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SOME SUGGESTIONS TOWARDS
A REVISED PHILOSOPHY OF
EDUCATION

By

PROFESSOR JOHN MACDONALD

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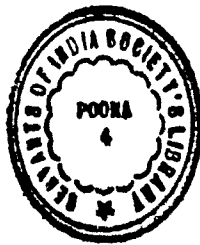
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EDUCATION

Being a lecture
delivered in the Institute by
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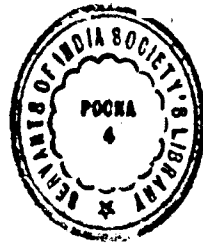


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NOTE

THE lecture printed in the following pages was delivered at the Institute of Education as the fifth John Adams lecture on 29 November 1937, under the chairmanship of Professor F. Clarke, Director of the Institute. That the topic was an attractive one was evident from the large and widely representative audience which came to hear the lecture; that the lecturer had stimulated thought has since been shown by the many requests that have reached the Institute for printed copies of the address. Professor Macdonald's thesis that co-operative thinking is the life-blood of democracy and should find a place in our schools will merit the further consideration of those who heard the lecture and of the wider audience who could not be present.

H. R. H.

SOME SUGGESTIONS TOWARDS A REVISED PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

I CONSIDER it a great honour to be asked by this Institute to address you on the present occasion. Both in the way of original thinking and practical, constructive effort, Professor John Adams has rendered services which have won for him abiding recognition wherever men are thinking and striving in the cause of education. The writings of John Adams will always be associated in my mind with a broad humanity of outlook, a wide and profound scholarship, and, withal, an unfailing literary grace which made them delightful reading. While I would not presume to try to emulate such qualities, I may perhaps hope to make some contribution to the subject—the philosophy of education—for my interest in which he, more than any other writer, I think, is responsible. If my contribution be only that of stimulating others to think of the problems in this field, that is always something.

Plato sought to produce an ideal individual, so he proceeded to create an ideal society. We, on the other hand, delegate the task of producing the perfect individual to our schools and colleges, and leave society to go its own way. Plato's idea is sounder than ours. We have much to learn from the central thought of the *Republic*—the notion of an essential harmony between the constitution of society and that of the individual soul, with the result that all the resources of society co-operate in the moulding of that soul. I wish to indicate in the present address certain glaring disharmonies between the constitution of our society and the aims of the educator; and to suggest ways in which these disharmonies may be overcome. If our education has so far failed to produce anywhere the kind of democracy that would show the democratic way of running society to be obviously the best way, the reason is perhaps that the kind of education that would do this has never been tried.

We may accept Dr. Lindsay's view¹ that modern political democracy had its real beginnings in the desire of certain groups in Cromwell's

¹ *The Essentials of Democracy*, p. 20.

army—the Independents, the Anabaptists, and the Quakers—apply in the realm of politics the principles of self-government which they conducted their own small congregations. Nevertheless, as everybody knows, democracy had to wait for more than a hundred years for that battle-cry of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity! which gave the ruling classes in Europe so bad an attack of nerves. The more one considers it, the more it appears that this rather histrionic formula does express the essence of what we must mean by democracy. I shall select one of the triad—fraternity—and replace it by the less emotional term, co-operation. Taking this term as the basic one in the language of democratic philosophy, I shall try to define it in a concrete, practical way and, incidentally, I may even succeed in attaching an acceptable meaning to the elusive ‘liberty’ and ‘equality’.

Miss Follett, in *The New State*, a book published about twenty years ago, illustrates in this manner what I shall call co-operative thinking:

‘A says something. Thereupon a thought arises in B’s mind. Is it B’s idea or A’s? Neither. It is a mingling of the two. We find that A’s idea, after having been presented to B and returned to A, has become slightly, or largely, different from what it was originally. In like manner, it is affected by C, and so on. But in the same way B’s idea has been affected by all the others, and not only does A’s idea feel the modifying influence of each of the others, but A’s ideas are affected by B’s relation to all the others, and A’s plus B’s are affected by all the others individually and collectively, and so on until the common idea springs into being.’¹

Miss Follett proceeds to show how, in like manner, collective feelings and collective will emerge from the group relationship. Finally, we are told, ‘the object of group life is not to find the best individual thought, but the best collective thought’.²

It seems to me that the whole question of whether democracy is really a feasible way of running society turns on the possibility of developing in the masses of the people an attitude of mind that prefers and, indeed, insists on the type of discussion which aims at discovering the common idea. Some might object that it merely means a glorification of compromise. To this one might reply that perhaps in a democracy compromise, rather than charity, is ‘the greatest of these’. In any case, the spirit of the thing is not that of compromise.

¹ p. 25.

² p. 30.

the spirit that accepts the collective idea as actually the best idea, the compromise means acceptance of it as a *pis aller*, with a certain sense of personal defeat. Some, again, might object that the fostering of such a spirit means an attack on the holy of holies of individuality—a phrase we may dismiss, inasmuch as the terms of it only contribute a dash of emotion to befuddle counsel. The co-operative thinking I have in mind need not mean putting a premium on pooled mediocrity. What it does mean is that in the democratic handling of social problems the best idea, if it fails to secure recognition and acceptance as the best, ceases *ipso facto* to be the best. This criterion obviously closes the door on the wise and benevolent autocrats—including some autocrats of modern science—who would take the conduct of our affairs out of our own blundering hands. It also imposes two demands on him who would be a leader in a democracy, a leader by right of his personal superiority. It demands, first, the ability to see the best idea, and second, the ability to persuade others that it is the best idea; and any one who balks at this second demand, while at the same time claiming a divine right to lead his fellows, had better betake himself to Germany, Italy, or Russia, where a simpler social philosophy offers him the choice of becoming a dictator or getting shot in the attempt.

I may remark in passing that we have here by implication defined both liberty and equality. I need not elaborate the point now; it will become clearer as the argument proceeds. In the meantime, let us see whether we can illustrate from everyday experience.

In committee work I have noticed that the good chairman always tries to avoid a vote. To bring an issue to a vote is an admission of partial failure. A minority report means at least that the issue is not disposed of. So with the good committee-man; for him, the best solution is not his own but the one that commands general assent. He is the embodiment of Miss Follett's philosophy of the common idea. At the other extreme is the individual who spells failure for every effort at co-operative thinking. He thinks the problem through in advance, and perhaps with great conscientiousness and care. He arrives at what he considers the one true course, and comes to the meeting with his mind made up. He delivers himself of his 'solution', and from then onwards is mentally deaf to whatever may be said. Criticism or suggested modification of his idea is resented—it is

palpable evidence of the perversity of men. If his proposal is accepted, he becomes the strong silent man—that is, he sulks, he will have nothing to say to people who cannot see the truth when it is clearly put before them. Such an individual lacks the essentials of democratic breeding. All that can be done is to vote him down.

Before proceeding to consider what education can do towards making co-operative thinking come naturally to men, it is good to remind ourselves of at least one example of the thing, where one would least expect to find it, in international politics. It was Senator Root and Lord Bryce who were responsible for the setting up of the so-called International Joint Commission for the purpose of settling questions arising in connexion with the boundary-line between the United States and Canada. The questions had reference mainly to the use of water-power, and in the settlement of them millions of dollars might be involved. Senator Root and Lord Bryce had the idea of setting up a commission of six representatives, three for the States and three for Canada. No one had a casting vote, and the recommendations were expected to be unanimous. 'What a fatuous idea!' we are apt to say, with European Peace Conferences in mind. And yet we have the authority of the historian Burpee for the statement—made quite recently—that the Commission has never yet failed to come forward with a unanimous recommendation, however serious and delicate the issue. In other words, it has not yet failed to dispose of any issue entrusted to it. Root and Bryce evidently believed that six intelligent men of goodwill could always solve the insoluble problems that make nations go to war.

If we hold, as I think we must, that such co-operative thinking is the life-blood of democracy, what, we must now ask, can education do to create it? I shall deal first with the school and then proceed to consider other educational agencies that may be used.

It seems to me that the school (by which I mean our schools and colleges—the institutions of formal education) cannot do very much in a direct way and, moreover, that this is not the peculiar province of the school. What its peculiar province is I shall suggest presently. In the meantime, I would submit that the so-called corporate life of the school subserves, in the main, other values than those with which I am concerned now. The reason is that it can only to a very limited

It is that furnish problems with these three characteristics: (1) they are while to be real problems—not factitious ones; (2) they are practical in some sense, precisely, that something must be *done* about them; discussion must arrive at a conclusion to which effect is to be given in action; and (3) they require co-operative effort for their solution.

This means, in effect, that a certain important present-day movement in education would appear to be in the wrong direction. I refer to the movement, associated with John Dewey and his disciples, towards making the school reproduce, as closely as possible, the conditions of real living, towards making the school a miniature replica of society. According to this philosophy, the school should be patterned on the Great Society itself, only simplified and, of course, moulded a little nearer to the heart's desire. But real living should go on in it. This is the implication of Dewey's reiterated assertion that you can train for society only by living in society. On both sides of the Atlantic the idea has found practical expression in attempts to develop a new and more adequate type of school. The motive of these attempts is well summed up in Kilpatrick's words:

'With the parents more and more dropping out of the child's life, the school and other directing agencies must more and more assume the duty of living with children. . . . The older school . . . was frankly supplemental. Life went on elsewhere; the school added certain knowledges and skills. The school now coming into being is and must increasingly be a place where actual living goes on.'¹

These words remind us that a main source of this idea of the school and its function is the belief of many American thinkers that the family is fated to disappear—has indeed already largely disappeared—as a factor in the education of the young. It would be aside from my purpose here to do more than state my view that this is an assumption, and a doubtful one; and that there is even less warrant for the assumption that the school can ever replace the better part of the family's contribution to education. I say the better part, for I am not unmindful of how the psycho-analysts have made high Roman holiday with this institution. It is not merely a question, however, of asking the school to replace the family; it is a question of asking it to provide the remedy for every sore which the critic of education

¹ *Education for a Changing Civilization*, pp. 64-5.

can put his finger on; and to my mind this is radically mistaken philosophy. ^{not} ^{and} ^{it}

Unless you decide to withdraw the pupil from society altogether (a resort about which I shall say something presently) then real life for him will go on where it goes on for his adults—outside of the school. The older he grows the more will the whole of which the school is a part become the real thing. I ought to say here that I am taking it for granted that school-days, in one form or another, should extend at least well into adolescence. For reasons I need not discuss now, adolescence appears to me to be the critical period for the sort of education I have in mind; and it appears, further, that any democracy which does not take account of the fact is simply not taking education seriously. Now any one who knows anything about the adolescent would be inclined to agree that the most important ingredient in his make-up is a deep and rather pathetic desire to be taken seriously by his elders; and that to play with him, to try to impose on him with make-believe, is to make him mad. That is the rock on which much that goes by the name of progressive education will split and, if I am not misreading the signs, is splitting already.

We must reverse the above philosophy and, instead of asking the school to make good the omissions of society, demand of society that it make good the inevitable omissions of the school. Before considering how this can be done, let me turn to a question I mentioned and postponed, the question as to the special function of the school itself.

The special function of the school is instruction. 'It needs no ghost to tell us that', I can hear the diehards of the good old-fashioned education saying to themselves. 'Putting the clock back a few hundred years', will be the comment of those enthusiasts of progressive education for whom the word instruction has acquired so evil an odour that they stand in nervous dread of imparting any knowledge whatsoever. More because I fear the approval of the former than because I wish to escape the disapproval of the latter, I shall use the more poetic word 'enlightenment', which, indeed, expresses more adequately what I have in mind. I have already hinted at one meaning of the term liberty; identifying it with participation in co-operative group life. Here we hit upon another and more general implication of liberty,

extremely, knowledge, in the sense of insight into the nature of the conditions and the influences that determine one's life; insight which brings with it the power to control these conditions to an extent to which it would be rash to set any limit. The fact that man is capable of such insight seems to me to rule out of court any purely naturalistic philosophy of society. For a long time—roughly, during the second half of last century and the first decade of our own—evolution was everywhere acclaimed as the master-key. Its success in the hands of the biologist went straight to the heads of philosophers like Herbert Spencer, who forthwith proceeded to try it on any and every door they wanted to open—history, psychology, sociology, ethics, religion—and twisted it so badly out of shape that even the biologists are now wondering whether they had not better throw it away. The bed-rock fact on which all philosophy of human society, including the philosophy of education, must begin to build if it is going to possess any real pertinence for human affairs, is the fact that man has the making of that society in his own hands and that the concepts and processes of evolution are simply irrelevant to the task.

It would appear, then, that no less an issue than the liberating of the human spirit is in question when we talk about the kind of instruction that means enlightenment. But there's the rub. 'Enlightening' is the last quality one would ascribe to a great deal of the instruction associated with the traditional school. So say our progressive educationalists, and here I am with them. I am also in full sympathy with their efforts to give reality and vitality to the work of the school. But let us note what it is that we must make real and vital. It is a curriculum arrived at as the result of analysis of our civilization and thus representing the essential interests, pursuits, or values on which that civilization rests. Science, art, and the study of man in his social and political relations, would be the core of such a curriculum. If we express it in terms of 'subjects' (another word of bad odour), we arrive at something disconcertingly like the curriculum of the faculty of arts and science in our universities and colleges. This leads me to say that the crux of the problem of school education (using 'school' in the broad sense already indicated) is not the assembling of new subjects by a process of addition or substitution, but the fostering of a genuine appreciation of those basic civilized

values already indicated by the captions of the curriculum. In so far as schemes of progressive education are an attempt to achieve such a purpose more effectively, they are really directed to problems of 'method', if I may use that word to indicate something vastly more important than the mechanical tricks of the trade it has usually denoted.

If we were really to take seriously the idea of using the school to enlighten the individual in a manner that would make for his freedom, the work of that institution would be transformed in a variety of important ways. Let me take but one example—perhaps the most obvious one. Consider the study of man in his social and political relations, a study just mentioned as one of the basic subjects on a liberal curriculum. At the High School stage, by which I mean the first three or four years of adolescence, that study is represented by history, with perhaps a dash of economic theory. Neither the history nor the economics, however, gives the adolescent anything approaching an adequate picture of the society in which his lot will be cast. Some instruction in sociology is clearly indicated. 'Sociology', I know, is rather a high-falutin word, but I mean it here in its strict etymological sense of 'talking about society'. Such talk would enlighten the adolescent as to what industrialism really means and how it came about. Instead of thinking of it vaguely as having to do with machinery, he would see it as something the physical scientist brought into being, something that enables man to use natural forces to replace human and animal energy; and he would be shown the relevant political issues against that background. He could be taught something about modern nationalism: where it came from and what it is made of. He could be taught something in a realistic though simple way about modern democracy and the mechanisms at work in it: about mob-spirit; about propaganda—where to look for it and how to know it when he sees it. It would, for instance, be an excellent exercise for the High School pupil to make a careful study of the use of what the logicians call 'question-begging terms' in the speeches of politicians, in newspaper leaders, letters to the editor, and other happy hunting-grounds that I need not specify. Finally, he would learn something about that vast debris of barbaric survivals and pseudo-sciences which the stream of civilization still carries with it, and which

threaten to turn it (in Sir J. G. Fraser's expressive phrase) into a pestilential swamp. If any one questions the need for this sort of enlightenment, I would remind him that on both sides of the Atlantic there are reputable newspapers that run a column on astrology, and, on one side of that ocean at any rate, there are reputable firms that would never think of opening a tea-room without appointing a professional tea-cup reader to the staff.

Such sociology might have piquancy to a high degree. But, I hear some one ask, would it not mean turning education itself into propaganda? On that point I need only remark that we must be on our guard against the tendency to call education propaganda simply because it happens to have a bearing on live issues in modern society. The instruction could be vital without being propagandist, in the correct sense of that term. Even if it meant saying hard things now and then about politicians and party politics, it would be most scrupulous to make it clear that these are all tarred with the same brush and in equal degree; so that none would have ground for complaint. Seriously, however, some such study is an indispensable part of the programme of enlightenment. That is even truer of this country than of the United States and Canada for the reason that in this country a very much smaller proportion of the population has any formal education beyond the High School stage.

So much for the special function of the school—enlightenment, mainly through instruction. It is a great and sufficient function, but it leaves yet to be accomplished the task of training the individual for the kind of associational or group life I have referred to. This training, I suggested, can only be given in real life, but as I further suggested, not by trying to impose the pattern of real life on the school itself. Training for the co-operative group life that democracy implies can be imparted in two ways: first, by way of associations already present in society and suitable for the purpose; and, second, by effecting such changes in the organization of society as will ensure that education shall not be side-tracked or stultified. Let us consider the first point, the use of already existing associations.

A very important feature of modern society is the growth of groups or associations organized around one or another of the great civilized interests. Many of the associations exist for cultural purposes or, one

might say, for purposes of play—cultural activities being at bottom a form of play. Such associations range all the way from a learned society to a Bridge club. Other associations—and it is with them I am concerned here—are practical in the sense that they exist to deal with certain practical situations or to further certain practical projects. The economic associations, of which the Trade Unions are the outstanding example, are of this sort; so, also, are the numerous philanthropic associations which have for their aim the prevention or relief of suffering. I need not specify further, but will only remind you that these associations have the two characteristics in which I am interested here: they are practical in the sense that they aim at doing something, and they aim at doing it by corporate effort.

Such associations have sprung up much more rapidly and extensively on the North American continent than in this country. The fact is of some sociological interest. Fundamentally, it seems to me, it is to be connected with the absence of class distinctions on the other side or, it would be more accurate to say, with the absence there of classes that carry prestige or authority throughout the body politic as a whole. On the North American continent there is no class in the community with the prestige that confers the kind of social and political authority which has always been exercised, more or less tacitly, by the upper classes in England, and accounts in large measure for the social and political stability of that country. America, of course, has its upper classes, but they are upper classes of wealth. This plutocracy has never become an aristocracy, for the reason, perhaps, that its personnel is always changing. In virtue of its wealth, it can and does exercise immense influence, but it acts behind the scenes and only in its own plutocratic interests. In short, in both senses of the phrase—literal and figurative—it minds its own business. The result is a society without leadership, explicit or implicit. Hollywood, it is true, has something of the status of a royal court (of a rather flamboyant type), but its authority is limited to the lighter matters of fashion and convention.

In a truncated society of this kind people are thrown on their own resources in the matter of how they will think and act, and their instinct is to come together and think and act in mass. Hence the growth of associations. In England, no doubt, with the continued

waning of inherent class prestige, the same tendency will become increasingly apparent; and to my way of thinking it is a healthy tendency and one full of significance for the philosophy of education.

When I first went to Canada, about fifteen years ago, one of the things that impressed me was just this tendency for people to think and act as members of groups or organizations; and like most newcomers I not only came and saw, but condemned. Here was mass thinking and the suppression of the individual; at the best, organizations of earnest, well-intentioned people who lacked training and political experience; at the worst, organizations of busybodies with an itch for meddling with other people; an era of crowds, as some of our psychologists would sum it up. I have since then changed my mind on the subject, and have come to the conclusion that in modern society the individual who tries to do his political thinking in splendid isolation will only find himself in the futile role of a voice crying in the wilderness with no reasonable likelihood that it is the voice of a prophet.

Let me give one illustration. Some years ago, if my memory is right, in a certain province of Western Canada, an organization of farm women, with very considerable political influence, brought up, discussed, and passed at one of their conventions a resolution calling for the publication of the best knowledge available in regard to methods of birth-control. Had any one of these women individually come forward in such a cause, however brilliant her advocacy, she would not be heard, or, if she was, she would be simply dismissed as a wild woman. It was quite another matter when a large and admittedly responsible body of rural women, who certainly could not be accused of not knowing something of that whereof they spoke, gave their considered blessing to the project.

The adolescent, it seems to me, should not pledge himself and his enthusiasm at his present stage to any one political party—there is something a little farcical in so doing—but in the interests of his own further education he should identify himself with some organization concerned with specific practical objects he can honestly sympathize with. In this way he will learn something about the society he is living in. His youthful enthusiasm, which always knows the One Right Way to do whatever is to be done, will be disciplined into a

realization of the fact that in such a society as ours the individual with the One Right Way is merely a nuisance and an obstacle; and, best of all, he will haply escape that depressing sense of personal futility, the feeling of simply not counting, which is the nemesis of him who would plough a lonely furrow in the vast territory which is modern society.

All this, however, only means that society offers certain opportunities for supplementing the school, if the individual diligently seeks them. That is not enough. What is needed is that society, in virtue of its own organization, should provide this necessary supplement as a matter of course. And this brings me to my second point.

Let us at the outset face the stark fact of the situation: the average individual is expected to behave in politics in a manner that will make democracy a success, while at the same time he is called upon to live the most important part of his life—the economic or vocational part—under conditions which are an open denial of democracy, in letter and in spirit. There are certain fairly specific consequences of our industrial régime which have a bearing on my present argument.

To begin with, there is that anxiety or fear which harries the individual like a chronic ailment. I refer to the fear of poverty. Poverty, I am well aware, is a relative term, which may mean anything from a state of near-starvation to one of near-opulence. Even so, the pervasive feeling of insecurity is a psychological fact; and if many who suffer from it do so because of a sense of values which, philosophically regarded, is foolish and distorted, our industrial régime is perhaps responsible for that too. There are, I know, enlightened, well-regulated firms whose relations to their employees are governed by well-defined and reasonably equitable codes, but, in the main, it is no exaggeration to say that the vast majority of our people are working with no feeling of assurance that they will not suddenly find themselves thrown aside for causes that have nothing to do with their value as workers. It is no longer in order to meet this state of things with a facile Darwinism that would invoke the principle of natural selection and the survival of the fittest. What I am interested in at the moment is the possibility that the mental energy wasted in pulling against this undercurrent of fear might, if it were saved, furnish a dynamic that would go far towards actualizing the ideals of higher education.

To many people, again, our system offers alternatives both of which are apt to be highly unsatisfactory. Many an individual who is trying to run a business of his own in a small way would be happier, and more effective as a citizen, if he were not 'on his own' but part of a large organization. Under the circumstances, however, he cannot become so without giving up all appearance of economic independence. We are often told that the real difficulty with farming in Western Canada and the Middle States is that the farms are too small and cannot yield their owners anything like an assured living. This may well be true, but it is regrettable that the only alternative open is one that makes the small owner cling pathetically to his farm. Surely it should be possible to find a middle way between a harassed liberty and a security akin to servitude.

There is, again, the matter of leisure. It is wrong to use that dignified word in reference to the few hours' respite from toil—often highly exacting toil—which is all that it means for the majority of people. In the true sense of the word leisure, the sense which implies that the faculties are still fresh, few people have any leisure. They have their periods of relaxation, and they use them for that purpose in a round of trivialities and banalities which has the one essential characteristic that it makes no demand on the active powers. It is foolish to expect them to do otherwise.

Underlying the leisure activities—falsely so-called—of the masses of the people, one can detect, I think, two needs. There is the need for excitement of tired and jaded faculties—a need that in many cases takes on the character of an acquired appetite, like the craving for tobacco or alcohol; and there is, again, the need for the free play of phantasy to compensate for the drabness and monotony of life. These needs account for a good deal. They account perhaps for one of the major lunacies of our civilization, whereby some of our public entertainers are rewarded for their services in a manner that, for the first time in the world's history, could be quite rightly described as exceeding the dreams of avarice. But this brings me to my next point.

There is a general distortion of values which spells defeat in advance for any plan of higher education which merits the description. In the long run, the sense of values in the young is determined predominantly, not by the values to which the school invites their

It might be thought that the English Public School system does this very thing. That would be a mistake. It certainly does remove the child at an early age from the society of his elders, but hardly in order to 'erect a purer abode' for him. It is rather to place him in a school which is itself the concentrated essence of the society from which he is taken. In other words, the English Public School is an actualizing of Dewey's idea of making the school a miniature of society. Unfortunately, however, it is not the Great Society itself that is reproduced there; it is a small and highly specialized section of it. Within these limits, the arrangement is highly successful, but the limits are always there. For example, the product of the English Public School makes an excellent British army officer, so long as the life of the British army officer is run on English Public School lines. It still remains true that the idea of removing the young from adult society is a merely theoretical solution, in the worst sense of that term.

Again, there is a point in which I am more specifically interested at the moment. I refer to the average man's indifference to politics and public life generally, an indifference usually associated with a cynical conviction (and who shall say it is ill founded?) that it is just those industrial policies and needs in which he has no say that are the determining factors in politics in any case. So long as such indifference continues, it is useless to look to society for the opportunities that will serve to carry on and complete the social training of our citizens. Clearly, the industrial régime must be modified to admit of some exercise of the co-operative thinking I have been talking about. The Trade Unions, of course, have already done good work in this direction. At present they are the only agency available, and it is worth remarking that they have already been the means of stimulating thinking—and much of it intelligent and responsible thinking—among the rank and file. For reasons that should be obvious, however, Trade Unions do not meet the need. More directly in line with what I have in mind are those experiments some firms have made in the direction of giving the employees some say in the running of the business and some practical interest in its success.

At this point, perhaps, some of you are beginning to see in the background the ugly spectre—or the bright angel—of socialism. I

submit that so far there is no good reason for your fear or hope. Socialism means essentially the public ownership of the means of production and distribution, or, as our American thinkers, with their fondness for synthetic adjectives, would express it, the elimination of the private profit motive. I can easily imagine a system of that kind which would be even more repugnant than our present régime to the aims I have in mind. What I am suggesting is certain changes within our present system, changes which appear to be compatible with the motive of private profit, though hardly compatible with the orgies of anti-social conduct to which the free indulgence of that motive inevitably leads. As one writer puts it: 'The men who have made the vast machine of modern industry should not be unequal to the task of finding means whereby man may use it and serve it and yet save his soul alive.'¹ It is always possible, on the other hand, that modern capitalistic industry will prove quite impervious to every consideration that would divert it from its old singleness of purpose—minding its own business. That would be another matter.

The sort of modification I am suggesting will invite, it is true, an obvious objection: you can no more run an industry than you can run an army on democratic lines; in both cases the result will be ruin. Whatever may be the case with an army (the story of the Boer army as told by the author of *Commando* might prevent us from being too dogmatic even on that point), there seems to be no *prima facie* impossibility in the case of industry. To say that there is would be tantamount to saying (if the main argument of the present lecture is sound) that democracy is impossible. One may take comfort from the thought that in the thirties of last century the leaders of industry raised a loud jeremiad of which the burden was that they would be ruined (and England, of course, ruined with them) if children of tender years were withdrawn from the factories and the mines.

But it is no part of my business here to try to follow up the economics of the suggestion that the industrial system should be modified so as to bring it into line with the movement towards co-operative thinking and co-operative effort which has been making headway in other regions of our social life. I am concerned with educational implications. Let me recapitulate these. Under a régime which was

¹ F. Clarke, *The Politics of Education*, p. 67.

truly democratic, the individual would not fail to develop an intelligent and serious interest in the affairs of the body politic which would replace the sort of interest, if any, he now has, viz. an interest which, when it is intelligent is not serious, and, when it is serious, is apt to be dangerously unintelligent. Further, the incubus of an immense, impersonal, and seemingly capricious system would cease to weigh on his spirit, and the consequent release of mental and moral energy would make for a truer orientation to the basic values on which our civilization rests—the values of science, art, social and political life, religion, philosophy. Inasmuch as the task of the school is to foster appreciation of these values, that task would be immensely simplified. The higher education of the masses would be brought within the realm of practical politics instead of remaining, as now, a pious aspiration of idealists or—for the realists—an empty formula not meant to be taken seriously.

And here we encounter the biggest wave of all, to use Plato's figure. Human nature may disappoint us and the average individual prove incapable of benefiting by even the best planned educational opportunities. The realist (let me call him so for convenience) who would tell us that in trying to educate the masses, in any adequate sense of the word 'educate', we are merely attempting the obviously impossible, may have a good deal to say for himself. While I am not prepared to concede his case either by abandoning my belief in popular education or by taking refuge in a *credo quia impossibile*, I am none the less impressed by the evidence for his side of the argument. Let us look at that evidence.

In the first place, there is the laziness of men. There is, no doubt, one side of our human nature which says: 'No matter how badly I am governed so be it I have some say in the governing'; and the democrat pins his faith to that. His opponent, however, would insist that human nature speaks more authentically in the words: 'Let the other fellow do it.' We assume that the average man is greatly concerned to have his say in public affairs, whereas the truth may be that his fundamental wish is merely to be left alone to take his fun where he finds it. In that admirable sociological study, *Middletown*, the Lynds report that with the appearance in Middletown of the low-priced motor-car, Trade Union leaders have been finding it increasingly

difficult to get a quorum for their meetings; and there is no doubt in the minds of these officials that the *post hoc* is also a *propter hoc*.

The same indolence may bring to nought the plans of the educationist. Whatever we mean by education, it is something that presupposes, somewhere and somewhen, exercise of the intellectual faculties; it presupposes the capacity and the willingness to think; and thinking is hard work. Some of our progressive educationists leave me with the uncomfortable feeling that what they are trying to do is not so much to bring the thinking of their students into conformity with cultural standards as to adjust those cultural standards to the mental processes that come most easily to their students and are believed by those young ones to constitute thinking. If the mountain will not come to Mahomet, there is always the easy and obvious alternative, which, moreover, can be itself justified by invoking the principles of democracy. But it will not produce an educated democracy. As our realist (to go back to him) would sum it up: the fate of all our fine ideals of popular education is foreshadowed in the publisher's message to the author: 'Murder, love and sob-stuff—always good; cut out the think-stuff—they don't want it.'

In still other ways democracy is working against the grain of human nature. It discounts the human weakness for heroes and hero-worship. The interest in personal liberty makes but a poor showing against admiration for the spectacular efficiency of a Caesar, a Frederick, a Napoleon. If we were to say, as I think it would be correct to say, that Hitler and Mussolini are using the methods of democracy to destroy democracy, we are tacitly recognizing the important fact that their authority has its sanction in the souls of the people they govern or misgovern. I am not concerned at the moment with the explanation of this need for hero-worship. It may be a case of what psychologists call identification or, again, it may be a manifestation of what the Freudians call infantilism, a resurgence of the childish need for protection and security. It is probably compact of both but, in any case, it is there; and democracy refuses to minister to it. On the contrary, indeed, democracy makes rather for distrust and even fear of the exceptional individual. As a Frenchman once said to me: 'We French are so democratic that the moment a man

believes a little distinction we want to pull him down.' In the particular case of the French I am not at all sure that the psychoanalyst would not explain this attitude as an over-compensation for a Napoleon complex of which that nation has not yet succeeded in ridding itself. But that only means that the case illustrates both points I have just made.

Finally, there is the appeal of the romantic. There is abundant evidence of the power that can be exercised over the minds of men by certain vague and highly emotionalized ideas, or 'myths', as some sociologists call them. The dialectic of history culminating in the supreme and perfect state, the victory of the proletariat, the superman, Nordic supremacy, the white man's burden, the nation and the national destiny—these are some of the foci of emotional infection from which nothing is immune, not even science itself, if we are to judge by the following words of a distinguished philosopher and educationist of our own day: 'If we thus understand the nation, it follows that not only every man must bear the imprint of his nationality, but that also there is no true science, no man's science, which is not national. . . . Concrete personality then is nationality, and therefore neither the school nor science possesses a learning which is not national.'¹ For all such soaring romanticism, democracy can have only scepticism and distrust.

These, then, are some of the forces working against those who would seek to create an educated democracy. Can education prevail against these forces? Some thinkers hold that the democrat might well set himself to beat the enemies of democracy at their own game. In other words, he might play on the weaknesses and irrationalities of human nature for his own ends. He would make democracy itself a matter of the parades, flag-waving, and stirring songs that the people love. He would see to it that politics provided a good show. It seems to me, however, that this would be equivalent to admitting defeat. It would mean accepting as permanent the present state of things where the interest in politics is just another and more occasional expression of the interest in horse-racing or any other public event which lends itself to the excitement of a bet. Democracy would once again become an affair of bread and circuses. The word democracy

¹ Gentile, *The Reform of Education*, ch. i, p. 17.

might still be used and even be given its aura of mysticism and romance. But in such case, the word would properly belong to the list of myths already referred to and the thing denoted by the word would stand condemned at the bar of reason.

No; we are still left with the question: can education—education taken seriously, with society itself organized to facilitate it—overcome the weaknesses of human nature and provide for its non-rational elements some form of expression in regions of experience other than those where reason should prevail? In short, is the average man capable of being educated? The answer must be: we do not know. All that the democrat can do is to hold fast his faith in the average of human nature. If he cannot offer reasoned proof of his position, it is certain that no one can produce reasoned disproof of it. In my student days, text-books in ethics used to teach that the moralist must keep in touch with the psychologist, lest, as a moralist, he erect ideals to which human nature cannot rise. I would suggest, on the contrary, that the moralist should occupy himself with his moral values and forget about human nature. On the subject of human nature—what it is, and what it is or is not capable of—modern psychology is a babel of counsel, with some of the counsellors even prepared to tell us that there 'ain't no such thing'. 'Contrary to human nature' has stood for centuries as the verdict on Plato's ideal state. Many of its most contrary-seeming provisions—state education and free educational opportunity for all, political equality and economic independence of women, state censorship of literature, abolition of a hereditary governing class, state regulation of marriage—are now either actually practised or widely conceded to be sound policy. Even some of its admittedly drastic provisions have come within the reach of practical speculation, if not practical politics. Plato himself made an attempt to show how the ideal might be realized—an attempt which has given us, if Rousseau's opinion is to be trusted, 'the best treatise on education ever written'. The Greek philosopher was aware of the 'contrary to human nature' argument. He does not consider that it clinches matters:

'Well,' I said, 'were not we two fashioning in argument a pattern of a good city?'

'Certainly.'

'Then do you think any less of our words because we cannot prove that it is possible to found a city of the manner we have described?'

'Surely not,' he said.

'That is the truth of the matter,' I said.

When we consider how little ground we have for dogmatizing as to what human nature is or is not capable of and when we reflect on the extent to which this entity is admittedly the result of man-made and therefore, presumably, man-remakable conditions, it is perhaps best to accept Plato's verdict on his own wonderful creation as laying down right law for all philosophies of social regeneration and reform.

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