considers in detail how the liberal arts, which serve so well in the study of Sacred Scripture, may also serve to bring the soul to God.

SUCH DIFFERENCES DO NOT, however, annul one consequence of the general agreement, namely, the conception that education is concerned with the vocation of man, and prepares him in thought and action for his purpose and station in life. In these terms Adam Smith argues for a minimum general education. He claims that “a man without the proper use of the intellectual faculties of a man, is, if possible, more contemptible than even a coward, and seems to be mutilated and deformed in a still more essential part of the character of human nature.” He explicitly points out that this is the condition of “the great body of the people,” who, by the division of labor, are confined in their employment “to a few very simple operations,” in which the worker “has no occasion to exert his understanding, or to exercise his invention in finding out expedients for removing difficulties which never occur.” The result, according to Smith, is that “the torpor of his mind renders him, not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, but of

conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment, and consequently of forming any just judgment concerning many even of the ordinary duties of private life.”

When the vocation of man is thus understood, a general or liberal education is vocational in that it prepares each man for the common conditions and callings of human life. In this sense specialized training, which by implication at least seems to be the object of Smith’s criticism, is not vocational. It fits a man only for some specialized function, according to which he or his social class is differentiated from some other man or class.

In our day, the word “vocational” is used in the opposite sense to mean specialized training, whether it is preparation for the least skilled of trades or for the most learned of professions. Since all men are not called to the practice of law or medicine—any more than all are called to productive work in the various arts and crafts, or the tasks of commerce and industry—the training they may need to perform these functions *does not fully develop their common humanity*. It is not adequate to make them good as men, as citizens, or as children of God.

THE TRADITIONAL MEANING of the word, ‘liberal’ as applied to education entails a distinction between free men and slaves. Slaves, like domesticated animals, are trained to perform special functions. They are not treated as ends, but as means, and so they are not educated for their own good, but for the use to which they are put. This is true not only of slaves in the strict sense of household chattel; it is also true of all the servile classes in any society which divides its human beings into those who work in order to live and those who live off the work of others and who therefore have the leisure in which to strive to live well.

In accordance with these distinctions, Aristotle divides education into “liberal” and “illiberal.” Certain subjects are illiberal by nature, namely, “any occupation, art, or science, which makes the body or soul of the freeman less fit for the practice or exercise of virtue.” In this category Aristotle includes “those arts which tend to deform the body, and likewise all paid employments, for they absorb and degrade the mind.”

It is not only the nature of the subject, but also the end which education serves, that determines whether its character is liberal or illiberal. Even a liberal art becomes, in Aristotle's opinion, "menial and servile . . . if done for the sake of others." A man's education "will not appear illiberal" only so long as "he does or learns anything for his own sake or for the sake of his friends, or with a view to excellence." In other words, to be liberal, education must serve the use of leisure in the pursuit of excellence. It must treat man as an end, not as a means to be used by other men or by the state.

It follows that any society which abolishes the distinction of social classes and which *calls all men to freedom*, should conceive education as essentially liberal and for all men. It should, furthermore, direct education, in all its parts and phases, to the end of each man's living well rather than to the end of his earning a living for himself or others.

IN THE CLASSIFICATION of the kinds of education, the word "liberal" is frequently used in a more restricted sense to signify not all education designed for free men, but only the improvement of the mind through the acquisition of knowledge and skill. In this sense liberal education is set apart from physical education which concerns bodily health and proficiency, and moral education which concerns excellence in action rather than in thought.

These divisions are clearly made, perhaps for the first time, in Plato's *Republic*. The education described there begins in the early years with music and gymnastic. Gymnastic "presides over the growth and decay of the body." Music, which includes literature as well as the arts of harmony and rhythm, is said to educate its students "by the influence of habit, by harmony making them harmonious, by rhythm rhythmical," and its function is to develop moral as well as aesthetic sensibilities.

The second part of Plato's curriculum, "which leads naturally to reflection" and draws "the soul towards being," consists in the mathematical arts and sciences of arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy. The program is capped by the study of dialectic, to which all the rest is but "a prelude"; for "when a person starts on the discovery of the absolute by the light of reason only, and without any assistance of sense, and perseveres until by pure

intelligence he arrives at the perception of the absolute good, he at last finds himself at the end of the intellectual world.”

Up to this point, the program can be taken as liberal education in the narrow sense of learning how and what to think. The fifteen years of experience in civic affairs and the tasks of government, which Plato interposes at the age of thirty-five, seem to function as another phase of moral training. This period provides “an opportunity of trying whether, when they are drawn all manner of ways by temptation, they will stand firm or flinch.”

To the extent that physical training aims, beyond health, at the acquirement of skill in a coordinated use of one’s body, it can be annexed to liberal rather than moral education. Plato notes, for example, that gymnastic should not be too sharply distinguished from music as “the training of the body” from the “training of the soul.” Gymnastic as well as music, he claims, has “in view chiefly the improvement of the soul,” and he considers the two as balancing and tempering one another.

Whether they produce competence in gymnastic or athletic feats, or, like the manual arts, proficiency in productive work, all bodily skills, even the simplest, involve the senses and the mind as well as bones and muscles. They are arts no less than music or logic. Apart from their utility, they represent a certain type of human excellence, which will be denied only by those who can see no difference between the quality of a racehorse and the skill of his rider. Whether these skills as well as other useful arts are part of liberal education in the broader sense depends, as we have seen, on the end for which they are taught or learned. Even the arts which are traditionally called liberal, such as rhetoric or logic, can be degraded to servility if the sole motive for becoming skilled in them is wealth won by success in the law courts.

IN THE TWO traditional distinctions so far discussed, “liberal education” seems to have a somewhat different meaning when it signifies the opposite of servile training and when it signifies the opposite of moral cultivation. In the first case, the distinction is based upon the purpose of the education; in the second, it refers to the faculties or functions being cultivated. When the second is stated in

terms of the distinction between the intellectual and the moral virtues, liberal (i.e., intellectual) education is conceived as aiming at good habits of thinking and knowing, and moral education is thought of as aiming at good habits of will, desire, or emotion, along with their consequences in action.

Although he does not use these terms, Montaigne seems to have the contrast between moral and intellectual training in mind when he criticizes the education of his day for aiming “at nothing but to furnish our heads with knowledge, but not a word of judgment and virtue.” It is, to him, a “pedantic education,” which not only fails to achieve the highest educational purpose, but also results in a great evil, in that “all knowledge is hurtful to him who has not the science of goodness.”

A too sharp separation of the intellectual and the moral may be questioned, or at least qualified, by those who, like Socrates, tend to identify knowledge and virtue. Yet they seldom go to the opposite extreme of supposing that no distinction can be made between the task of imparting knowledge to the mind and that of forming character. Socrates, for example, in the *Meno*, recognizes that a man cannot be made temperate, courageous, or just in the same way that he can be taught geometry.

From another point of view, the notion of moral training is questioned by those who, like Freud, think that the patterns of human desire or emotion can be beneficially changed apart from moral discipline. It is the object of psychoanalysis, he writes, “to strengthen the ego, to make it more independent of the super-ego, to widen its field of vision, and so to extend its organization that it can take over new portions of the id.” To do this is radically to alter the individual’s behavior-pattern. “It is reclamation work,” Freud says, “like the draining of the Zuyder Zee.” Emotional education, so conceived, is therapeutic—more like preventive and remedial medicine than moral training.

Religious education is usually regarded as both intellectual and moral, even as the science of theology is said to be both speculative and practical. Citing the admonition of St. James, “Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only,” Aquinas holds that religious education is concerned with the knowledge not only of “divine things” but also of the

“human acts” by which man comes to God. Since man is infinitely removed from God, he needs for this purpose the grace of God, which, according to Aquinas, “is nothing short of a partaking of the divine nature.”

Both on the side of man’s knowledge of God and on the side of his love and worship of God, religious education involves the operation of supernatural factors—revelation, grace, sacraments. Hence God is Himself the primary source of religious education. But as the dispenser of the sacraments whereby “grace is instrumentally caused,” the church, according to Aquinas, functions instrumentally in the service of the divine teacher.

THE CONCEPTION OF THE means and ends of moral education will differ with different ethical theories of the good man and the good life, and according to differing enumerations and definitions of the virtues. It will differ even more fundamentally according to whether the primary emphasis is placed on pleasure and happiness or duty. The parties to this basic issue in moral philosophy, which is discussed in the chapters on DUTY and HAPPINESS, inevitably propose different ways of forming good character—by strengthening the will in obedience to law, or by habituating the appetites to be moderate or reasonable in their inclinations.

On either theory, the basic problem of moral education is whether morality can be taught and how. The Greeks formulated this question in terms of virtue, by asking whether such things as courage and temperance are at all teachable, as geometry and horsemanship plainly are. The problem remains essentially the same if the question is how the will can be trained. Can it be trained by the same methods as those which work in the improvement of the understanding?

The answer to the question, whichever way it is formulated, depends on the view that is taken of the relation between moral knowledge and moral conduct. Do those who understand the principles of ethics or who know the moral law necessarily act in accordance with their knowledge? Can a man know what is good or right to do in a particular case, and yet do the opposite? St. Paul seems to suggest that when he says, “For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.” If something more

than knowledge or straight thinking is needed for good conduct, how is it acquired and how can one man help another to acquire it? Certainly not by learning and teaching in the ordinary sense which applies to the arts and sciences. Then how—by practice, by guidance or advice, by example, by rewards and punishments; or if by none of these, then by a gift of nature or by the grace of God?

These questions are necessarily prior to any discussion of the role of the family, the state, and the church in the process of moral training. They also provide the general background for the consideration of particular influences on character formation in men and children, such things as poetry and music, or laws and customs. All of these related problems of moral education have a political aspect, which appears in the issue concerning the state's right to censor or regulate the arts for morality's sake; in the question of the primacy of the family or the state in the moral guidance of the young; in the distinction between the good man and the good citizen or ruler, and the possible difference between the training appropriate for the one and for the other.

THE MAIN PROBLEM of intellectual education seems to be the curriculum or course of study. The traditional attempts to construct an ideal curriculum turn on such questions as what studies shall be included, what shall be their order, and how shall they be taught or learned. A variety of answers results from a variety of views of man's faculties or capacities, the nature of knowledge itself, the classification and order of the arts and sciences. Especially important are the various conceptions of the nature and function of the liberal arts. Subordinate questions concern the place of the fine and useful arts in liberal education, and the role of experience and experiment—both in contrast to and in cooperation with the role of books and teachers.

In addition to the problem of the curriculum and its materials, the theory of intellectual education necessarily considers methods of teaching and learning. Here the various proposals derive from different views of the learning process—of the causes or factors at work in any acquisition of skill or knowledge.

The contribution of the teacher cannot be understood apart from a psychological analysis of learning, for the teacher is obviously only one among its many causes. It makes the

greatest difference to the whole enterprise of learning whether the teacher is regarded as the principal cause of understanding on the part of the student; or whether the teacher is, as Socrates describes himself, merely “a *midwife*” assisting the labor of the mind in bringing knowledge and wisdom to birth, and “thoroughly examining whether the thought which the mind . . . brings forth is a false idol or a noble and true birth.”

This Socratic insight is later reformulated in the comparison which Aquinas makes, in his tract *Concerning the Teacher*, between the art of teaching and the art of healing. Both are cooperative arts, arts which succeed only as “ministers of nature which is the principal actor,” and not by acting, like the art of the cobbler or sculptor, to produce a result by shaping plastic but dead materials.

The comparison which Hippocrates makes of instruction in medicine with “the culture of the productions of the earth” exhibits the same conception of teaching. “Our natural disposition,” he writes, “is, as it were, the soil; the tenets of our teacher are, as it were, the seed; instruction in youth is like the planting of the seed in the ground at the proper season; the place where the instruction is communicated is like the food imparted to vegetables by the atmosphere; diligent study is like the cultivation of the fields; and it is time which imparts strength to all things and brings them to maturity.”

This conception of teaching as a cooperative art, analogous to medicine or to agriculture, underlies the principles of pedagogy in the *Great Didactic* of Comenius. It gives significance to the distinction that Aquinas makes between learning by discovery, or from experience, and learning by instruction, or from a teacher—even as a person is healed “in one way by the operation of nature alone, and in another by nature with the administration of medicine.”

In addition to the technical considerations raised by the nature of the learning process, the discussion of teaching deals with the moral or emotional aspect of the relation between teacher and student. Without interest, learning seldom takes place, or if it does, it cannot rise above the level of rote memory. It is one thing to lay down a course of study; another to motivate the student. Though he does not hesitate to prescribe what is to be learned by the

student, Plato adds the caution that there must be no “notion of forcing our system of education.”

More than interest is required. Teaching, Augustine declares, is the greatest act of charity. Learning is facilitated by love. The courtesies between Dante and Virgil in the *Divine Comedy* present an eloquent picture of love between student and teacher, master and disciple. Not only love, but *docility*, is required on the part of the *student*; and *respect* for the student’s mind on the part of the *teacher*. Intellectual education may not be directly concerned with the formation of character, yet the moral virtues seem to be factors in the pursuit of truth and in the discipline of the learning process.

WE HAVE ALREADY noted some of the political problems of education. Of these probably the chief question is whether the organization and institution of education shall be private or public. Any answer which assigns the control of education largely or wholly to the state must lead to a number of other determinations.

Who shall be educated, all or only some? Should the education of leaders be different from the education of others? If educational opportunity is to be equal for all, must the same kind as well as the same quantity of education be offered to all? And, in every case, to what end shall the state direct the education of its members—to its own welfare and security, or to the happiness of men and the greater glory of God? Should education always serve the status quo by preserving extant customs and perpetuating existing forms of government; or can and should it aim at a better society and a higher culture?

These are some of the questions with which statesmen and political philosophers have dealt, answering them differently according to the institutions of their time and in accordance with one or another theory of the state and its government. There are still other questions. Is freedom of expression, in teaching and discussion, indispensable to the pursuit of truth and the dissemination of knowledge? To what extent shall the state control the content and methods of education or leave such determination to the teaching profession? How shall public education be supported? Should it be carried beyond childhood and youth to all the

ages of adult life; and if so, how should such education be organized outside of schools?

Mill, for example, holds it to be “almost a self-evident axiom that the State should require and compel the education, up to a certain standard, of every human being who is born its citizen.” Yet he deprecates the idea of a “general state education” as a “mere contrivance for moulding people to be exactly like one another.”

Discussing the pro’s and con’s of this issue, Mill touches upon most, if not all, of the questions just raised. He believes that the difficulties could be avoided if the government would leave it “to parents to obtain the education where and how they pleased, and content itself with helping to pay the school fees of the poorer classes of children, and defraying the entire school expenses of those who have no one else to pay for them.” Schools completely established and controlled by the state, he maintains, “should only exist, if they exist at all, as one among many competing experiments, carried on for the purpose of example and stimulus, to keep the others up to a certain standard of excellence.”

So far as the problem of adult education concerns citizenship, Mill’s answer, like Montesquieu’s and Plato’s before him, is that nothing can take the place of active participation in political life. Men become citizens by living and acting as citizens, under the tutelage of good laws and in an atmosphere of civic virtue. So far as the problem of adult education concerns the continued growth of the mind throughout the life of mature men and women the answer is not to be found in the great books in the words of their authors. Yet the great books as a whole may constitute a solution to that problem.

The authors of these books, from Homer to Beckett, are the great original teachers in the tradition of our culture. They taught one another. They wrote for adults, not children, and in the main they wrote for the mass of men, not for scholars in this or that specialized field of learning.

The books exhibit these teachers at work in the process of teaching. They contain, more over, expositions or exemplifications of the liberal arts as the arts of teaching and learning in every field of subject matter. To make these

books and their authors work for us by working with them is, it seems to the editors and publishers of this set of books, a feasible and desirable program of adult education.