

Education in the New Age - P r e f a c e

Educational Trends in a World Crisis by Oliver L. Reiser

This book on educational philosophy comes at a time of crisis, for the theme that runs through critical thinking in the field of educational theory today is characterized by deep concern over both the preservation and the enrichment of human values. Can we maintain our democratic individualism in the face of the standardizing forces of the Western machine civilization which may also engulf the Eastern world? Can we offset the totalitarianisms which deify the materialism of an increasingly industrial culture?

In May of this year (1953) I attended a two-day seminar in Chicago, sponsored by *The Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults*, a subdivision of the Ford Foundation, created to express the growing concern of our times for the spiritual basis of our civilization. In the statement of the problem which our group was to study, *Education in a Democratic Society*, we were informed as follows:

"Education must meet the needs of the human spirit. It must assist persons to develop a satisfactory personal philosophy and sense of values; to cultivate tastes for literature, music and the arts; to grow in ability to analyze problems and arrive at thoughtful conclusions."

This statement demands a re-examination of our educational theory and practice. A survey of current developments proves that, at long last, the professional educators *are* clarifying a common philosophy and *are* consciously striving to delineate a theory of education adequate to the new world that is emerging. In such a philosophy three fundamental needs must be met:

(1) *a psychological theory* of the human person to be "educated";

(2) *a social theory* of the kind of society one is trying to create or preserve as a suitable home for the cultural ideals promulgated; and

(3) *a world view or cosmology*, a theory of man's place in the universe in which man is spectator and actor.

Our problem is to attain the kind of overall synthesis that Marxism and neo-Scholasticism provide for their followers, but to get this by the freely chosen cooperative methods that Dewey advocated. In the broadest terms such a world view will make possible a planetary civilization by integrating whatever trans-temporal and trans-spatial truths about man and the universe we can extract from all regional cultures in their local times and places. These universal principles will then provide the norms for *Education in the New Age*, as the Tibetan terms it.

The world today suffers from a cultural provincialism based on the dualism of an outward-looking, objective attitude of the Western world, and an inwardness or subjectivity of Oriental societies. Each of these civilizations, in its extreme form, is over-balanced in its own direction. In harmonious living, man must integrate both ideals to achieve wholeness for himself and his world. This, it seems to me, is one important theme of the present work.

For the future, the remedy for the social schisms and psychological fissions that have handicapped and obstructed our modern efforts to overcome the divisions of humanity, lies in a restoration of *unity of principles* upon which an integration of human values and achievements can be attempted. The educational implications of this development

are clear. As the Tibetan indicates, on subjective levels we must provide for the resynthesis of human personality and for the overcoming of the double consciousness that has resulted from the cultural fission which made the "self-negation" of the peaceful civilization of the Orient the overpowering concept of its culture, and the aggressive "individualism" of the Occident the ideal of Western man. Accordingly, we need not only the political synthesis of a [vii] World Federation in which the Eastern and Western hemispheres function like the right and left lobes of man's brain, with the seat of the World Brain serving as the point of decussation of the planetary nerves, but we need also a planetary way of life, a planetary ethics, and a planetary way of feeling to supply the powerful drive we shall require for the great tasks that lie ahead of us.

The time to resynthesize the objective and subjective, the extrovert and the introvert civilizations and to achieve a great orchestration of culture *is now*. Japan was not aggressive until the country learned the trick from the West. Before her doors were forced, her arts and philosophy were in tune with oriental tradition. When she adopted Western technology, she threw overboard her ancient culture. What happened in Japan can happen in the rest of the Orient, but whereas Japan was a relatively small country, China, India and their neighbors are vast and populous. Heaven help us if they re-enact the history of Japan. Our activity in the resynthesizing of the world must include, through our own efforts to understand and appreciate, an appeal to the Orient to preserve and develop the fundamental values in its regional cultures. While the West is seeking the principles upon which peaceful and fruitful living can be founded, the East may provide us with the counter-balance to our aggressive materialism.

If this new synthesis is to restore cultural and spiritual unity in mankind, the Occidental world will have to acquire humility when it turns to the Orient. The Oriental world will not, because of its inherent nature, generate the physical energy to go to the West. We Westerners went into the East in search of markets - outlets for the products of our mechanical power - and we must return to our own world, magnetized by the subjective energies of the East and conscious of it. Our aggressive commercial penetration of Oriental lands and peoples has had the end result of bringing the literature, the philosophy and the arts of the East into the [viii] West as uncalculated dividends. We can, if we choose, make use of the vast heritage of Oriental culture available to us, even in our neighborhood libraries.

Our main hope of survival in this highly polarized world lies in a prodigious effort at synthesis of the two cultures *while there is still time*. Should the Orient deny us that time and decide to meet us merely on our own grounds, then this might write *finis* to the story for all of us, East and West.

During our industrial and expansionist age there have been increasing evidences of the permeating power of Oriental thought in the fields of science, philosophy and the arts of the West. Psychosomatic medicine, parapsychology, Jung's analytical psychology are only a few indications of contemporary inwardly-oriented researches. The re-entry of the spiritual factor in life and education is something more than a recrudescence of some earlier forms of Christian ideology.

In this education for the New Age, the type of East-West philosophy presented by the Tibetan will find its proper setting. Here we have the elements of a complete theory, as follows:

- (a) *Subjective Planning*; a theory of the creative self-development of the individual.
- (b) *Objective Planning*; a theory of the good society for human persons to live in.

The psychological and social implications of the education for the New Age must be stated as explicitly as possible. The next step is to test the validity of the principles in concrete applications. The testing must be done in terms of operational techniques relevant to the Hindu psychology, rather than by Western positivistic procedures. Until this program has been given a fair trial, it is a waste of time to attempt to prejudge the issue. Yet it is not necessary to consider the ancient East and the modern West approaches [ix] as two mutually exclusive alternatives. In some instances the approaches are merely two "languages" for stating universal truths about human nature and we are not faced with an either-or antithesis. Intertranslation may reduce the strangeness of terminology. For example, the Tibetan's view that "meditation is thinking things through" is good Dewey doctrine. As the elements of unfamiliarity diminish, understanding is facilitated.

That the research project so briefly sketched is not some vague philosophical fantasy but an urgent and immediate need is indicated by a document drawn up by the Department for Cultural Activities of UNESCO which formulated the theme for discussion in these terms: "The Concept of Man and the Philosophy of Education in East and West." Here it is stated:

"UNESCO could not remain indifferent to this problem (of East and West); it was bound to face it squarely in the present circumstances of the world, brought about by the increasingly rapid process of unification, the reduction of distances, the growing importance of technology, the gradual attainment by all peoples of political independence and international responsibility and, above all, the disquiet and perplexity prevailing among the *two* great civilizations of yesterday, ready to give birth to the *one* civilization of tomorrow but cowering under the threat of a world crisis far beyond their capacity to control."

In an article on *Our Goal Is Unity* in *The Free World* of October, 1944, Dr. Albert Einstein regretfully took note of "an odious materialistic attitude toward life which leads to the predominance of an unrestrained selfishness." But how shall this materialism and selfishness of our culture be corrected? By geodesies in the space-time manifold of relativity theory? This would be cold comfort from a warm heart and Einstein does not offer this way out. Indeed, Einstein offers no clear solution. The simple truth is that the only counterweight to "materialism" is "idealism" and this must come out [x] of the very heart of science, as an evolutionary development. Researchers who know the data of science must take our knowledge about nature and synthesize it into a body of integrated principles to establish the Pythagorean-Platonic-Bruno cosmology, a world picture similar to the pantheism, of Eastern thought, wherein man can reverence nature because nature is worthy of awe and reverence. A humanism that is exclusively anthropocentric is over-balanced and is in need of a world philosophy in which the infinite and eternal cosmos yields the other pivot for the axis around which the new synthesis can move and grow.

There is a remedy for "the sickness of modern man" and many of its constituents are found in this book on the education of the future. The implementation of the principles involved is the work of humanity itself. That its theories are not beyond the need and grasp of contemporary educationists is borne out by the fact that steps are already taken in several places for the setting up of experiments in education which are to express the need for synthesis. As an example of this development there is the "self-survey" project financed by the Ford Foundation out of which has come a proposal for a Department of Integrating Studies in the University of Pittsburgh. Part of the statement presenting this experiment reads as follows:

"It has been proposed that a new department, *outside* the present three distri-

bution fields of the Humanities, the Social Sciences and the Natural Sciences, and different from the departments *within* existing distribution fields, be established at the University of Pittsburgh. This new department shall be termed the Department of Unified Studies. It shall be concerned with seeking the interrelationships between various subject matter disciplines already available in the offerings of the University. The main objective is to cultivate the habit of reflective synthesis and find or create a body of wisdom for human evolution and personal self-development. [xi]

"Since unified interpretation and understanding is not a science in its own right but a synoptic comprehension of antecedent bodies of concepts and principles, this department shall not offer degrees in its own area or 'field.' The Department of Unified Studies is primarily a service department to the students and faculty members carrying on their primary (but not more important) activities in the more specialized areas of study.

"Until contemporary times, there has been little need for such an adjunct to our institutions of higher learning. But with the increase in size of our specialized bodies of knowledge - to the point where we are burying ourselves under the mountains of information and data - the time has come to take seriously the problem of finding out what all this knowledge means. If the University cannot synthesize the overall implications of modern learning it will abdicate its historic role of providing universal principles for enlightened individuals seeking the benefits of the good life. This urgent need here requires explicit statement and recognition, if we are consciously to design a solution to the problem.

"The broad purpose of the *Advancement of Learning* (to use Bacon's phrase) is to throw light on four basic questions of human existence:

What is man?

What kind of physical universe (cosmos) is it that man inhabits?

By what processes of evolution did the human species emerge from the matrix of nature so that man could become the self-conscious and creative individual he now is?

Knowing something about the cosmos and about human nature, what is the best kind of society for man's progressive self-evolution?

"In seeking answers to these questions and providing students with the stimuli and data necessary to the formulation [xii] of their own answers, the instructors in the Department of Unified Studies will not pose as experts in integration. Along with interested students, the faculty members will be *seekers after synthesis*. To illustrate the type of courses contemplated, the following possibilities are suggested:

The Sociology of Knowledge.

The Interrelationships of Religion, Philosophy, Science and Art.

Information Theory, Cybernetics and Semantics.

The History and Philosophy of Science.

The History and Presuppositions of the Democratic Theory of Government (Ideology).

Contributions of Biology, Sociology and Psychiatry to Human
Welfare and Progress.

The Unity of Knowledge.

The Evolution of Value Systems from Primitive Culture to
Modern Industrial Civilization.

"The first prerequisites of all such courses is that they shall interrelate not less than three so-called departments of study. Thus the students and faculty will be encouraged to search for vision - 'seeing life steadily and as a whole.' "

The Tibetan's seed-principles will find prepared soil in such experimental fields.

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