

General Education—for What?

General education is general in the sense that it allows a balanced and informed awareness not only of the nature of humane and social values but their central and dominant place in individual and group life.

EVERY civilization has given its unique answer to the question, "What is education for?" Athens sought to make "cultivated souls" out of the sons and daughters of its freemen. Rome taught its children to be men of action. In the Middle Ages education was, above all else, Christian. In the Renaissance, education assumed a more secular and literary character, albeit chiefly for the children of its elite. What education is for, in mid-twentieth century America, is in grave dispute.

If we state the terms of the dispute in the form of "saving our necks" or "saving a civilization" we invent an unnecessary and uncompromisable "either-or." If, however we state the terms of the dispute in the form of "saving our necks as the immediate price of saving our civilization," we cast the issue in intellectually and morally defensible terms; not as "either-or" but as a "both-and," or as "means-ends." That this formulation of the problem has been more forced upon us than willed by us, is I think a fair statement of the case.

I now ask what the "either-or" and the "both-and" or "means-ends" of this brief analysis symbolize respecting alternative philosophies of education. The former symbolizes an education which not only values technology more than humanity but sets them in opposition. The latter

symbolizes an education which, in rightly "dividing the word of truth," has also taken thought to show the relation between the truths so divided. It thus values both technology and humanity and sets them, not in opposition, but in cooperation.

In this interpretation I have dealt with but one evidence of an educational house divided against itself. The halves referred to are those represented by the natural science studies and the social-humane studies. But each of these halves is, in turn, divided within itself. Whether this division is greater in one than in the other I am not certain. I have the impression, however, that the division in the social-humane half is more aggravated than is the division in the natural science half. There is considerable evidence that the students of *nature* have been more disposed to combine their systems of inquiry and knowledge to ferret out the secrets of the order of their concern, than the students of *human nature* have been to ferret out the secrets of the order of their concern.

Relating Specialisms

This is to say that the specialisms within the order of *nature* have effected a working interrelation more marked and more advanced than is true of the specialisms within the order of *human*

nature. It may be that cooperation between specialisms *within* each of the two great orders of knowledge is an achievement necessarily prior to cooperation between the two orders.

Despite what has been achieved and yet remains to be achieved respecting the integration of specialisms both *within* and *between* the two great orders on which scholarly study focuses (the orders of nature and human nature), the major issue which confronts education today is the issue of the relation of the specialisms to each other. The core curriculum is, I believe, a significant gesture in the direction of the resolution of this issue.

The eminent British political scientist, Graham Wallas, has stated briefly but eloquently the gravity of this issue, as it bears not only on the school but on the whole society.

We are forced . . . now to recognize that a society whose intellectual direction consists only (or chiefly) of unrelated specialisms must drift, and that we dare to drift no longer. We stand, as the Greeks stood, in a new world and because that world is new, we feel that neither the sectional observations of the special student, the ever-accumulating records of the past, nor the narrow experience of the practical man can suffice us. We must let our minds play freely over all the conditions of life till we can justify our civilization or change it.¹

Now, because of the limitations of my own knowledge, I must confine my discussion of the problem of unrelated specialisms chiefly to the social and humane studies.

These studies are, as I understand it, the chief content of the core curriculum. It is the *core* in the sense that man-in-society is the ultimate focus of every enterprise in general education. How-

¹ Graham Wallas. *The Great Society*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928. p. 15.

ever, I should feel that, to the degree feasible, the core curriculum might well take some account of natural and geographical factors. Man-in-nature is necessary as a condition for man-in-society. Man lives not only *in* the physical world but *by* and *of* it. Thus it is that social things do not lie merely on the "top of" physical things. They interact and, in the process, both are changed.

But since I would not charge the core curriculum with solving the entire puzzle of the "altogetherness of things" I should be content if it gave its major attention to interrelations between the social and the humane. This is certainly a piece of "the whole of creation" big enough to challenge the imagination of everyone.

Let me expand briefly on the theme of the relation between man-in-nature and man-in-society. Although man at birth is a part of nature he does not at that time have a human nature—except potentially. He acquires it through interaction with his human and nonhuman environments. He learns to buy and sell, to harness the power of water, to domesticate beasts, to change raw minerals into tools and trinkets, to love the beauty of the natural scene as well as his fellow men (who of you do not at once think of Wordsworth and Burns?), and to join with his fellows in the great dialectic by which the question "what shall we live for?" both arises and is, in various ways, resolved. In this brief recital we have come full circle and have brought within its circumference the physical, the social, and the humane.

Core Curriculum

Within this very brief and inadequate sketch of what the "seeds" in a core curriculum might be, we see how the interdependence of specialisms as different and disparate as those which deal with

the world of nature and the world of human nature come into productive communication. Their *differences* cannot, of course, be denied for there is a legitimate division of the things which deal, respectively, with the "is" and the "ought" sides of human experience. There is also a legitimate *union* of these things and it is the obligation of the core curriculum to show how this union comes to be.

The ultimate locus of this union is in the student who, in being that locus, is also the place where the "togetherness" for which general education strives is ultimately established. Relationship—or call it coordination or integration if you wish, is the *leit motif* of general education and hence of the core curriculum as its center.

Man himself can be understood only if that which he symbolizes as a number of relationships can be understood. I think now of his capacity for responsible behavior and conscious thought; of his need to appreciate and his need to understand; of his role as artist and his role as scientist—however amateur he may be in each; of his convictions about truth and his responsibility for shaping his conduct in its service: in a word his ethical and rational natures. Man is man, only to the degree that these sides or facets of his nature are in proper balance. I believe the factors which enter into this balance ought to be known by this generation's youth—even though we cannot, as teachers, guarantee that the proper balance will be struck. That obligation lies with what I like to think of as "the educative society."

My conception of the core curriculum is that it is the *center* of a program in general education to the degree and with the depth and intensity that it treats man as a value-serving, a value-making, a value-choosing and a value-pursuing

creature. From this it follows that its ultimate concern ought to be with the great *oughts* whose service, creation and understanding distinguish man from all other animate forms in the whole realm of creation.

These are the great moral-intellectual imperatives of human existence. It is these which mark man's unique place in the great chain of being.

The education of teachers of the core curriculum ought to take its image from the facts and preferences (and the skills) which the social and humane studies provide. I do not hesitate to say that the primary task of the school is to play the role, unique to it, of educator in a "crusade for human values," which role, above all else, demands teachers who are educated to improve their own and their students' skill, knowledge and insight in selecting, making and remaking, pursuing and enjoying the values to which the democratic conception of man-in-society is beholden. Let us now examine some of the central issues of this conception.

First, let us look at the nature of and the relation between appreciation and understanding. These differ as immediate and mediate ways of dealing with values differ. If we take our values *immediately*, that is, without criticism and at "face value," we appreciate them. If, however, we take them *mediately*, that is, in the light of criticism, we understand them—but our appreciation of them is not thereby necessarily lessened. On the contrary, it may be enlarged. Appreciation

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is a matter of taste; understanding is a matter of evidence or proof—or call it knowledge.

We may, for instance, appreciate flowers or a poem without possessing any theoretical knowledge about either. But, if we are concerned to understand the flowering of plants or the construction of a poem, we would be obliged to find out a good deal about the interactions of soil, air, sunlight and water which condition the growth of plants, and, for poems, a good deal about the nature of meter, rhythm and the various forms of poetic expression.

But this we need to know: whether we take our values immediately or mediately it is *we* who take them. The issue is whether we take them without or with criticism.

In these comments I make no covert or hidden plea that the immediate taking of the values of poetry, or any other art form, be abandoned. My concern is rather to mark the difference between those two qualities of human experience which are the result of our immediate or mediate confrontation with values. I speak of the difference between science and art, of the social and the humane studies. The issue is this: what do we want or need in given situations and circumstances, for there is a time for poetry and there is a time for systematic thought and both of them about the same thing—the community, the family, leaders and the “little people.” We live by *beliefs*, the objects of immediate valuation, and we live by *examined beliefs*, the products of criticism of things valued. No experience can or should be divested of its affective tinge. It is pathetic that we so often ask our students to take a detached (critical) view of human things without first permitting them to form an attachment to them. It is for

reasons such as these that I would make the humane and social studies co-agents in the education of teachers of the core curriculum.

The trouble with the social studies, divorced from their humane origins is that the teaching of them is often so dull and literal as to preclude appreciation and imagination, thus leaving the desires and emotions of our students untouched. Santayana said it well: “Ultimate truths are more easily and adequately conveyed by poetry than by analysis. This is no reason for forbidding analysis, but it is reason for not banishing poetry.”

Another pair of terms affords the material for a complementary examination of the relation of desire to intelligence or of appreciation to understanding. These are the “ethics of conviction” and the “ethics of responsibility.” Here I refer to the fact that conduct can be oriented to what Max Weber called an “ethic of ultimate ends” or an “ethic of responsibility.” In the former case, one would act without concern for the foreseeable consequences of his act. In the latter case he would act in the light of what the probable consequences of his behavior would be. The former would be purely impulsive action, however much its motives were of a high ethical character. The latter would be action which began, as does all action, with an impulse, but it would be released in such ways as to take account of its consequences, insofar as, in the light of reason, they might be foreseen.

If now we think of the ethic of conviction as the ethic of *ends*, and the ethic of responsibility as the ethic of *means*, we may thus view them in terms roughly comparable to desire and intelligence, appreciation and understanding, or if you will, loving and thinking. Note that each of these pairs of terms is connected

by "and," not "or": for the task of the core curriculum is to bring appreciation and understanding and desire and intelligence together. In this interpretation I find the meaning of the adjective "core": "that through which certain things in life and in the curriculum presumed, hitherto, to be alien to each other are brought together."

The view of the core curriculum which I have sought to share with you finds a place for impulse and reason, desire and thought, belief and proof. These are the dual components of men. But men do not become reasonable by becoming passionless. It was his belief and faith in a great passion that made Socrates choose "to obey the god, rather than you." So it was with John Milton when he held that Truth had never been "put to the worst in a free and open encounter." Both Socrates and Milton submitted their belief and faith to criticism and found it good to act upon. By the same token the core curriculum can, in its dependence on humane and scientific materials, provide food for our students' passions as well as for their reason. The truth is, of course, that "feeling informs thought, and thought reforms feeling."

Mere desire, to reduce the prime movers of man to but one, does not know the way. Moreover, there is not one path but many paths which it may take. Although "the wood is dark and perplexing, still we must push on." Nor is the problem rightly put if we say that "students *must* act." They *do* act. The problem is whether they can afford to act from sheer desire, unaided by criticism, or whether they will discipline their desire by criticism. Warm emotion and cool intelligence can work together, and it is the obligation of teachers in the core curriculum—and everywhere else, for that matter—to know how they can and teach

it to their students. Only then may both teachers and students develop the insights and skills necessary for setting limits on some of their preconceived values, if not indeed, abandon those which they may, thus, find wanting.

The two great traditions to which our civilization is indebted thus come into view: the tradition of belief or conviction which we owe to the Hebrews, and the tradition of proof or criticism which we owe to the Greeks. These two great traditions also symbolize the dual role of the teacher—the role of priest and the role of prophet. It falls to the former to pass on the received truths which have come to us out of the past. It falls to the latter to interrupt this continuity of past to present in order to examine the goodness and the relevance of these truths for our time.

Implicit in these observations is the view that the use of the tools of scientific inquiry is itself an act of faith, for there is no science which tells us that we ought to use science. This faith is rewarded in the "maximum correctness"—not certainty—which science gives. The partner of science, as I have sought to point out, is desire. Science helps us determine what we may value, but it cannot tell us what values we ought to prefer. It mediates, but it does not rule.

A Common Focus

The foregoing discussion has, I trust, thrown some light on how the "feebleness of coordination" between the social and humane studies may be overcome. I have tried to show that such an endeavor is not achieved by doing away with special studies, such as the various forms of literature and such bodies of social knowledge as history, sociology and political science. The problems of the core curriculum may, rather, be resolved by conceiving of general education as

one requiring *special studies, specially studied*. Their special study is, in a word, the study of their unique and co-ordinate contributions to an understanding of man as a believer and thinker.

Our difficulty, it is clear, lies not so much in the fact that the subject matters of social and humane knowledge are separate but that they have been *separated*—that is, without a common focus. This state of affairs explains, in large part, the backwardness, especially of the social studies. They have taken man apart and have neglected to put him together again. I swear that he is not Humpty-Dumpty; he *can* be put together again.

This leads me to say that the term "general education" is somewhat misleading. This fact may have contributed a good deal to our misconceptions as to its real nature. It does not refer to something abstract or obscure, it is not thin and vague, it is not a "hasty pudding" quickly come by and through some magic formula, nor is it for only those of lesser intellectual talents. Its essence may be reported in the epigram, that it is to be found wherever there is an "explosive mixture of ideas" drawn from various fields of knowledge.

But we need more than an epigram. General education in the social-humane studies is general in that it seeks to effect a working synthesis by bringing separate and hitherto separated subject matters together as co-ordinate means for the study of what is general, pervasive and permanent (yet, paradoxically changing) in human affairs, revealed in unique ways by men who enjoy and practice the dignity of being individuals.

The conception of the major focus on which the humane and social studies may converge has already been implied. It is the social order which is, by definition, *an order of the distribution of human*

values. Around this focus such concerns and inquiries as the following may be brought together: the various patterns of the division of social labor which the study of comparative cultural systems would reveal as well as how each pattern attains the unity which gets the work of a particular culture done; the study of how myth, magic, science, law, education and religion function as control and integrative devices for individual and group behavior; how selves achieve a working *coherence* and societies achieve a working *cohesion*,* for these are the terms which identify the form of "belonging together" of the various facets of the personality on the one hand, and the different orders and interests of groups of men on the other; the nature of social institutions, how they arise, become decadent or renew themselves; how the physical and the biotic are taken up and transformed by human design for the satisfaction of man's many needs; how present and past are bound together so as to reveal the continuity in man's affairs and which, paradoxically enough, would also reveal that change is a constant in human affairs.

Content and Purpose

Such a panorama would, in the humanities, draw upon the short story, the novel, biography, poetry and music as well as those less fluid but perhaps even more expressive art forms: painting, sculpture and ceramics. In the social studies, materials would be drawn from history, economics, political science, geography, sociology, cultural anthropology and ethics.

As for the internal order of such a panorama of appreciation and understanding—or call it the core curriculum if you please—I refer you to Rudyard Kipling who told us that,

There are nine and sixty ways of constructing tribal lays

And every single one of them is right.

So it is with curricula. The only admonition I would give is this: *do not mistake their mechanics for their content and purpose*. A place must be found for each of the interrogatives of which all teaching must take account: why, what, for whom, and how. Note that this order begins with the philosophical or ethical, moves next to the substantive, then to the personal, and concludes with the practical.

After this brief discussion of the somewhat explicit phases of the core curriculum in general education, I should like to comment further on some of the significant, although perhaps less operational phases of general education as I have come to view it.

General education is general in the sense that it allows a balanced and informed awareness not only of the nature of humane and social values but their central and dominant place in individual and group life. It also tells us of their infinite number and variety, their similarities and their dissimilarities. It schools us in principles by which we may guide our conduct in the swift, and both certain and uncertain, changes of our time so that we may not be lost in them. It is general in that it seeks to reveal those phases of social thought and action which are relevant to all mankind and to a wide variety of situations and circumstances. It discovers to us that man is many, but still one.

It deals with man as a social and humane creature by showing how his ways of buying and selling, his ways of governing and being governed, his ways of worshiping and loving and creating things of beauty, converge to *make* him social and humane. It helps us escape

from the prison of cultural pettiness, from provincial and local isolation of mind and heart, and acquaints us with our ties and obligations to universal man. In the same measure it delivers us from the thralldom of mere events and disconnected and sterile facts. It aids us in our understanding of what is essential and pervasive in human affairs wherever and by whomsoever they are enacted.

Such an experience may be had without courses or curricula named "general" or "core." It requires, not so much new knowledge, as a new way of looking at what we already have, and thereby adding new meaning to it. A long step in this direction may be taken simply by new ventures in the art of teaching.

But this view of general education cannot come by the mere addition of courses, whatever that may produce besides some kind of "academic sum." While it is true that the external connections of special subjects may "drag thought outward," as Whitehead puts it, we can hardly rest the case for their better coordination on a "drag" which is incidental or accidental. The focus of a general education is a dual one as I have tried to show: one on specialisms, the other on their interrelations.

But we cannot coordinate something which we do not know, hence the need for the mastery of special studies.

The "academic sum" to which I have just referred is the method of "academic layer-cake" between which layers, despite Whitehead's hope, too little osmosis, "rubbing together" or "rubbing off" takes place. This conception, furthermore, provides no theme. Coordination to serve a theme or themes, not sampling, is the logic which will bring about the synthesis which we need.

Nor can an enterprise in general education be fashioned by the logic of "pro-

portional representation": 10 minutes of music, 30 minutes of reading; 15 minutes of composition and 35 minutes of history. These add up to 90 minutes, not to a general education. General education, and the core curriculum as its center, is much more than subjects treated in timetable fashion. It is a thoughtful and useful coordination of materials and skills standing in a relation of competitive-cooperation. Special bodies of knowledge are drawn upon. This is done by their materials being drawn together. If we must, perforce—as is indeed the case—work at this task before scholars have given us a neat conceptual logic, we must do it in the practical terms suggested.

In such an endeavor we must be brave and resourceful enough to undertake what Margaret Mead asks for: “. . . a totally new kind of teaching—a teaching of a readiness to use *unknown* ways to solve unknown problems . . . We need to teach our students how to think, when you don't know what method to use, about a problem which is not quite formulated.”²

Now, if throughout this discussion I appear to be talking at the same time about *your* education and your *student's* education, I offer no excuse or apology. We cannot teach what we, ourselves, do not know. Moreover, and this is a truth which has, somehow, escaped us: *there is something called social and humane knowledge*. It is a common something which all of us, young and old, immature and mature, must know. The facts and preferences to be found in these branches of knowledge have a universal value and bearing. These are the *constants* in general education. The ways in which *they*

may be taught so that they will be used universally are the *variables* in general education. The *why* and *what* are implicit in the constants; the *for whom* and the *how* in the variables.

Moral Disciplines

Now, in conclusion, I should like to share with you my conception of the moral and intellectual disciplines through whose use and enjoyment a general education is both taught and acquired—and, may I add, *inspired*. But they are not disciplines in the sense of being systematic bodies of knowledge. Rather, they are disciplines in the sense that they are the thought-and-belief ways of the critical and dedicated mind. They are imagination, precision, appreciation and synthesis.

The discipline of imagination is the discipline of hypothesis. It finds its dynamics in minds equipped with fresh and challenging ideas. But it is not born only of ideas. They must be brought to play on an abundance of factual knowledge. Hence it is made of both fantasy and fact.

In directing us to what might be, it is the discipline of the tentative. Its symbol is *if*. It is pregnant not only with curiosity and challenge but with discontent and dissent. It is the artistic phase of science. It is also its ethical phase.

It is artistic in that it is creative. It is ethical in that it sees, with the mind's eye, what might be, what is possible rather than only what now *is*. Its dual virtues recall Shelley's observation that “A man to be greatly good must imagine intensively and comprehensively.”

Like art itself, it stands outside of good and evil—“wholly innocent of ideas derived from praise and blame.” It is the child of doubt, that legitimate doubt which initiates all search for truth. Its

² Margaret Mead. *The School in American Culture*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951. p. 40-41.

task is to spur *suppose*. To suspect or fear it is to suspect or fear thought itself. To increase its range and set it free is one of the grand purposes of teaching. The lack of it is the great source of our remediable trouble: the absence of a genuinely humane way in which men may live in security and dignity. To stifle it is to stifle creativity.

Imagination assigns the question mark to those sentences which, without it, would all speak in the indicative mood. Without this question mark, precision would have no problem to solve. Through the use of imagination new myths are born which, in being myths are not untrue, but rather those things by which men live and whose endless pursuit gives direction and purpose to their living.

Whether the new reality which imagination brings to view will be magnificent or mean cannot be prejudged. There is no way of knowing what particular kind of knowledge is divertible to destruction; nor is there any way of classifying knowledge into safe and unsafe. The only way to decrease its destructive consequences and further its constructive ones is to teach this generation, and all that follow, to *imagine* how a more humane knowledge may be achieved.

The net of imagination must be cast wide. It must encompass not only those things which suit our preferences but also those which run counter to them. This involves a great risk. But however great it be, the risk which lies in our failure to imagine boldly along new and untried lanes of thought is the greater. We must teach youth that, "Out of this nettle, danger . . . [they may] . . . pluck this flower, safety."

The discipline of *precision* is the discipline through which, as Ortega y Gasset

has expressed it, "ideas put truth in checkmate." By its use, inferences which are "the great and unavoidable business of life" are drawn according to rules, not according to whim and caprice. Through these rules, we move from the "if" of imagination to the "then" of knowledge. It is much more than information. It is the only reliable means of emancipation from chance and fatality.

Its basic operating principle is the search for truth. It requires a mind trained in the making of accurate and honest observations, a readiness to accept evidence though it run counter to what we would like to believe. It is suspicious of hearsay. It permits no confusion of fact with preference and employs logic only in the service of clarity of thought. It treats facts not as ends in themselves but as turning points in the growth of the mind. It demands a quality of courage which is unique in the annals of man. No tradition, belief or practice is excused from the rigors of its method. It demands integrity, competence and humility. Unless its method and findings are made public they degenerate and die.

By the discipline of *appreciation* we come into immediate touch with those values which reason can treat only indirectly, the distinction which I treated earlier. It pertains to what we would *rather* do and *rather* love. It is partial. It nurtures all *affective* learning. It fixes "the generous purpose in the heart." It is, in Lin Yutang's words "the stuff of human experience."

The discipline of appreciation is the one of which, I think, we are most apt to be afraid. But without it, teaching can only be clever—never grand or warm. Without it there is no profundity. It is the mark of the excellence of the human spirit.

Finally there is the discipline of *synthesis*. By it wholes are created out of the ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsible action, out of desire and thought, and out of thought and action. Its use reports itself in balanced perspective which calls for discrimination among beliefs. Its function is to perpetuate the type and, to the degree possible, to educate beyond the type. These become the leaders. It provides the "growth-point of human experience."

Through it, education persists, even to the extent of one's learning alone. It is manifest in self-control and in the will, the skill, the knowledge and the courage

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workers, and similar services to help youngsters with special problems and to assist educational workers in understanding the individual and social needs of human beings?

7. Is the educational situation "authoritarian," or is it genuinely democratic, with children, teachers, parents and others sharing in planning and carrying out the program?

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Allport, Lawrence K. Frank and M. F. Ashley Montagu, as well as Oppenheimer, Ruesch, Riesman, Turner, Prescott, Havighurst, Davis, Chisholm, Menninger, Sullivan and Rogers. It would also include reports of interdisciplinary teams and groups such as that edited by Parsons and Shils. This is but a brief sampling, to substantiate what has been stated, to instigate initiative in independent study, and to hold the line for further advance.

There is much which can and should

to resist the attrition of everyday experience. It engenders faith in the self. The fullness of its expression is the crown of a truly general education. Its operational presence affirms the wisdom of Emerson's observation that "the only entrance so to know is so to be." Thus character is manifest in conduct.

In the measure that we teach these disciplines and *teach by them* we may devoutly hope that our students will, like the great ones of the earth, act out their dreams instead of merely dream of their action. But if they do, they, and we, their teachers, must believe quite as much in longings as in facts.

8. Do the community and the educational administration understand that "administration" is not something that exists for itself, but is justified only as an agency to facilitate the essentially *human* task involved in education?

9. Is our underlying philosophy such that we have faith in the possibilities of human beings—building on what they can do rather than on what they cannot?

be done without delay to dispel the present confusion and to challenge the hope and faith of those whose dedication to educational leadership is recognized in this statement.

Together we can plan soundly and project long-term programs of action and evaluation with vision and courage. Meanwhile we can and must carry on, for education cannot declare a moratorium on its current obligations. We can even carry on the more responsibly and courageously, as we glimpse fuller vision of what lies ahead.

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