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The Purpose of Education: Peace, Capitalism and Nationalism

KERN ALEXANDER

INTRODUCTION

What is the purpose of education? Sir Christopher Ball posed the question to the Round Table. The question was not rhetorical and, indeed, must be addressed either implicitly or explicitly by all states and nations that provide public instruction for their citizenry. Consideration of the issue produced several responses, all of which were highly insightful and worthy in several contexts. Three, however, came to the forefront demanding further discussion. They were that education should have the purpose of promoting (1) peace, (2) a capitalistic economic system, and (3) nationalism. These three purposes were not advanced by any one member of the Round Table exclusively nor was any consensus reached or attempted on the issue. Yet, the importance of each with its various connotations suggests the desirability of much more extensive consideration. This paper is meant to contribute some thoughts to the discussion and to observe that simplicity and certainty in answer to the question is elusive, indeed.

The quest for purpose assumes, of course, that such an enunciation is desirable or even possible. Some would argue that the nature of education is such that purpose is and should be indefinable, that definition itself implies limitations in the pursuit of knowledge. Yet, this position is substantially weakened when one considers that there is not world enough and time or money for a nation or a state to provide everything to all persons without boundary or limit. Too often nations and states pursue educational policy without a definitive understanding of what they are about and for what they are educating. Elaborate schemes of objectives, methods and evaluation are fashioned without knowing what it is that education is supposed to achieve. Typically, much is said about what is to be taught, the system, organization and level of government to convey the education as well as elaborate programs for testing and evaluation, but little worthwhile discussion is devoted to the question of ultimate purpose. The foundational issues of what the particular nation or state is hoping to finally achieve through education tend to float, unattached, beyond the grasp of the respective governments and the inability to respond becomes endemic and perpetual.

Many examples of limited perspective by nations and states can be cited. One such instance of a nation fashioning educational goals without a particular purpose is well exhibited by the United States' formulation of a plan that the Bush administration called the *America 2000 Education Strategy*; a similar measure was enacted and signed into law on March 31, 1994 by President Clinton. The basic purpose of this initiative was stated to be, a "...long-term strategy to help make this land all that it should be..." Such a nebulous purpose begs credibility and exhibits either a high government disinterest in education or a genuine misunderstanding as to the vital nature of education.

As in the United States, many other countries fail to define their purposes in provision for education. Perhaps the purpose of education cannot actually be defined with any clarity. It may be that education simply responds to the whim or caprice of the particular government in power at any appointed time. A government may be vague on the subject because no more specification is desirable or the superfluidity of the politics of the day ebbs and flows with such frequency that an amorphous context for education is not only necessary, but is even considered to be desirable. It may be more comfortable for governmental leaders if educational purpose remains indefinite and bends with the vicissitudes of current politics. Yet, this does not obviate the need for a rational purpose and policy to achieve that end.

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DOES EDUCATION FASHION GOVERNMENT?

A critical question is whether education is destined to be merely a tool of government to achieve its immediate ends or can education shape the government itself. In other words, do we arrange education to advance governmental policy or do we fashion educational policy to form and mold government? A realist would argue that for education to shape the government denies history and experience. The educational idealist, on the other hand, would maintain that, in actuality, an educated people do ultimately mold the government while an uneducated people, with less knowledge and correspondingly lower aspirations, will require less of government. The realist will maintain that, in the final analysis, government will use education to achieve its own ends and that, ultimately, factors other than education will determine the success or failure of both the government and education. Thus, there is the eternal dispute, as Albert Sorel has put it, "between those who imagine the world to suit their policy, and those who arrange their policy to suit the realities of the world."¹ Whether realism or idealism will ultimately prevail probably cannot be determined, and in this light any discussion of educational purpose has inherent limitations. Yet, there is an underlying credibility to the idealist position, emanating from nineteenth century optimism, that good government will result from right reasoning and that a general increase in the diffusion of knowledge will provide the basis for the people to reason rightly with regard to their own governance, and right reason will logically lead to right actions.²

Both Rousseau and Kant argued that knowledgeable people supporting republican governments will realize that their best interests rest not in war but in peace. Bentham maintained that members of the community, if given the opportunity, form the best tribunal for adjudication of social and political controversies.³ This idealism that Carr calls the "doctrine of salvation by public opinion"⁴ was further elaborated by James Mill, Bentham's pupil, as he circumscribed the ultimate "infallibility" of public opinion for setting governmental direction:

"Every man possessed of reason is accustomed to weigh evidence and to be guided and determined by its preponderance. When various conclusions are, with the evidence, presented with equal care and with equal skill, there is a moral certainty, though some few may be misguided, that the greatest member will judge right, and that the greatest force of evidence, whatever it is, will produce the greatest impression."⁵

This is, of course, the argument on which democracy as a political institution is defended, but, further therein is the assumption that the majority of the people cannot be misguided. We know, of course, that objective evidence is rarely presented to the public with "equal care and equal skill" so that misdirection can be avoided. Yet, it is generally agreed, and one must conclude, that the better educated the people the greater the likelihood that right reason will prevail.

What then does right reason demand of education? What should the purpose be? Surely reason and rationality would suggest that we educate for the higher purposes of peace. Some will argue that economic efficiency fostered by *laissez-faire* capitalism should be a basic purpose of education, while others may maintain that the advancement of nationalism must be inculcated through education. Each of these purposes merit consideration and, while their

¹Albert Sorel, *L'Europe et la Revolution Francaise*, p. 474.

²E.H. Carr, pp. 24-25.

³Jeremy Bentham, *Works, the Public Opinion Tribunal*, ed. Bowring, viii, p. 561.

⁴E.H. Carr, p. 24.

⁵James Mill, *The Liberty of the Press*, pp. 22-23.

logical advancement appears *prima facie* to be unassailable, in actuality, upon closer examination, the issues become less clear.

PEACE AS THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

Peace may come the closest of all objectives to purity of purpose. Yet, peace ensures stability and the status quo and if inequities exist in society, perpetual peace may prevent their remediation. The dominant and advantaged group will seek to maintain peace to preserve legitimacy. Educational idealism would appear to move government in the desired direction for the achievement of peace. Education, though, will not always result in the achievement of some generally accepted and desirable end that government is supposed to obtain. Certain delusions may be experienced even by an educated people. After all it is reasonable to assume that educated people dislike war and will eschew destructive conflict. Buckle in his famous *History of Civilization*, first published in 1857, declared that love of peace and a dislike of war was "a cultivated taste peculiar to an intellectual people." He observed that international bellicosity came about not from some innate immorality of the people, but rather from a lack of knowledge and an underdeveloped intellect. "The fault" he said, "is in the head, not in the heart."⁶ In this same vein, Angell noted that war was simply a "failure of understanding."⁷

That an educated people is less bellicose may have something to do with whether the peace is domestic or international.⁸ The same rationality that leads to internal cohesion may not be, and frequently is not, the same that would lead to international accord. If the purpose of education is to mold and foster national unity, the achievement of external peace may be only coincidental and not a rational objective of education.

Education for peace may have even more discernible inherent limitations. Realism would suggest that diffusion of knowledge does not create passivity and accord either within or among nations, though it may be measurably less among nations. Niebuhr has noted that self-deception and hypocrisy is less obvious in individuals than in nations.⁹ In fact, the rationality that intellectual development breeds may in some circumstances lead to the conclusion that peace is in fact not moral at all. The educated may be less peaceable because they are aware of undesirable consequences of peace. It is no secret that the better educated are less content to suffer deprivation than the uneducated. If the educational objective is to achieve peace, then it must be recognized that peace always comes at a price and, as such, peace may simply preserve an unjust status quo.¹⁰ The desirability for peace emanates from a natural human tendency to achieve a state of harmony for mutual protection. In most cases this means that certain of the parties to peace will give up freedom or property to gain security. But in most instances the relinquishment of rights is uneven with some persons or peoples making much greater concessions to peace than others. Peace at Versailles was the classic international example, but in fact all international accords illustrate the point.

The privileged in society often retire behind the veil of peace to preserve their advantages. Those who are disadvantaged by the status quo must upset peace to gain their rightful status. Niebuhr has made the point: "Those who would eliminate the injustice are therefore always placed at a moral disadvantage of imperilling its peace."¹¹ Those who are privileged claim that it is immoral and dangerous to disturb the peace, while the disturbance of peace is precisely what the disadvantaged must do if they are to gain equality. Domestic peace may thus be the culprit in any unequal condition and may thereby become the intellectual justification for

⁶Buckle, *History of Civilization* (World Classics ed.) i, pp. 151-152.

⁷Norman Angell, *The Great Illusion, Foundations of International Policy*, p. 224.

⁸Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Scribners), pp. 83-84.

⁹*Id.*, p. 95.

¹⁰*Id.*, p. 129.

¹¹*Id.*, p. 129.

discrimination and malapportionment of wealth.

Thus, as the underprivileged become better educated they are more likely to upset the peace. It is no revelation that the privileged have always been suspicious of universal education because it may ultimately lead to devolution of their advantages. If a standard of rational morality leads to the conclusion that equality is morally superior to peace as a social good, and Niebuhr says that it is,¹² then to break the peace in the name of equality of opportunity is justified. Moreover, if peace is merely "an armistice within the existing disproportions of power,"¹³ and as such, serves as a defense for oppression, then peace becomes offensive to social justice and morality. Further, peace as an ultimate purpose for education may be questioned on the grounds that it can be oppressive of liberty. Because freedom and liberty are fundamental interests, it may be necessary in some circumstances to subordinate peace in order to achieve them. Justifications for breaking the peace in efforts to throw off the bonds of imperialism are well documented. Similarly domestic revolutions to change the internal social order and economic condition of a country have often been well justified. The social standards of the privileged classes are usually protected in various ways that legitimizes and justifies the social and economic strata of society. Obedience to these laws is required and departure therefrom may be characterized as a disrespect for the legitimacy of law and destructive to established peace. The quest for peace must be carefully examined to determine whether it maintains and advances liberty or whether it is merely a facade to retard the expansion of rights.

Thus, in the final analysis, the purpose of education cannot be safely couched within a broadly arching rhetoric of peace. To educate for peace must be carefully calibrated if it is to advance a moral state of society. The social arrangements that peace preserves may themselves be morally indefensible. One could even argue, depending on the circumstances, that a reasonable purpose of education should be to upset the peace. Huntington may be essentially correct when he maintains that:

"In general, the higher level of education of the unemployed, alienated, or otherwise dissatisfied person, the more extreme the destabilizing behavior which results. Alienated university graduates prepare revolutions; alienated technical or secondary school graduates plan coups; alienated primary school leavers engage in more frequent but less significant forms of unrest."

It is no accident that the peace was disturbed in Tiananmen Square in April of 1989, by students, for it was by means of the students' intellectual development that a budding revolution was fueled. The internal order and social stability that had been nurtured by Chinese authorities had failed to adequately inhibit the lively prospects of greater liberty and individual freedom. Education in China had succeeded in upsetting the peace. In the process of indoctrination to achieve internal peace and stability, in accord with communistic ideology, intellectual development had bred an aspiration for liberty that had not been contemplated by the totalitarian government.

CAPITALISM AS THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

As Eastern European command economies have collapsed there has been a pendulum swing to the opposite extreme. Developing states and republics have developed crash programs to move toward competitive privatized economic systems. As a result, it was strongly suggested at the Round Table that educational systems should teach, and indeed, inculcate the virtues of capitalism. While acknowledging the undeniable benefits of the capitalist system, one may legitimately, nevertheless, question the wholesale adoption of the competitive model as a basic purpose of education.

¹²Niebuhr says "It is important to insist, first of all, that equality is a higher social goal."

¹³*Id.*

Strong argument may be made for maintaining that the ultimate purpose of education should be efficiency as fostered by competition in a *laissez-faire* economy. "The capitalist spirit is as old as history" and experience¹⁴ suggests that nations ultimately rise or fall as a result of their economic condition.¹⁵ It goes without saying that an economically efficient society will be wealthier than an inefficient one.¹⁶ Few would disagree with Tawney who has said that, "The virtues of enterprise, diligence, and thrift are the indispensable foundation of any complex and vigorous society."¹⁷ The recent demise of communism as a political and economic ideology and the fall of the Soviet Union are striking historical examples of such failed policy. Inability to maintain economic growth has always been a familiar story in the rise and fall of nations and the decline of many great powers has been testimony to economic failure that is as potent, and perhaps, dramatic as military failure. Though economic interest and national interests have not always been the same, a rough parallel tends to exist that makes the two interdependent. This relationship, for example, had much to do with the rise of colonialism in the 19th Century and the decline of British European hegemony and the ascendancy of Bismarck. Commerce had been Britain's strength and it would prove to be its critical weakness. Power, thus, has much to do with the choice of economic policy. The maintenance and extension of overseas markets and the ability to broaden fields of investment has spelled the success or failure of developing and developed countries.¹⁸

Apostles of free trade have attached a certain morality to its exercise and some have even characterized the phenomenon of capitalism in terms of a high moral calling. Such led many to attach extraordinary, almost religious, credibility to the economic efficiency of free trade. Cobden, in 1870, saw benefits to capitalism that reached beyond wealth and prosperity to engender a kind of moral code. He said that free trade acted "on the moral world as the principle of gravitation in the universe--drawing men together, thrusting aside the antagonism of race, and creed, and language, and uniting us in the bonds of eternal peace."¹⁹ Such testimonials in the western world are too numerous to cite. The point here is simply that economic interests are an indisputable wellspring of international power and respect.

It has become an article of faith in the United States and in Britain that capitalism is the only road to economic strength and vitality. The present day advancement of GATT and NAFTA are strong testimonials to the religiosity with which we view the Adam Smith *laissez-faire* economics. To a lesser extent, far eastern and some European states follow this rule with some degree of leavening sanctioned by Frederick List adherents who argue for governmental intervention and protectionism in certain circumstances. Even assuming a measure of governmental activity to regulate markets, the basic importance of competitive capitalism is the accepted credo that must be followed if the economic condition and the state of civilization is to advance. The world has apparently adopted the philosophy advanced so clearly by J.S. Mill when he said, "Laissez-faire...should be the general rule; every departure

¹⁴R.H. Tawney, *Religion and The Rise of Capitalism* (London: Penquin Books, 1990), 1st edition published in 1926, p. 225.

¹⁵*Capitalism* may be defined as the tendency toward and acceptance of an economic system in which all or most of the means of production and distribution are privately owned and operated for profit and is generally characterized by a tendency toward concentration of wealth and income inequality.

¹⁶Richard A. Posner, *The Economics of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 205.

¹⁷Tawney, *op cit*.

¹⁸Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share, A Short History of British Imperialism 1850-1983* (London: Longman, 1984), p. 142.

¹⁹Richard Cobden, *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy*, 1870, ii, p. 135, in Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share, A Short History of British Imperialism, 1850-1983* (London: Longman, 1984), p. 6.

from it, unless required by some great good, a certain evil."²⁰ Moreover, education has been tied to this economic model. Indeed such considerations have gained such credence in recent years that we have seen the World Bank, the OECD, European Union and individual nations make much of the connection between the growth of knowledge and economic productivity. *The Economist* has stated that good economic policy promotes good policy and that there are indisputable links between better education and economic growth.

"...a competitive microeconomy furthers educational progress because it raises the economic returns from extra years of schooling; equally, better education makes the economy more competitive by making workers more productive."²¹

The strong linkage between the level of educational achievement and productivity growth is well established; "Countries with a high level of education tend to absorb new technology more quickly and so grow more rapidly."²²

Without question education is related to economic growth and the better educated the people the higher will be their standard of living. To acknowledge this fact, however, does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that the purpose of education should be to educate to a particular economic theory or economic creed. Nor does it mean that the purpose of education should be to teach and inculcate a doctrine of *laissez-faire* capitalism and that the school, by word and act, should affirmatively instill in each child the dogma of competition.

Schools, it is thought, should have a more basic purpose. Economic efficiency is not after all a principle of human understanding that is on a level with the more basic human rights and interests. To the contrary, the notion of *laissez-faire* economics may be seen to be deleterious to the expansion of liberty, equality and commonality of interests of the individual. One may argue that a state or a nation cannot reject the competitive economic model without correspondingly rejecting the idea that "enterprise, diligence and thrift" are desirable human characteristics. Yet, it is one thing to teach that "thrift" and the careful use of resources are preferable to profligacy and it is quite another to inculcate in youth that the *laissez-faire* competitive model should drive all human motivations. Pareto optimality and supply and demand curves can never determine what is good or bad, moral or immoral, ethical or unethical. To assume so, is to risk the fostering a society with a limited value perspective; a society without a sustaining eleemosynary spirit and possibly devoid of the values of sacrifice and charity. In such circumstances the basic and inherent need for social equality may go unheeded and unappreciated.

The marketplace itself tends to generate inequality. According to Kuttner, "By market standards, inequality is not a regrettable necessity, but a virtue."²³ To inculcate the ideals of capitalism may be only a short step from governmental reinforcement of man's primitive and uncivilized tendencies toward self-interest, greed and avarice. If it is true, as H.L.A. Hart says that in nature "human altruism is limited in range and intermittent"²⁴ or as Samuel Alexander once said, "man's humanity to man is a very thin veneer," then the purpose of education in

²⁰J.S. Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, II, Book V, Ch. xi.

²¹*The Economist*, "The Path to Growth," July 13th - 19th, 1991, Vol. 320, No. 7715, p. 77.

²²*The Economist*, "Economic Focus," September 12th- 18th 1992, Vol. 324, No. 7776, p. 75.

²³Robert Kuttner, *The Economic Illusion, False Choices Between Prosperity and Social Justice* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), p. 10.

²⁴H.L.A. Hart, *The Concept of Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), pp. 191-192.

achievement of a higher social order surely requires some effective harnessing of man and society's "selfish" gene.²⁵

The competitive urges of mankind are such that it is natural that some will ultimately gain economic dominance over others. Bentham concluded that the internal "labyrinth" underlying human motivation was "the principle of self-preference."²⁶ With a similar view, Helvetius noted that if man searches all the recesses of his soul he will perceive that "his virtues and vices are wholly owing to different modification of personal interest."²⁷ Competition, though, has a dual character. Kant saw the innate human condition of a competitive urge, personal preference and self-interest as not of reason but of reason's opposite, an "asocial sociability" that leads men to join together in civil societies, to wage war, to encourage arts and sciences and, the desire to rule and dominate, the phenomenon that perversely becomes the wellspring of social creativity "ensuring the realization of potentials 'unborn in an Arcadian shepherd's life.'"²⁸ Accordingly, then, self-interest motivates persons to improve their condition, but with the costly side-effect of creating inequities, inequalities and commonly the repression of liberty.

The dilemma for the planners of education policy is to determine to what extent the public education system should be designed to reinforce mankind's competitive urges that may be simultaneously both constructive and destructive to the social condition. To what extent should schools instill in the individual student the importance of self-interest as a way of advancing both the individual and society's economic condition.

It would seem then that the purpose of education should not be to fuel man's natural "asocial" tendencies to competition and self-interest, but rather should attempt to teach students the salutary effects of economic efficiency within the context of the more basic human interests of liberty, equality and commonality of social interests. The purpose of education may well be perceived as a mitigating force to harness extremes of self-interest and to encourage common accord, economic stability and harmony in the social condition. It would further seem that a purpose of education should not be to exacerbate man's discord, but rather to mitigate self-interest and to teach the "necessity of mutual forbearance and compromise which is the base of both legal and moral obligation."²⁹ Education should not dampen the ardor of the competitive urge, but rather have the purpose of channeling and ordering the capitalist spirit to raise the standard of living while reducing the more deleterious aspects of competition.

NATIONALISM AS THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

One of the most commonly enunciated purposes of education is the fostering of a spirit of nationalism. Sir Christopher Ball, in his presentation to the Round Table, observed that a frequently given reason for maintaining an educational system is for socialization which has been widely interpreted in both the east and the west as an aspect of advancement of nationalism. He notes that "some eastern countries redefine socialization as 'national unity' and consider its achievement as the first function of education."³⁰ Sir Christopher further

²⁵See T.H. Marshall as quoted in Robert Kuttner, *The Economic Illusion, False Choices Between Prosperity and Social Justice* (Philadelphia: the University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), p. 15.

²⁶Jeremy Bentham, *Works*, Vol. XI, p. 80.

²⁷Helvetius, *De L'Esprit, or Essays on the Mind*, Essay II, Chapter 2.

²⁸William Galston, *Kant and the Problem of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), pp. 205-268; See also: Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Books, 1992), pp. 58-59.

²⁹H.L.A. Hart, *op cit.*, p. 191.

³⁰Sir Christopher Ball, *Making Sense of the Reform and Restructuring of Education*, Oxford Round Table; See: Ball this issue.

observes that in the west, too, nationalism and the promotion of a common culture are often identified as a purpose of education.³¹ Regardless of hemisphere, much governmental action is reflective of a nationalistic purpose of education. For example, Victor Gaisyonok, Minister of Education of Belarus and a member of the Round Table, noted with special emphasis that an overriding interest of the Belarus government was to reverse the influence of a Russian imposed educational system that had sought to obliterate the Belarus culture, language and nationalism. Gaisyonok said that:

"Within the past four decades the national school (of Belarus) has been completely destroyed. Despite the fact the Byelorussians account for 80 per cent of the republic's population, the instruction in 80 per cent of all schools was in Russian...In the 1930s, a considerable part of the nation's intelligentsia was accused of nationalism by the Stalin regime and wiped out. Following that, science developed in Belarus primarily as an item of Russian export and culture would be identified as the culture of the Russian people."³²

The conflict over nationalism is not confined to the former Soviet Republics. In his Pulitzer Prize winning trilogy on American education, Cremin classifies the entire era from 1783 to 1876, as *The National Experience*.³³ "Governments have a considerable domestic interest in mobilizing nationalism among its citizens"³⁴ and education has served as an essential tool to forge a feeling of national pride. States have used the powerful machinery of mass education "to spread the image and heritage of the 'nation' and to attach the citizenry to it. In order to do this traditions are invented, attaching the country and flag, patriotic songs are written and sung, flags are flown and stirring poems and stories are passed on about heroes and their deeds."³⁵

We see daily evidences of a nation's seeking to enhance a nationalistic spirit by means of various devices. Today, France is in the throes of political turmoil over the purity of their nationalism as affected by religion, language and multiculturalism. In November, 1993, the French government deported a Turkish Muslim who had supported two Moroccan school girls suspended from school for wearing Muslim head scarves.³⁶ Such acts, it was conjectured, would presumably spread unchecked and create divisive influences in the nationalist spirit of France. A government spokesman pointed out that such actions were justified because "Now, for the first time, we have people born in France who are not French."³⁷ Prime Minister Edouard Balladur has acted to limit immigration in order to reduce the "threat," perceived or otherwise, of immigrants further eroding the purity of the French culture.

Similar concerns have arisen in the United States where some have maintained that multicultural and multiethnic influences will materially alter the internal structure of the United States as it is known today. Kaplan observes that "it is not clear that the United States will survive the next century in exactly its present form. Because America is a multiethnic

³¹*Id.*

³²V.A. Gaisyonok, Minister of Education, Oxford Round Table; See: Gaisyonok this book.

³³Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education, the National Experience, 1783-1876* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1980).

³⁴E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 91.

³⁵E.J. Hobsbawm, "Mass-producing Tradition: Europe 1870-1914" in E.J. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), Ch. 7.

³⁶Alan Riding, "France, Reversing Course, Fights Immigrants' Refusal to be French," *The New York Times*, December 5, 1993.

³⁷*Id.*, Commentary by Jean-Claude Barreau a representative of the French Government.

society, a nation-state has always been more fragile here than it is in more homogenous societies like Germany and Japan."³⁸

The homogeneity of the population and nationalistic foundations of Japan are obviously well established, but the situation in Germany is more difficult to determine. After World War II, the East Germans, surrounded by a wall and dominated by communism, dreamed of nationalism in the face of Soviet domination. The Federal Republic of Germany³⁹ saw nationalism as desirable, but untenable, so long as reunification was out of reach.⁴⁰ In East Germany, as throughout eastern Europe, there transpired "the very strange phenomenon of a mass shift in the loyalty of intellectuals from communism to nationalism."⁴¹ Then, with the surprise reality of reunification, the German people have moved to bear the economic and social consequences of a re-established national union. Today, through re-education and economic sacrifice, a new era of nationalism is emerging. It goes without saying that the thrust of neonationalism is probably as potent today as it has ever been. The disaster of the Balkans and the continuous strife in parts of Africa, India and in the Middle East are all striking evidence of the stridency of an ill-conceived nationalism.

Rousseau believed that nationalism was among man's most noble impulses. To sacrifice in common and to bear the "yoke of public duty"⁴² for one's country was man's highest calling. To Rousseau, this was the "reign of virtue" that brought the individual particular wills into conformity with the general will.⁴³ Patriotic loyalty that binds citizens together into a common cause is the only vehicle that transcends the narrow self-interest that appeals to man's more ignoble tendencies. To Rousseau, the most important justification for education is to instill a sense of patriotism. Such patriotism is the essence of virtue: "Do we wish men to be virtuous? Then let us begin by making them love their country,..."

Nationalism found favor with other philosophers as well, one of the foremost being Hegel. For Hegel all duties and ethical standards among men were premised on and formed by the conditions of a "fatherland." "Duty," Hegel said, "requires that men should defend not just whatever country they choose but their own particular fatherland. This requirement is the criterion by which the ethical activity of all individuals is measured."⁴⁴ Yet experience has taught that nationalism if exercised inappropriately may be a device to subject the citizenry to oppression and other countries to aggression. The Nazi seizure of power in 1933 and the subsequent convulsion of world war is no mean example of nationalism at its lowest denominator.

With full cognizance of the enormities of barbarism attributable to virulent nationalism, Dunn has observed that "Nationalism is the starkest political shame of the twentieth century, the deepest, most intractable and, yet, most unanticipated blot on the political history of the world since the 1900s."⁴⁵ The ethical accord envisaged in Rousseau's theoretical construct has in Dunn's view become a blatant vehicle of immorality in the light of practical realism.

From the mid-1800s onward, nations have been formed and reformed along geographical boundaries, ethnic lines, cultural history, language and religious beliefs; nations that have no

³⁸Robert D. Kaplan, "The Coming Anarchy," *The Atlantic Monthly*, February 1994, p. 76.

³⁹Anne-Marie Le Gloanneec, "On German Identity," *Daedalus*, Vol. 123, No. 1, Winter, 1994, p. 136.

⁴⁰*Id.*

⁴¹John Kifner, *The New York Times*, Section 4, Sunday, April 10, 1994.

⁴²Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *A Discourse on Political Economy*; See N.J.H. Dent *A Rousseau Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), p. 94.

⁴³*Id.*

⁴⁴G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction* (1830 draft) (quoted from the edition translated by H.B. Nisbet, Cambridge, 1975, p. 80).

⁴⁵John Dunn, *Western Political Theory in the Face of the Future* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, Canto edition, 1993), p. 57.

particular size but are founded on some agreeable scale of community. All those nations, large or small, that hang together, have some ideological foundation that sustains them. Dunn has said, "There is no state today so ramshackled that it cannot muster an ideological proclamation of why its citizens should trust it"⁴⁶ and cast their lives and fortunes to support it.

Leaders who form and sustain nations realize that they must influence and fashion the individual wills in such a way as to strengthen the general will. If such connections are weak, the leadership seeks to embellish and strengthen the connections with various devices, usually by identifying a common enemy and solidifying opinion around self-protection. The Cold War is an example of recent vintage while the Germany of the 1930s is of vivid recent memory, as is the jigsaw puzzle of nation-states that were formed after World War I.⁴⁷ The ideologies, though, that are most prevalent in nationhood usually have to do with language, culture and religion, ethnic or racial make-up. "In nationalistic doctrine, language, race, culture and sometimes even religion are different aspects of the same primordial entity, the nation."⁴⁸ Language is the linchpin that holds a nation together. Language makes the possibility of nationhood viable. Kedourie has suggested that nationalists, either explicitly or implicitly, adopt the historian Albert Sorel's motto, "I speak, therefore I am."⁴⁹ Fichte himself recognized that when a people are forced to give up their "language, and coalesce with its conquerors, in order that there may be unity and internal peace," then a new nation may be formed and the former nation is condemned to oblivion. Thus, to form and hold people together in a nation requires a system of education that advances a commonality based on language, culture, heritage with which identity is perceived. Children educated in common with a sense of patriotism emanating from these and other nationalistic devices and symbols tend to shape and mold the nation.

In the final analysis, nationalism cannot be characterized as either good, as in Rousseau's patriotic idealism, or bad, as in Dunn's pragmatic realism. Rather, nationalism's inherent limitations must be recognized. The most important limitation is that nationalism itself has no inherent virtue. As Niebuhr has observed in his important statement on realism and nations, "The selfishness of nations is proverbial."⁵⁰ "Nations cannot be trusted beyond their own interest" was a dictum advanced by George Washington.⁵¹ History suggests that there is probably an inherent contradiction between nationalism and virtue. Yet, this is not to say that a nation must be without virtue, but rather realism suggests that the chances of the individual being moral are far greater than for a nation to be moral.⁵² Nationalism, however, is not *per se* immoral or unvirtuous, rather closer examination suggests that nationalism has at least two faces, liberal nationalism and illiberal nationalism. Liberal nationalism forms a "correspondence" between a culture and a state and promotes democracy. On the other hand, illiberal nationalism is authoritarian and founded on religious and genetic definition.⁵³

In this light, then, the purpose of education cannot be to simply advance a nationalistic purpose. For the purpose of education to be to teach undefined nationalism in a society of collective immorality and intolerance, as in the Balkans today, is untenable from any rational

⁴⁶Dunn, *op cit.*, p. 64.

⁴⁷See article in this book by Naima Balic, "Perspectives on the Future Educational System in the Republic of Croatia."

⁴⁸Kedourie, *op cit.*, p. 67.

⁴⁹A. Sorel, *L'Europe et la revolution Francaise*, Vol. I, Paris, 1885, p. 429; See also Kedourie, *op cit.* p. 62.

⁵⁰Niebuhr, *op cit.*, p. 84.

⁵¹*Id.*

⁵²*Id.*

⁵³Michael Lind, "In Defense of Liberal Nationalism," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 73, No. 3, May/June, 1994, p. 94.

perspective. Education then should not be the blind tool of nationalism, but should have more basic and profound moral and ethical foundations.

CONCLUSION

As the foregoing discussion indicates, there are few obvious answers to the question of "what is the purpose of education?." Even though one would appear to be safe in concluding that peace and nationalism would be relatively unimpeachable candidates as primary purposes, closer examination reveals less certainty. As noted above, peace can be used by the advantaged to preserve a position of privilege. The prescriptive moral force that accompanies the ideal of peace may possibly make it a formidable ally of oppression and an obstacle that the oppressed must overcome if they are to unshackle themselves and obtain their rightful freedoms and liberties.

Similarly, the desirability of thrift and efficiency in both the individual and government cannot be doubted, and are most worthwhile and, indeed essential, but, the education of youth should discern between constructive efficiency and avariciousness bred by a predatory self-interest. If we are to believe Hobbes, Hegel, Locke and Adam Smith, and most persons would give substantial weight to their opinions, we must conclude that by sentiment, individuals are primarily self-interested, self-actualizing and egotistical in their social and economic pursuits. This is the source of the timeless conflict. To understand this as pre-ordained by the competition of the "invisible hand" and to accept it is reality, but to blindly do its bidding by reinforcing its undesirable propensities through education is the antithesis of intellectual development. As Angell has said:

"The obstacle in our path...is not in the moral sphere, but in the intellectual...It is not because men are illdisposed that they cannot be educated into a world social consciousness. It is because they...are beings of conservative temper and limited intelligence."⁵⁴

In Angell's view, the natural tendency of man toward pride, ambition, and greed are exacerbated by "muddled thinking."⁵⁵ A positive intellectual development should serve to mitigate these more primitive instincts, not strengthen them. For education to reinforce such tendencies is to further cultivate propensities that are undesirable in the first place. What good does it do society to add impetus by education to an innate and strong willed aggressive egotism?

Similarly, the purpose of education cannot be to advance insensibly nationalism without examining its underlying motivations and conceptualizations in light of more basic philosophical considerations such as virtue, morality, liberty and equality. On balance, nationalism may be considered a negative social force even though a realist would conclude that it is inevitable. The sorry state of affairs in Serbia today is only one recent example. With regard to the Serbian situation, Vladimir Goati provides the best characterization of the moral deficiencies of nationalism run amuck. He says that in Serbia "There are no liberals... There are only nationalists." "We are," he observes, "victims of a long-lasting nationalistic idea, impossible to get rid of. It is the true state of mind of the people of Serbia." The nationalism of Serbia is intertwined with religious and ethnic bigotry making it the most virulent and deadly type. The educational systems of Croatia and Serbia sharpen the intensity of this narrow nationalism instead of mitigating its force. The solution cannot be to pursue an educational policy of "narrow nationalism," but rather, education must be designed to ameliorate the intolerance and to advance the cause of rationality and forbearance.⁵⁶

⁵⁴Sir Norman Angell, *Neutrality and Collective Security* (Harris Foundation Lectures: Chicago, 1936) pp. 8, 18.

⁵⁵*Id.*

⁵⁶Kedourie, *op cit.*, p. 62.

What then should be the "purpose of education?" First and foremost, it should be understood that education is a fundamental right and knowledge development is the prerequisite to the desirable state of civilization. The enlightenment and expansion of knowledge should be the rule, and without exception, the purpose of education should be in opposition to "contracting the spectrum of knowledge." The narrow channeling of thought, and the central control of educational objectives suggest conditions where expansiveness of learning may be restricted and, therefore, rational thought production and the scientific method should be vigorously protected.

Education should be seen as the primary means to prepare youth for a life of contribution and sacrifice in building a democratic government based upon virtue. Education should have as a major objective the breaking down of barriers of caste and class and to erase intergenerational privilege and personal aggrandizement. The allure of education to the individual should not be for preferred economic and social status and the exploitation of the less advantaged, but rather should inculcate the importance of merit in personal achievements and sacrifice in public pursuits. With the knowledge and competence obtained by the individual through acquisition of knowledge, there should be fostered a strong corollary sense of social obligation. "The school should be permeated, not with the competitive, but with the cooperative, spirit. It should strive to serve society as a whole, to promote the most inclusive interests."⁵⁷ At the same time, education must promote the value of full development of individual talents and provide the climate and incentives for striving towards personal betterment through pursuit of knowledge. In this light, the educational system should be designed to accommodate the varying educational needs of each individual and to advance a collective aspiration for expansion of knowledge.

Moreover, the purpose of education should not be to espouse moral platitudes that bear little relationship to the condition of civil reality. Disengaged enunciations of "virtues" that are daily contradicted by deed and practice are not only futile, but are hypocritical and dishonest. An excellent example of such duplicity is found in the United States where a former U.S. Secretary of Education, William Bennett, recently published a book⁵⁸ on "virtues," while at the same time, fostering a disregard of civil rights laws, a reduction of funding for children in common schools, and economic and social segregation through funding of privileged children attending private schools.

Possibly, the most important foundational purpose of education should be to inculcate in youth the liberality of tolerance; tolerance for differences in race, religion, culture, language, nationality and ethnic origin. The purpose of education should be to define and teach the difference between peace for oppression and peace for liberty, the difference between competitive self-interested capitalism and a *laissez-faire* spirit that provides for a "harmony of interests" for the general uplifting of society. Education should promote patriotism and a broad based and "liberal"⁵⁹ nationalism. The brand of patriotism that is founded on intolerance, a "narrow" or "illiberal" nationalism, should be singled out by the educational process as being undesirable and in the best interest of neither the individual nor the nation. Historical proofs should be constantly advanced which inveigh against bigotry, genetic preference and religious intolerance in the name of nationalism.

The ideal of interdependence and commonality should be advanced by the education system both within and among nations and states and that in both realms education should teach the value of the democratic ideal. Finally, the purpose of education should be to arm humankind in its struggle against the natural primitive instincts of the Hobbesian state of nature and to glorify and honor the common interest and the common weal.

⁵⁷George S. Counts, *The Social Foundations of Education* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 542.

⁵⁸William J. Bennett, *The Book of Virtues: A Treasury of Moral Stories* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993).

⁵⁹Lind, *op cit*.