

Enlightenment through Liberal Education: Values and Attitudes

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Abstract

Contemporary education, with its heavy focus on content, risks becoming overeager, losing sight of its true purpose: fostering certain values and attitudes in students. Unlike computers, humans aren't just repositories of information; education should evolve them into thoughtful individuals. This text highlights the importance of restating the objectives of a liberal education in contemporary terms to address the alienation and fragmentation in today's technologically advanced society. Fifteen aspects of a liberal outlook are discussed, emphasizing practical communication, resisting injustice, avoiding superficial judgments, and fostering genuine understanding and human connection. These points underline the necessity of logical thinking, exploring motives, and integrating scientific humanism in social conflict resolution. The aim is to maintain a proper relationship between individuals in our complex urban civilization, ensuring education nurtures human relationships amidst social atomization. Research questions include: How can liberal education adapt to modern technological societies? What is the core valuing a liberal education should instil? The answers suggest that education must go beyond content delivery to instil critical thinking, empathy, and a balanced view of human relations, adapting to the complexities of modern life while maintaining its foundational ideals.

Keywords: Liberal Education, Values, curriculum, civilization, Greek city.

Modern education, by weight of its focus on content, is overeager. This is not saying anything about the worth of what virile Chichester produces in its curriculum more liberal. It is the curriculum that really should be at the heart of our work. However, men are not the computer memory banks (or whatever) that store education. This is the historical drama between which students and teachers have always been caught. Here again, the ideal expressed the conviction that a liberal education should lead to something of which (or from till exposure) - certain values and attitudes among those who received its content. They adjust those values and attitudes as they work, but the soul of trying to evolve into a real human remains. It is indeed useful to restate some of the objectives and aims of a liberal education in contemporary language so that old wine can be poured into new bottles. These new bottles are the complex forms, structures, processes and social contacts of our urban civilization a civilization in which it becomes increasingly more difficult to fashion and maintain a proper relationship between man and man. The social milieus of a technologically advanced civilization produce new forms

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of alienation and fragmentation within the social group. These new forms of social unrelatedness and atomization make the expression of a liberal outlook in human relations far more difficult than it might have been in the Greek city state or the later city states of the Renaissance. I should therefore like to spell out below fifteen aspects of the liberal outlook in values and attitudes which, I believe, are proper reminders and cautions as to how to establish the proper relationship of man to man in the complex group life of the present. The paradigms below, then, constitutes one man's opinion but, I hope, a relevant and viable one.

1. Learning to shun communication about human affairs, and that for a specific solution of a social problem, that is always restricted to a high level of abstraction or generality. 'An abstract discussion, in other words, should eventually be tied to a familiar one and specified context'. (Dewey 1938) The inclination to deal with personal and social difficulties in high levels of abstraction is usually not difficult at all to detect. We display it either when we do not see at all what sort of action is called for by a given ideal in a given situation, with respect to a given difficulty, or when we believe that the action (though seemingly clear to others) is unclear to us.

2. Learning to avoid the tendency to become ruthless to among justified injustice and to support it with unprofessional silence that hardens our spiritual arteries. We can then invent reasons.

3. Learning to curb the tendency to reduce one's judgment to available and convenient mantras or mythologies.

4. Checking the habit of determining facts by hearsay. There are many forms of this habit: framing our judgment from gossip, relying on cronies to ascertain what is going on, setting up our own brand of informers and cheerfully calling them "consultant", "reliable judges", etc. Trying to get at the facts of personal and social conflict will probably be the last social virtue men will acquire. We smile gently when we read that mediaeval scholastics would argue passionately over the number of teeth in a horse's mouth but never open the horse's mouth to count his teeth. We moderns do things so much better. We now ask the horse's owner.

5. Reducing the tendency to ignore blithely the force of logic in situations of personal or social conflict. An example of this is to accuse A on Monday of always avoiding B and then to insist on Tuesday that A always quarrels with B.

6. "Spurning the use of what has been called fiat-creation and magic- thinking. This is the habit of insisting that something is so because, if it was, it would meet one's needs. Examples: You appoint a retired movie actor as superintendent of schools and then, even though he has not devoted time to problems of education, you declare that he is an outstanding educational philosopher and leader." Unfortunately, most people will go along with fiat- creation and

magic- thinking because they judge others by their titles and public images, by their ranks and the positions they occupy.

7. “Resisting the tendency first, to accept negative judgments about people you do not know and then, second, either to avoid them for that reason or to persuade yourself to see them in the terms you have accepted”. (Arendt 1958)

8. “Trying not to be prone to look for reasons for getting your way or for considering yourself as right in the clash of ideas. Henshaw Ward has called this “throbbing”. A liberal education should weaken this tendency. (Ward 1964)

9. “Escaping a quality of arbitrariness in dealing with other people.” Such arbitrariness shows up when we do not ask others what the motives for their conduct were but, instead, prefer to judge that conduct usually unfavourably. If we do explore motives, we tend to judge motives rather than to try to understand them.

10. A quality of the arbitrariness of one’s meeting with people, which the speaker escapes is that arbitrariness shows itself when we don’t ask people what their motives were. Instead, we are often more comfortable judging people and events disfavouredly. If we do ask about motives, we often fall short of trying to understand the motives.

11. The man escapes the hiring of social thoughtlessness when we are thinking long enough and well enough about the other fellow when he is attacking someone. We forget to ask about the motives of the person who was attacking and to assume he was good or that he was attacking him for some reason. Social thoughtlessness is handy when we will not listen to both sides, or when it will handle to bring them both together for peace and quiet.

12. Refraining from political ways when dealing with matters concerning a group coming together or an organization. People undoubtedly have two favourite ways of working together on a project. One way is too great a study committee figure. The other way is to manage to set up something that will save you know which we wanted to know in the first place ours. That, in short, is the result of the method and procedure.

13. Avoiding the human tendency to define social maturity in a limited fashion. (Habermas 1984) Some people settle issues as lawyers do, by precedent. Others settle issues by majority opinion, whether that opinion is well informed. Still others settle issues, using what has come to be called the scientific method and the scientific attitude, and some demand only a human, treatment of issues, regardless of their rationality, concern for fact, or the consequences of the actions taken. The most mature way of dealing with social conflict is through a combination of these last two approaches. This combination has been called scientific humanism and the latter should certainly be an outcome of a liberal education.

14. Learning to reduce in human relationships what existentialists call the "absurd." (Camus 1942) These are the socially approved incongruities one's group refuses to question. Examples of the absurd are the following:(a) appointing the happy-go-lucky and popular owner of the town's filling station as head of the Municipal Committee for Public Education and Culture, even though the latter's reading has been confined to Captain Billy's Whiz Bang; (b) inviting the author of a successful novel on the Spanish Civil war to speak on that subject, when your institution may have a leading authority in the field; (c) Insisting that a student lacks the ability to learn, even though this IQ exceeds that of the professor; and (d) flunking a student in freshman composition, who has just won a National Short Story Contest.

15. Learning not to resort to a formula in responding to people. A typical example of such an unpardonable mode of response is our use of such phrases as "he's a square," or "he's the Beatnik type." Or again, in another context, when we disagree with a person, to say to him, or of him, "Dont take him seriously, he is just being "radical" only to be followed by an oracular comment of the same nature: "The man is just plain neurotic." Or when we viciously object, politically, to the firm, wary, conscientious behaviour of a governmental or other official, to castigate him by saying: "Oh forget him! he is not unusually sneaky, he is just a typical administrator. If that is your behaviour and you are doing it after a college education, it follows that you have not been educated.

The above items are only a few from a catalogue of what might be said to constitute some of the attitudes and values organically inbred in a liberal education. Others of both sorts—and many more important ones of all sorts—could probably be compiled by any reader. Those which I have presented have to do, centrally, only with calling attention to what I conceive to be that portion of a liberal educational outlook from which one might possibly take some heart in conducting human relationships within psychologically atomized scopes. They are a part of the human brotherhood goals of a liberal outlook. They take precedence in my thinking only because attention must, as the warning goes, "First matters first."

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