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**LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ
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Return to Basics as a Conservative
Educational Slogan

Robert D. Philip

A Thesis
in
The Department
of
Education

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University,
Montréal, Québec, Canada

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Robert D. Philip, 1986

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ABSTRACT

Return to Basics as a Conservative Educational Slogan

Robert D. Philip

The question of using the "return to basics" slogan as a legitimate tool for education reform in North America is examined in this Thesis. The issue is evaluated from within the context of educational conservatism and with the understanding that, as an educational slogan, "return to basics" must have a specific identity before it can be utilized in any meaningful way.

Educational conservative ideology is sub-divided into fundamentalism, intellectualism and traditionalism (conservatism), and examples of each are investigated in order to establish what "return to basics" means for each. From the information developed it is determined that, although all educational conservative ideology is identified in some common understanding of the "basics" slogan, each possesses a distinctness which allows for a somewhat broad interpretation of what the slogan implies.

In the final analysis the slogan, by itself, means nothing. To have educational value it must be understood in the context of a particular educational philosophy.

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CHAPTER I

"RETURN TO BASICS" AS A SLOGAN

Criticism of current North American education is at a fever pitch, and a major voice in this criticism centers on the call for a "return to basics". This movement favouring educational reform, though gaining in volume, is not new. In fact ever since it was determined by some that the progressivist crusade inspired by John Dewey was not doing an adequate job, educationists such as Hilda Neatby, were advocating a return to a more authoritative structure, noting, as Neatby does, that "discipline is not an adult conspiracy against children; it is a responsibility adults owe to children."¹

Neatby's attitude was, in the early 1950's, in direct contrast to Dewey's concept of progressive education; which, some twenty years later evolved, albeit not surprisingly, to the no-school-at-all approach as taken by Ivan Illich.² To some it appeared education was headed towards anarchy, and the time was ripe to initiate reform.

¹Hilda Neatby, So Little for the Mind (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Company Ltd. 1953) p.320.

²See Reginald D. Archambault, ed., John Dewey on Education (New York: The Modern Library, 1964), and Ivan Illich, Deschooling Society (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

As child-centred education gained prominence in North America, calls for a more conservative authoritarian schooling emerged. Just as the student unrest of the sixties exposed flaws in traditional schooling, the child-centered approach denied children, according to critics, the opportunity to learn by failing to ensure that adequate material was provided and that students were disciplined enough to acquire it. As Eugene Arden points out, "the libefated curriculum was soon extinguished by its own measured failings and the higher demands of the students of the seventies."³ The "measured failures" came from America's realization that the post war emergence of other industrialized nations threatened American prosperity and security, and that the tool behind development was quality education.

In general, the criticism of progressive or child-centered educational values concludes that educational reform should be based on a return to the teaching of fundamentals lost when traditionalism was pushed aside by the wave of laissez-faire advocates. Even the progressive-minded Eisner states that, "we must return to what is truly fundamental in schooling, namely teaching children to read, write and compute."⁴

³Eugene Arden "A Hard New Look at the Old Core Curriculum", Journal of General Education 31 (1979-80) 144.

⁴Elliott Eisner, "Humanistic Trends and the Curriculum Field", Journal of Curriculum Studies 10 (1978) 197.

However, unlike Bereiter who disassociates education from training, leaving only the latter to schooling, Eisner acknowledges that schooling must go beyond the three R's and implement qualitative methods of inquiry that create relationships to the whole, joining together what, in the curriculum, is now fragmented and unrelated. His approach is epistemological in that it combines scientific inquiry with experiences inherent in the classroom, and methodological in a way that presents a more naturalistic approach to study.⁵

The most recent criticism of the failure of North American education and the subsequent need for educational reform comes from philosopher Mortimer Adler and the twenty-two members of his Paideia Group. The reaction of this assemblage is to education's failure to live up to our democratic promise to provide equal educational opportunity for all citizens, the failure of which is threatening the very survival of the social system. The question of educational reform and the direction it should take are the features of Adler's Paideia Proposal, which is discussed in detail later on.

I include myself among those who believe the need for educational reform is valid; however, I caution against

⁵Ibid., p.198.

jumping on the "return to basics" bandwagon without first establishing its meaning and import.

One of the ways of doing this is to treat the phrase "return to basics" as a slogan in the sense that such writers as Komisar and McClellan, and Scheffler use the term; and to establish from this inquiry ways in which the meaning of an educational slogan may be determined. More importantly, it will allow us to discuss, in later chapters, the philosophical basis of the conservative educational ideologies within the framework established by the slogan in order that we might investigate the reform movement in question, in practical terms. The point, in general, is that before jumping on the bandwagon we should see what we are getting into and make some judgement about the adequacy of proposed "return to basics" reforms to solve current educational problems.

The Use of Educational Slogans.

In Komisar and McClellan's analysis slogans have two uses, which they term as ceremonial and non-ceremonial.⁶ The ceremonial function is to arouse enthusiasm and attract attention. The non-ceremonial, on the other hand, goes beyond simple arousal, aiming to guide or direct action. To

⁶ John Martin Rich, ed., Readings in the Philosophy of Education, 2^d ed., (Helmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., (1972) p. 275-76.

achieve this function, slogans require an elaborated set of attached ideas. In other words, it may be acceptable to use the "return to basics" slogan to attract attention to a perceived need for educational reform; however, to go further, to determine what course of action the reform should follow, requires that the slogan have a definite meaning or interpretation.

We can accept the ceremonial definition in the case of the "return to basics" movement if we say the task of the slogan is simply to attract public attention to the need for educational reform through appeal to that sense which popularizes the merit of doing things the "old fashioned way". However, as Komisar and McClellan indicate, the

educationally important use of slogans are not purely ceremonial uses. In fact educational slogans always contain a prescriptive element aimed at the achievement of certain results through action.⁷

Scheffler accepts that educational slogans may be ceremonial in the sense that slogans may be used to attract attention to the cause or movement at issue. However, he qualifies his position in defining educational slogans as "rallying symbols of ideas and attitudes of movements (that) with the passage of time are taken more and more as literal

⁷Othanel Smith and Robert H. Ennis, eds., Language and Concepts in Education (Chicago, Illinois: Rand McNally Co., 1961), p.196.

doctrines or arguments, rather than merely as rallying symbols."⁸

It seems imprudent to limit our analysis to ceremonial uses of the "return to basics" slogan in this case because we discern from the body of beliefs evident that the movement intends to be remedial and directive and not simply critical. Therefore, we cannot dismiss this slogan as a public awareness gesture intended merely to gather support for a vague notion of reform. Rather, we must deal with the "return to basics" slogan as one which implies the need for educational reform and which prescribes as the remedy a return to something called "basics" as the dialectic for effecting that change.

What we have is a slogan which, as Komisar and McClellan state, is "systematically ambiguous", but which gains meaning through the acquisition of our interpretations of what the slogan's pedagogical application might be. However, in this sense the slogan may be relatively useless for the purpose of guiding practice; because even though, in this instance, the slogan may logically tie educational reform to the term "basics", it is still open to different interpretations of what the term itself means. It is, to recapitulate, by reference to the slogan's interpretation

⁸ Israel Scheffler, The Language of Education (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher, 1966), p.36.

that we discuss what the slogan portends for education. Let us see how this is to be done.

Educational Slogans

At this point it is necessary to differentiate between the "return to basics" movement and the slogan itself. Although movements are difficult to identify, it is possible to establish meaning for an educational slogan. To do so the literal assertion and the practical remedy the slogan suggests must be evaluated separately to establish an educational meaning; because as Scheffler notes, "no official discipline or leadership preserves the initial doctrines or some elaboration of them, seeing to it that they take precedence over popular versions at critical junctures, as is familiar in religion and politics."⁹ As Scheffler implies, we can accept the practical purport of the "basics" slogan as meaning the need for educational reform via a return to basic traditional schooling. However, we cannot determine the meaning in any substantial sense without first knowing exactly what the term "basics" represents. In other words, the relevance of the message contained within the slogan cannot be identified without reference to the context from which it was derived.¹⁰

⁹ibid., p.37.

¹⁰ibid., p.40

As Komisar and McClellan explain: "slogans are systematically ambiguous in a demonstrable sense until the systematic ambiguity is eliminated through a process of arbitrary delimitation of meaning."¹¹ As well, they note that slogans

do not imply their particulars, they merely become connected or attached to a more or less clearly specified group of proposals, together with definitions and empirical evidence used as argument in favour of the proposals made.¹²

Thus the slogan that calls for a "return to basics" allows one to accept educational reform as a return to some form of schooling without logically necessitating the acceptance of a particular proposal for what basics might be.

To resolve the meaning or interpretation of an educational slogan we can again turn to Komisar and McClellan who suggest that:

We can reduce the initial systematic ambiguity of a slogan by deliberately restricting or delimiting its application to some limited set of proposals within the larger amorphous class. So from all the possible particulars a slogan could conceivably be used to summarize, the slogan is made to apply to some sub-set of them.¹³

¹¹ Rich, ed., Readings, p.279.

¹² Ibid., p.281.

¹³ Ibid., p.282.

They caution though that this action of restriction is not only deliberate but is also "arbitrary" in the sense that it is attached to the slogan's uses rather than in its strict or literal sense.¹⁴ By way of example let us assume that the slogan "school is boring" is adopted by a group of students who are attempting to draw the attention of teachers and parents to the need for curriculum change. Legitimately we infer that these students are quite literally bored while attending school. However, if it turns out that although the students involved in the protest want changes to the curriculum, but that no students want a complete curriculum change, and in fact, complaints lie with certain subjects in varying degrees of discontent, this then would be an "arbitrary reservation" which we could not be expected to know about unless it was first expressed by one of the group. Of consequence here, as Komisar and McClellan point out, is the awareness that to properly identify the meaning of an educational slogan one must go beyond examining the slogan itself and acquire, by some means, a clear insight into what practices or programs are being recommended.

To lay the groundwork from which to generate a meaning for the slogan it seems appropriate to accept Scheffler's suggestion to, "evaluate their (slogans) practical purport in reference to their changing contexts,

¹⁴ Ibid.

as well as the parent doctrines from which they have sprung."¹⁵ The alternatives include accepting the slogan only in the context of attracting attention; or being informed of what exactly the slogan specifically identifies. Since we have already rejected the first, or the ceremonial, use of the slogan, we are left with the task of interpreting the slogan in some meaningful way by evaluating the need for educational reform with respect of existing educational ideologies. However, to avoid the possibility of having to consider all possible educational interpretations of the term, we can accept Komisar and McClellan's recommendation and reduce the slogan to a more manageable form by restricting its application to a limited set of educational proposals. This restriction is done arbitrarily in the sense of the term as adapted by Komisar and McClellan, and which quite literally means "with justification."¹⁶

Understanding the Movement Itself

At the outset, I made reference to the educational reform movement which inspired the "return to basics" slogan, and which is really the purpose of this inquiry. After all it is the reform movement bandwagon we are

¹⁵ Scheffler, Language, p.46.

¹⁶ This is as opposed to the sense of "arbitrary" which means "without justification" which is outlined by Komisar and McClellan in: Rich, ed., Readings, p.282.

contemplating joining and the "basics" slogan is merely the identifying feature of that movement. However, understanding what the "basics" movement itself is trying to say requires two prerequisites, namely; a determination of the nature of the movement itself, and the establishment of a meaning for the slogan which accompanies the movement, in this case, "return to basics". The task of identifying the slogan will come later. Understanding the nature of the movement itself will help to establish the framework from which that inquiry will be undertaken. What, then, are the characteristics of educational movements? Dunkel defines educational movements as

vague concepts that sprawl around and beyond any organizations they generate. The outer edges are completely unrefined, with the distinction between adherent and non-adherent to a movement being hazy at best, and hence a movement's actual size is unknowable. In fact a movement seems to exist only insofar as others refer to some vague group of people sharing certain general beliefs and activities as a movement, but who or what is meant by any such reference may vary widely from statement to statement.¹⁷

As diverse as educational movements may be, they usually evolve from some educational philosophy which may be expressed in the simple form of a slogan. In understanding the relationship between an educational movement

¹⁷Harold Dunkel, Conceptions of Curriculum Knowledge: Focus on Historical Movements. Peter Pereira and Thomas W. Roby, ed. (The Mid-West Centre for Curriculum Studies, March, 1985), p.17.

and the philosophical base, we must first accept that a philosophy of education can take a variety of shapes and forms and serve a number of different purposes. Wingo suggests that a particular educational philosophy may be determined by establishing that; (1) the primary subject matter of philosophy of education is education itself; (2) education always takes place within a certain constellation of cultural conditions and therefore it cannot be studied as part of universal and independent phenomena. Some set of relations among education, politics, and social institutions is inevitable and cannot be ignored in any useful analysis; (3) the basic purpose of philosophy of education applies to the ends and means of education and their interrelationships.¹⁸

Applying this to the "return to basics" movement implies that the supporting philosophy must be concerned with education in the context of the North American democratic social structure, i.e., to serve as a basic right to its citizens, and must also advise as to the aims and means of educational reform. Also, as Dunkel points out, disciples of a particular doctrine or ideology are the most qualified, from an epistemological sense, to improve upon the original tenet, receiving in return legitimization of their idea

¹⁸Max G. Wingo, Philosophies of Education: An Introduction (Toronto: D.C. Heath and Company, 1965), p.24.

through association with some proven thesis rather than merely expressing their unsupported opinions.¹⁹ If, for example, an educational reform movement was to promote a standardization of all collegiate education to conform with the "Great Books" program at St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland, it would be a rather straightforward matter to grasp an understanding of what was being recommended.²⁰ However, the intention is not clear when a movement calls for a return to something called simply "basics", and warrants further investigation. For example, Wingo points out the need to consider education relative to the "politics and social institutions" that make up a particular society. Understanding American educational reform means knowing, on the one hand, that education has the responsibility of ensuring the continuation of the democracy by preparing people to adequately exercise their right to self-government, while at the same time respecting their right to freedom, which brings into question the contradiction of authority in schooling for freedom later on. To determine a meaning for "return to basics" in American education it is necessary to understand the role of education in American society, and,

¹⁹ Dunkel, Conceptions of Curriculum, pp. 17-18

²⁰ Wingo, Philosophies, p.22.

to realize that in a political democracy, and in educational philosophy as well, the sense of freedom is often interpreted in a variety of ways.

The Sense of Freedom in Education

In establishing the parameters from within which the "return to basics" question will be discussed, two conditions must be accepted. First, as we are evaluating a call for reform in North American education, it seems reasonable to confine our inquiry to educational philosophies which address the role of education in the North American democratic social environment. This is not to suggest that conservative educational ideologies, for example, are found only in our democratic system. They are in fact the basis for educational philosophies in as widely differing political systems as Socialism and Fascism. The restriction, rather than being one of denial, is intended to settle the question of the slogan's meaning for those who see educational reform as the redeemer of the North American way of life. It will not limit the use of other social systems as political ideals in the evaluation, although it will direct them to use within North America's social and educational contexts.

Second, we must limit the identity of the sense of freedom to that which is defined within our North American

way of life. For our purpose it is essential that educational aims and means are based on senses of freedom that are consistent with those inherent within the composition of our democratic rights and principles. If not, we are advocating education as a means to alter the social structure, which some believe it capable of doing, but which is far from the case here. Rather, the intention of those calling for educational reform is to reinforce the existing social structure through educational reform. Since we live in a social environment that was established upon the promise of individual freedom and equality of opportunity, our educational philosophy should be reflective of these virtues. Because, as Barrow points out, "autonomy literally means self-government or self-legislation",²¹ it follows that North American democracy is synonymous with autonomy and therefore educational aims and means should be part and parcel of the creation of this autonomous adult. The right of self-determination is not satisfied merely by a citizen's right to make choices. Rather, it is dependent upon the citizen's ability to make responsible choices. As Dearden

²¹ Robin Barrow, Moral Philosophy for Education, (Hampden, Conn.: The Shoestring Press Inc., 1975), p.131.

points out, "the exercise of autonomy must include relevant freedoms."²² It necessarily follows that senses of freedom which are educationally defensible within our social democracy are the senses of freedom at issue when discussing educational reform in this context.

Conservative Educational Ideologies

Over the past century, North American education has been exposed to a myriad of educational philosophies, ideologies and terminologies. From early traditionalism through progressivism and the child-centred approach and beyond, to the call to go back to basics, education has completed a full philosophical cycle and has accomplished a great deal. Each change, radical or otherwise, has contributed to our understanding of what shape educational objectives should take. Each criticism has spawned debate that in turn has generated new ideas. However, as far as education has come in legislating access to schools for all children, it has failed to achieve what it was intended to do in a democratic society; that is provide equal educational opportunity for all. As Adler explains,

equality of educational opportunity is not, in fact, provided if it means no more than taking all the children into the public schools for the same number of hours, days and years. If

²² R.F. Dearden, Education and Reason, Hirst and Peters, eds., (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1972), p.59.

once there they are divided into the sheep and the goats, into those destined solely for toil and those destined for economic and political leadership and for a quality of life to which all schools have access, then the democratic purpose has been undermined by an inadequate system of public schooling.²³

The findings and recommendations of the National Commission on Excellence in Education in the United States confirm Adler's assertion. The Commission has determined that, "a high level of shared education is essential to a free, democratic society and to the fostering of a common culture, especially in a country that prides itself on pluralism and individual freedom."²⁴ It is in fact a declaration which sustains equality of educational opportunity as a fundamental right that must be upheld lest its failure effectively disenfranchise a part of society, thus denying it the chance to fully participate in national democratic life. Although the concern here may be more with preserving democracy as we know it than with education per se, the essential prerequisite of the latter sways the focus to the failings of education and the concern for reform. In fact by its very existence the Commission confirms the failure of North American education, a situation from which

²³Mortimer J. Adler, The Paideia Proposal (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1982), p.5.

²⁴U.S. National Commission on Excellence in Education, A Nation at Risk, April 1983, p.7.

has evolved such movements as that which is identified by the "return to basics" slogan.

However, to avoid what Komisar calls the "paradox (of) equality as a principle of schooling"²⁵ it is important to separate schooling from education. By this I mean that we must accept education as an ongoing process, and schooling as a preparatory phase of that process. In this way equal educational opportunity is not achieved simply by the establishment of compulsory schooling. It is, rather, dependent upon the provision of a school curriculum which satisfactorily prepares the young for further learning by dispensing material basic to this process. This logic is consistent with conservative educational theory which describes absolute freedom in schooling as apparent or illusory freedom which is in turn counter productive to our democratic educational aims. Educational conservatism is essentially a denial of this false freedom for the chance to achieve real freedom later on.

In relation to such points, the slogan of "return to basics" has arisen as a rallying cry. In examining the interpretation given to the slogan, I am limiting the inquiry into the meaning of the "return to basics" slogan to the scope of educational conservatism, and in particular that

²⁵ Rich, ed., Readings, p.258.

contained within the secular conservative educational ideologies as outlined by O'Neill.²⁶ I do so because the "return to basics" slogan implies a return to educational conservatism in the North American social context; also, in the context of educational philosophies, because a "basic", "fundamental" curriculum is the foundation of essentialism, which reflects the conservative tradition in education. As Wingo notes,

so far as the nature of the curriculum is concerned, conservatives unite on the stand that it consists of a common core of subject matters, intellectual skills, and accepted values that are so essential they must be transmitted to all who come to school. As the conservative sees it, it is through this kind of program that the school can make its chief contribution to preserving and transmitting the essential heritage of culture.²⁷

As well, the restriction is justified in that the call for a "return to basics", stated as such, typically comes from conservatives. That is, this is a common conservative slogan. It manifests the way conservatives would approach the problem of their dissatisfaction with schooling while other approaches will develop similar criticisms in different ways.

²⁶William F. O'Neill, Educational Ideologies (Santa Monica, California: Goodyear Publishing Company, 1981), pp. 64-65.

²⁷Wingo, Philosophies, p. 54.

In justifying the restriction to conservatism I am not ruling out the possibility that a "return to basics" movement for educational reform cannot be found in liberal ideology. Indeed, many liberals are critical of current educational practices, and are interested in a well-grounded education. Less typically, however, do they use the slogan "return to basics". It would be a legitimate and appropriate scholarly endeavour to examine and explicate liberal (or Marxist, Maoist, etc.) views on what constitutes the fundamentals in education. However, for reasons of the scope appropriate to a Master's thesis, and for the reasons cited above, this inquiry will be limited to conservative meanings for the "return to basics" slogan.

As we have seen from the varied uses of the sense of freedom in educational philosophies, educationists do use various interpretations of the same terminology to support their particular arguments.²⁸ This is more easily done when one considers the least extreme positions of conservative and liberal educational ideology. For example, secular educational conservatism is defined by O'Neill as

²⁸ For example, according to Illich, schooling inhibits a child's freedom by denying him the right to learn (Deschooling Society, Chap.1), while educational conservative Bantock maintains that freedom comes only from one being able to make responsible choices as learned through authoritative intervention. Bantock, Dilemmas of the Curriculum, (Bungay, Suffolk: The Chaucer Press, 1980), p.59.

being "concerned with the necessity of preserving and transmitting existing beliefs and practices as a way of ensuring both social survival and personal effectiveness".²⁹ The least extreme liberal takes the position that "while instructional method (or means) should be updated to encompass new psychological insights into the nature of human learning, the goals (or ends) of education, including traditional content, are fundamentally sound and do not require significant modification."³⁰

However, as one moves to the extremes in the conservative and liberal educational spectrums it is evident that this call for educational reform is a move against child-centered education in the liberal sense, proposing instead a return to the more disciplined approach to the teaching of fundamental curriculum inherent in conservatism. Thus, in relation to social movements, if not in relation to logical possibility, the ideologies competing for the slogan are conservative ones.

O'Neill categorizes conservative educational ideologies as falling under the sub-headings of Educational Fundamentalism, Educational Intellectualism, and Educational Conservatism. He further divides each of the three

²⁹ O'Neill, Educational Ideologies, p.66:

³⁰ Ibid., pp.264-65.

ideologies into those reflective of religious and secular philosophies. The most conservative or radical conservative (if it is possible to wed the terms) positions are characterized by the attempt to "unite in some kind of acceptable synthesis the spirit and achievements of modern science with the old supernaturalism",³¹ as evidenced in America by the "common sense populism" of Max Rafferty, and the religious fundamentalism of the Christian crusades, and the moral majority.

Intellectual conservatism is expressed in the philosophical intellectualism of Mortimer Adler and Robert Maynard Hutchins and is based on the tradition of the Western liberal arts and the "Great Books". The religious equivalent is found in the theological absolutism of the Jesuits and contemporary Roman Catholicism among others.

The least conservative ideology is expressed within secular conservatism by the establishment, and laissez-faire conservatives, and is characterized by educational critics such as Hyman Rickover and Arthur Bestor. Religious conservatism is at the same time

³¹Wingo, Philosophies, p.278.

established within Protestant traditions, Presbyterianism, and Lutheranism, for example.

In outlining the conservative educational ideologies established by O'Neill I indicated the examples from both the secular and religious sides of each. I did so in order to offer some insight as to where the secular ideology stood in relation to its theological counterpart, which in some cases are difficult to disentwine. This is particularly true in understanding the folklore beliefs of Max Rafferty and his populist movement and the intellectual basis of Educational Intellectualism.

In this study, however, I will limit my inquiry into the meaning of "return to basics" to the secular interpretations. These are the interpretations of most influence in public educational institutions; they are as well complex and extensive, and offer sufficient scope for a study of this kind.

Summary

I have indicated support for the need of educational reform in America, not only as my own belief but also as evidenced by, among others, the reform inquiry as set forth in the National Commission on Excellence in Education report, and by Mortimer Adler's Paideia Group. Given the need for

reform, I have established the "return to basics" slogan as the basis for the investigation, which initially begins with a look at ways to determine meanings for educational slogans in general, and the "return to basics" slogan in particular.

Keeping in mind the arbitrary nature of establishing parameters essential to the valuation of educational slogans, as outlined by Komisar and McClellan, I have limited the research to the North American social environment and the sense of freedom implied by democratic states. Also, since the educational intent of the "basics" movement appears to fall within the framework of educational conservative philosophy, the exposition that follows will be contained within the secular educational conservative ideologies outlined by O'Neill, which includes Educational Fundamentalism, Educational Intellectualism, and Educational Conservatism. These conservative ideologies will be examined in the upcoming chapters to see what sense, if any, they can make of the "return to basics" slogan as a valid consideration for the question of educational reform.

In the next chapter, I will explore the most conservative fundamentalist position (excluding religious fundamentalism); the main spokespersons of this ideology are Rafferty, Hegel and Durkheim, although the latter two are involved through their influence rather than directly.

In Chapter 3, the "basics" questions will be addressed through the intellectual conservatism of Mortimer Adler's Paideia Group proposal, and the educational philosophy of Robert Maynard Hutchins. The importance here is that Adler's Paideia Group proposal is a contemporary reform issue which indeed may be representative of what a "return to basics" movement might mean today.

Finally, the inquiry will expound upon the social conservative views of Hyman Rickover and William F. Buckley, Jr., and those of educational critic Arthur Bestor. Both Rickover and Buckley are critical of education for its failure to allow America to keep pace with socialist adversaries. Bestor has been outspoken as well in condemning education for its failure to develop man's intellectual power. It is his belief that a free and democratic school system is synonymous with disciplined intellectual training and that misrepresentation and under-evaluation of liberal education by professional educationists is responsible for the failure of education to adopt proper aims.³²

³²Howard Ozman, Contemporary Critics of Education (Danville, Ill.: The Interstate Printers and Publishers Inc., 1970), p.21.

CHAPTER 2

EDUCATIONAL FUNDAMENTALISM

If one equates education with intellectualism, which has not been an uncommon supposition from Aristotlian philosophy to the present, then educational fundamentalism would appear as a contradiction within itself. At the far right of the educational conservative scale, it is not surprising that the educational fundamentalist evokes this perception considering that his anti-intellectual authoritarianism lies beneath the equally contradictory statement manifest in the term reactionary conservatism.¹ The apparent contrariety lies within the two traditions of Secular Reactionary Conservatism which includes on the one hand a "non philosophical restorationist" base, while on the other hand influence comes from the late eighteenth century "philosophical antirationalist" movement.² However, upon closer examination the two positions share similarities in relation to Platonic and Aristotlian theory. Both are influenced by the Platonic rejection of education based on

¹William F. O'Neill, Educational Ideologies (Santa Monica, California: Goodyear Publishing Company, Inc., 1981), p.64.

²Ibid., p.111 and 123.

relativism while disavowing Platonic idealism in which education is the "development of the intellectual powers of men".³ The knowledge of what is true or false, or right or wrong, in fundamentalist tradition is pragmatic in the sense that it is based on practical applications of proven moral values, or, as in the totalitarian example, on "irrationalism".

Aristotlian theory, which is "founded on the possible rather than the ideal", is rejected in both reactionary conservative ideals for its adherence to the notion that education is inseparable from the real world.⁴ For Aristotle, "the existence of a spiritual world in splendid isolation from the world of particular things is meaningless speculation".⁵ Reactionary conservatism, in one sense, rejects this position for its link to the importance of relativism in much the same way it rejects Dewey's concept of education based upon natural experience. At the other extreme it rejects this position by accepting the state as, "a mystical entity", based on what is perceived to be right.⁶

³George Howie, ed., Aristotle on Education (London: Collier-MacMillan Ltd., 1968), p.14.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid, p.15.

⁶O'Neill, Ideologies, p.128

Secular Reactionary Conservatism

As O'Neill points out, secular reactionary conservatism is largely identified by: (1) an anti-intellectual, right-wing tradition exemplified politically by the John Birch Society and educationally by Max Rafferty, and (2) a more philosophical position influenced by the German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel and the French sociologist Emile Durkheim and epitomized both politically and educationally by Fascism and National Socialism. The former is characterized in the United States by O'Neill as the

ethnocentric, nativistic, "know nothing" orientation of the chauvinistic super patriot, with his sentimental and simplified version of American beliefs and attitudes. Such an individual, who might be termed a "common sense" populist, constitutes an essentially non-intellectual, or even anti-intellectual, point of view that envisions a return to the intuitive "folk wisdom" of the common man.⁷

The reaction of this ultra-conservative is to social change. The reactionary conservative position is a response to change that either occurred or is threatening to occur and that is in some way seen as detrimental to the well-being of the state, in this case the United States. Educationally it is a reaction against progressivism for

⁷ Ibid., p.117

the over simplification of curriculum and for a lack of discipline within the less authoritarian "open" school system. Reactionary conservatives, in this context, have no basic philosophy as they tend to be locally placed; as O'Neill notes, their ideas relate

to their own particular social situations as these (ideas) exist at some particular point in history, and are seldom expressed in the more abstract and theoretical terms more characteristic of the other ideological orientations.⁸

As well as having no intellectual basis from which to generate an educational philosophy, reactionary conservatism, in this sense, is non-intellectual in substance preferring folklore and local cultural traditions as foundations for moral redemption upon which educational objectives should be structured.

Although fragmented by the diversity of "their concepts of what constitutes the 'idealized past'", "common sense" populist principles establish the goal of education as the means to "reaffirm the older and better ways, (and) to re-establish traditional standards of belief and behaviour".⁹ On this point it becomes difficult to segregate secular and religious fundamentalism mainly due to the

⁸ Ibid., p.118.

⁹ Ibid., p.149.

intimate relationship between religion and the American cultural past. In fact, much of reactionary conservative discourse is accented by what O'Neill terms as "political evangelism" which is characterized by the many independent ministries and crusades thriving today throughout the United States and from within which the moral objectives of "Populist" society were founded.

Max Rafferty and the Radical Right

According to Max Rafferty the goal of education is quite clear. As he bluntly states, "education's first duty is to make possible the survival of our country".¹⁰ Rafferty personifies the educationist ideal of the secular "radical right" that, as O'Neill points out, "rose largely in response to the development of the John Birch Society".¹¹ For Rafferty, Sputnik was the turning point in the evolution of American education which, as he notes,

for a generation and more had thrust aside the great Art, (replacing it with) the scarecrow figure of Pragmatic Progressivism riding tall in the saddle, brandishing the brittle lance of Behaviouristic Psychology and armored with the invulnerable reputation of John Dewey".¹²

¹⁰Max Rafferty, Max Rafferty on Education, (New York: The Devin-Adair Co., 1968), p.116.

¹¹O'Neill, Ideologies, p.121

¹²Max Rafferty, Suffer Little Children, (New York: The Devin-Adair Co., 1962), p.15.

The initial Soviet space venture awakened America to the realization that the nation's very survival was being threatened by the advancing collective that was the Soviet Union. Ironically Rafferty's educational rhetoric, a kind of comical cynicism aimed at corporate and state interference in educational policy, lauds the Soviet system of education as the "raison d'etre" for the space program's success, while at the same time being critical of America for listening to Dewey, a more than casual influence on the Soviet educational scene.

Rafferty lays the blame for education's failure on, the Progressivist influence of John Dewey, or more directly, "upon the shoulders of our educational leaders who swallowed hook, line, and sinker the philosophy of John Dewey and who helped spread it like so much treacle over an apathetic land", as well as, in his terminology: (1) "The Hypocrites", prominent businessmen who equate quality schooling with corporate success but who do an about face when asked to help in adequately financing education. (2) "The Ingrates", who prosper from their complete educational backgrounds and who now vote against taxes that would fund education for the next generation. (3) "The Quitters", churches, drive training programs, etc., who expect the school to provide services that should be provided by them. (4) "The Pinheads",

or those who represent the "lunatic fringe" and crusade against everything, from "saluting the flag, singing Christmas carols, or studying evolution".¹³

In addition, Rafferty blames the federal government, and indeed education itself, for allowing all of these "extraneous projects and problems" to interfere with education's ultimate goal; the former because those who pay the bills like to call the tune, while in the latter instance because the non-aggressive nature of education has encouraged these debilitating inroads to occur.¹⁴ In Rafferty's words, "education has too many Neville Chamberlains, umbrellas and all. Schools exist not to compromise with wrong, but to uphold right."¹⁵ In this case, for Rafferty, what is right is what is morally right. In short, this view of what is wrong with education is multi-faceted; however, the main theme interwoven throughout Rafferty's attack against the internal and external ravagers of education exposes decaying moral values as the main culprit. Although by accepting this rationale it becomes difficult to comprehend how a "morally corrupt" (Rafferty's words) commune, such as the Soviet Union, could achieve a scientific advancement of the magnitude of Sputnik, one may,

¹³ Ibid., pp.140 and 128.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.129.

¹⁵ Rafferty, On Education, p.116

by the same token find skepticism in Rafferty's allusion that recanting present moral standards in favour of those of yesteryear will secure the survival of the nation from a scientific perspective. However, with some candor one is able to conclude that Rafferty, and the "fundamentalist" ideal he represents, suggests that moral degeneration is the underlying cause of learning disability in American schools. It therefore may logically be assumed that, for Rafferty, one of the "basics" of our slogan must contain the teaching of moral standards abandoned by recent generations. After all, if we believe progressive, relativist education based on a "new morality" clouds the issue of assessing right from wrong, then it would follow that this moral failing needs to be corrected before we can hope to achieve the level of scientific education seemingly necessary for us to catch up to the Soviets. Of course, we know moral standards do not apply when one is evaluating the educational accomplishments of American vis-a-vis foreign culture. We accept that what is morally right here is not necessarily so under other social orders. However, the fundamentalist maintains that relativism, without the basis of American "frontier" morality "really implies the assassination of all absolutes, the strangling of all standards, the vanquishing of all value — except of course relative ones".¹⁶

¹⁶Rafferty, Suffer, p.123.

Clearly Max Rafferty supports educational reform. Indeed, one might also surmise that Rafferty would call for, among other things, a "return to basics" slogan as the direction educational reform should take. However, what exactly does Rafferty suggest it would take in order to make American education work?

I began this section by reporting that for Rafferty the main purpose of education is to ensure the survival of the nation. In Max Rafferty on Education he outlines four other main educational objectives which support this ultimate aim. They are: (1) to pursue the truth; (2) to hand down the cultural heritage of the race; (3) to teach organized, disciplined, systematic subject matter; and (4) to help the individual realize his own potential.¹⁷ In short, the exegesis of the above is that educational objectives should include the pursuit of truth within the fundamentalist belief that truth can be "non-rational and not conditional upon personal experience".¹⁸ In fundamentalist terms past knowledge should be used to solve today's problems and prepare the way for a better future; this past knowledge or wisdom should include simplistic American

¹⁷ Rafferty, On Education, pp. 114-115

¹⁸ O'Neill, Ideologies, p. 115.

beliefs and legends such as those expressed by Walt Disney, James Fenimore Cooper and Herman Melville among others. Finally, it is authoritarian teaching of specific subject matter that might include memorization, and rote, which is necessary in preparing an individual to be capable of altering a hostile environment rather than adapting to it.

To attain this goal Rafferty likens educational reform to the twelve great labours the Greek demigod, Hercules was willed to do for humanity. Rafferty sets out twelve labours for education to perform if it is indeed to serve humanity, at least American humanity, namely:

(1) An End to "Life Adjustment" Education, (2) The Fight for Local Control, (3) Keeping Education a Profession, (4) The Need for Better Books, (5) How to get Top Teachers, (6) A New Philosophy of Teacher Training, (7) The Need to Reward Superior Teaching, (8) The Problem of Lifelong Teacher Tenure, (9) The Danger of Federal Aid to Education, (10) God in the Schools, (11) The Puzzle of De Facto Segregation and, (12) The Teaching of Patriotism.¹⁹

The likeness may be there but it might be more relevant to equate the task facing Rafferty with the Herculean effort that would be required for its achievement. To begin, one

¹⁹Rafferty, On Education, pp. 4-39.

would have to convince the federal government to support education financially while allowing local control over curriculum. In addition, funds would have to be made available to pay teachers competitive wages so the best ones would not be drafted by corporations. University teacher-training programs would have to be upgraded to compensate for the diluted criteria necessitated by the huge teacher demand required by the influx of universal education. As well, there is the question of what to teach and to whom. Here we must keep in mind that Rafferty is writing in 1968 in reaction to, as he calls it, "the hippie phenomenon". As one might expect from the conservative right, there is no place in society for this sort of social anomaly, and certainly no place in school. Rafferty attempts to rationalize that schooling should not be universal, rather that it should be specialized, particularly in providing a more advanced curriculum and more highly qualified teachers for gifted children. Those who are products of our social failure should be kept on the outside, not forced upon teachers who have neither the time nor the means to deal with their inabilities and uncooperativeness so that "normal" children can receive uninterrupted attention. Evolution will presumably wipe this group of malingerers from the American scene in due course. It is Rafferty's

position that school should teach the individual and allow him to reach his fullest potential. It is this individuality, not social conformity that will allow the nation to produce experts in the arts and sciences that in turn will enhance the culture for future generations, and will also guarantee the survival of the nation. For Rafferty, education should concentrate on a basic curriculum with English as the prerequisite for the teaching of history, geography, the "old math", science and Latin. He favours elimination of what he terms "frills" and which includes social studies, "new math" and other curricula designed to soften the difficulty of mastering the more formal programs, and thus allowing most students to "do well" with respect to grades.

Finally, Rafferty concludes that religious teaching, though indirect in nature, is essential to educational reform. Although he allows that specific religious training is the responsibility of the church, religion itself is implicit in our history and basic to right-wing, conservative moral values. The result is educational reform which is restricted to a definition of basics, encompassing the "three R's" and an authoritarian approach to teaching based upon moral standards established in early "God-fearing" America.

Fascism

If Max Rafferty exemplifies an educational reformer of religiously inspired moral convictions, then Fascist social theory, and its educational principles are to be found at the other extreme. However, for our purpose of identifying meaning for the "return to basics" question it is interesting to note the differences if any, apparent in the "Populist" versus national socialist view of what a basic education might be.

According to O'Neill radical philosophical reactionary conservatism is characterized by: "irrationalism or non-rationalism, nationalism (patriotism), social Darwinism, and a predisposition toward totalitarian government".²⁰ Although influenced by several philosophies both fascism and national socialism were inspired by the writings of German philosopher George W.F. Hegel and French sociologist Emile Durkheim, neither of whom, in O'Neill's listing of conservative contributions, falls within the realm of reactionary conservatism. In fact, both Hegel and Durkheim, as well as the social-Darwinists, are found at the far left of conservative educational theology. However, it must be noted that O'Neill's categorizations

²⁰O'Neill, Ideologies, p.27.

are reflective of educational ideologies that may differ from political and other social beliefs. In fact, it is not uncommon for educational and political concepts to be at opposite ends of the ideological scale as exemplified by the radical politics of revolutionary Marxism and the conservative qualities of Marxist educational discourse.²¹ In the case of fascism the philosophies of Hegel and Durkheim were central to the conception of the social theories which evolved; however, the educational doctrine of the fascist movement was more conservative.

The clues to fascist educational ideology may be found in the fundamental ideas of the doctrine as expressed by Mussolini, and which were generally based on the philosophy of Giovanni Gentile, who was Mussolini's first Minister of Education.

The man of Fascism is the individual who is nation and fatherland, which is a moral law, binding together individuals and the generations into a tradition and mission, suppressing the instinct for a life enclosed within the brief round of pleasure in order to restore within duty a higher life....Fascism is opposed to Democracy which equates the nation to the majority; nevertheless it is the purest form of democracy if the nation is conceived, as it should be, qualitatively and not quantitatively, as the most powerful idea (most powerful because most moral, most coherent, most true).²²

²¹Harold Entwistle, "Sense and Nonsense in Radical Pedagogy", Working Teacher, 1980

²²Elizabeth Wiskemann, Fascism in Italy: Its Development and Influence (London: MacMillan and Company, Ltd., 1969), p.34.

For the fascist truth was beyond proof; it was rather that which was right and that in turn was what was best for the nation as a totality. As Karl Rosenkranz interprets Hegel,

every single man is a blind link in the chain of absolute necessity in which the world (nation) develops. Every single man can extend his dominion over a greater length of this chain only if he recognizes the direction in which the great necessity will go.²³

In line with Rosenkranz's interpretation, fascist doctrine defines the state as "organic, and it is the duty of the individual to raise himself to the national consciousness and to lose his own identity in it. In this way, the individual exists only in and through the nation state".²⁴

Fascism then differs from democracy and from socialism in that it is against individual rights as guaranteed by a majority belief, and it is anti-socialist in that it is not a class struggle in the Marxist sense. It is rather an entity developed of homogeneous individuals transcendental to themselves (the state). The role of education is thus a cog in this synergistic cycle that

²³G.W.F. Hegel, Faith and Knowledge, Cerfand Harris, ed., (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), p.44.

²⁴O'Neill, Ideologies, p.128.

indoctrinates in order to perpetuate the society. The founding principle is Durkheim's Concept of Social Reality which states that:

Each society (as a mechanical collection of individual consciousnesses) evolves, by means of social condensation, toward an organic society, giving rise to a collective consciousness, and tends to express itself in ways.... that become self-sustaining, self-perfecting, more intense, more complex, etc.²⁵

There is little need for intellectual discourse in the fascist realm because progress, taken from Hegelian philosophy, is "ensured through reason which in turn acts through conflict. In the absence of a supra-state, war is the only arbitrator of what is right".²⁶

Right, including virtue and what is morally right, is thus determined by the state and this can only be changed by conflict with a superior state. Intellectual discussion is replaced by pragmatic teaching and moral indoctrination, as determined by the state's Ministry of Education. In fact in 1930 Italy, students (who were members of the fascist youth) were encouraged to chastize professors not adhering to fascist ideas. The consideration of moral education is similar in substance to that expounded by the American "populist" with the exception that it is based on

²⁵ Ibid., p.126.

²⁶ Ibid., p.123.

a moral code newly established to serve the need of the state. In the case of fascism there is no folklore purest past to which to return. However, the commonality linking the "fascist" and the "purist" is the belief that the main objective of education is to provide individuals with the opportunity to become virtuous citizens of established moral tradition.

As stated previously, although Durkheim's social philosophy influenced fascist theory, educational principles enforced by Gentile in Italy differed somewhat from Durkheim's philosophy of education. However, Durkheim was not without influence in Gentile's educational reform.

Durkheim defines education as:

the influence exercised by adult generations on those that are not yet ready for social life. Its object is to arouse and to develop in the child a certain number of physical, intellectual and moral states which are demanded of him by both the political society as a whole and the special milieu for which he is specifically destined.²⁷

The difference in philosophies lies in the interpretation of what constitutes moral education. Durkheim sees moral education in state supported schools as secular,

²⁷ Emile Durkheim, Education and Sociology Trans. Sherwood D. Fox, (New York: The Free Press, 1956), p.71.

not derived from revealed religion, but that rests exclusively on ideas, sentiments, and practices accountable to reason only; in short, a purely rationalist education.²⁸

Fascist authoritarianism negates rational morality; and, its binding of morality to what is in the best interest of the state precludes what Durkheim calls "the introspective inquiry" necessary for the development of new moral standards. Whereas Italian Fascists did not hesitate to chide the Catholic Church for its fallacy, religion delivered a positive input to moral educational values as a component of what was good for the state.

In fact, Fascist education is authoritarian and anti-intellectual, and is based on moral principles established within its own social doctrine. Its morality contains religious influence and is used as a basis for student self-discipline. The curriculum includes practical work, "conducive to a social and productive consciousness", as well as party doctrine.²⁹ It is, such as is the case with the populist, based upon the development of the individual to pre-supposed moral and practical standards.

²⁸ Emil Durkheim, Moral Education, Trans. Everett K. Wilson and Herman Schnurer (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, Inc., 1973), p.3.

²⁹ Wisekemann, Fascism, p.42.

In a general sense there is little difference in the populist and the fascist approach to education with respect of the "basics" question. The commonalities of authoritarian teaching and morality-inspired curricula vis-a-vis the development of the individual override the social and political differences apparent in the doctrines.

Practical Application

Marshall Fundamental Secondary School in Pasadena, California is, as the name suggests, an example of the practical application of educational fundamentalism. Marshall's philosophy is based on an increase in the fundamental principles of education. As is outlined in the student-parent handbook:

Special emphasis is given to basic skills. A strong character building program with a strict adherence to a disciplinary philosophy, which is geared to the establishment of self-discipline, is the core through which we hope to provide an atmosphere in which concepts of patriotism, courtesy, respect, responsibility and citizenship are developed. Following this philosophy, Marshall strives to develop in the student: (1) the highest possible competence in fundamental skills; (2) growth in citizenship; (3) moral and spiritual value; (4) responsibility for personal behaviour; (5) a spirit of individual achievement and competition.³⁰

To accomplish what the philosophy intends, Marshall stresses an authoritarian classroom setting, based on strict

³⁰ Marshall Fundamental Secondary School, Student-Parent Handbook, Pasadena, California, 1986-86.

behavioral guidelines, which includes a dress code, and regulations that ensure attendance, punctuality and participation in recognized extra-curricular activities. As well, parents are expected to help ensure the enforcement of certain behavioral regulations and, as well, be involved in the P.T.A.

To graduate, students are required to complete eight semesters of English and the Social Sciences, four semesters of Mathematics, two semesters of Science, and one semester each of Health or Driver Education, and Consumer Education or the U.S. Economic System. Lastly, students must take six semesters of Physical Education. Students are graded and may be placed in tutorials or what are termed as "self-contained classrooms", if grades fall below standards. The daily schedule reflects the influence of regimentation, noting that home room period extends from 8:00 a.m. to 8:08, with class times running fifty-one or fifty-two minutes, allowing seven minutes to change periods and thirty-two minutes for lunch.³¹

³¹Marshall, Handbook, and Course of Study Handbook for Senior High Schools, Pasadena Unified School District, Curriculum Dept., 1982-83.

Summary

In Political Ideologies O'Neill outlines five basic principles of Educational Fundamentalism; (1) there are authoritative answers to all of life's really significant problems; (2) these answers are founded basically on external authority; (3) these answers are not only authoritative; they are simple and straightforward; (4) the answers provided by intuition/faith are sufficient for anyone who desires to lead the good life; and (5) to live the good life....it is necessary to purify contemporary society.³²

Under the heading of secular educational fundamentalism I have examined two positions; Max Rafferty's "populist" theory, and fascist theory, in an attempt to explicate the meaning of educational reform from the conservative far right. Although the concepts of "populism" and "fascism" contain similarities relative to moral character, virtue, and educational ideology, the two differ with respect of their basis for development. In summation I will evaluate the two relative to O'Neill's guideline.

The educational fundamentalist believes that social problems can be solved by determining right from wrong, that truth is beyond proof, and that authority or power determines the distinctions. For Rafferty, right and what is

³²O'Neill, Ideologies, pp.114-115.

morally right are found in the American cultural past. The interpretation for fascism is that life's problems are solved by the authority legitimized within the "spiritualized conception" of itself. Fascism then "is a religious conception in which man is seen in his immigrant relationship with a superior law."³³

Both the populist and fascist hold the position that authoritative answers are straightforward and simple, not intellectual or philosophical. This holds true even though fascist theory contains philosophical roots.

In both theories the good life is supported within the well-being of the state. For Rafferty the survival of America is at issue in the face of decaying moral values and progressive educational principles. The fascist, although rejecting "that happiness can be attained on earth....reaffirms the state as the true reality of the individual".³⁴ Since the well-being of the individual is dependent upon the survival and success of the state, it is necessary to rid society of adverse distractions. Here Rafferty calls for the return to moral standards of a bygone age, while "fascism is an historical conception....from (which) follows the great values of tradition in memories,

³³ James A. Gould and Willis H. Truit, eds., Political Ideologies, (New York: MacMillan and Co., Inc., 1973), p.103.

³⁴ Ibid., p.104.

in language, in customs, in the standards of social life".³⁵

Educational fundamentalism, as O'Neill summarizes, expounds the goal of education as a reaffirmation of traditional standards. This goal is achieved through two main objectives: (1) to help reconstruct society by encouraging a return to its original purposes, and (2) to transmit the information and skills necessary to succeed within a existing social order".³⁶ It is characterized by viewing man as a moral agent, meaning that man is responsible for transmitting accepted moral standards to new generations through formal education, "focusing on the existing purposes of social traditions and institutions. It is anti-intellectual" (and views) education as moral regimentation".³⁷ Teaching is authoritative in nature, and testing, or grading, are valued as tools for instructing children and young adults as to what is right and wrong. In short, schooling should be built on basic traditional patterns, and emphasize "ideological conformity".

Followers of Max Rafferty would include "different sorts of people for a variety of reasons" who would be generally attracted to his "anti-communism, nationalism, tough-minded masculinity, conformatism", as well as his

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ O'Neill, Ideologies, p.149.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 298-299.

"just folks" approach to Americanism.³⁸ Fascism would have similar appeal from an educational perspective to those who were persuaded by patriotic, anti-communist sentiment and who stressed law and order, and authority. "Return to basics", based on fundamentalism, would imply a return to traditional, authoritarianism characteristic of the pre-progressivist era, launched by Dewey.

³⁸ William F. O'Neill, Reading, Riting and Rafferty: A Study of Educational Fundamentalism (Berkeley, California: Glendessary Press, 1969), p. 116.

CHAPTER 3

EDUCATIONAL INTELLECTUALISM

If one were to ask the question as to whether or not, in the early years, it was true that the world was flat, the response from the educational intellectualist would be - no, it was not.

Although one might defend the position that at the time, and with the use of all available scientific data, it was reasonable to believe that the world was indeed flat, superior scientific conclusions have of course proved the contrary. The basis for this intellectualist reasoning is established from three philosophical assumptions outlined by O'Neill as follows:

- (1) the world is inherently meaningful. There are certain fundamental truths - natural or divine law - that are absolute and unchanging, and these truths precede and determine personal experience.
- (2) Men are not born with an explicit knowledge of these truths, so a conscious awareness of them must be acquired through learned experience in the natural world.
- (3) In all but the most exceptional cases - these truths are apprehensible through the exercise of reason.

It is this fundamental principle of absolute truth upon which educational intellectualist philosophy is centered.

William F. O'Neill, Educational Ideologies (Santa Monica, California: Goodyear Publishing Company, Inc., 1981), p.156.

Of import to educationalists is O'Neill's description of the intellectualist's view that "truth is ultimately metaphysical in the sense that it is highly abstract and consists of meaning that transcends any particular objects or events in the natural world."²

As O'Neill further explains:

For the intellectualist, truth is not man-made, and it is no private matter. On the contrary, there are certain truths and values that exist independent of being known. These qualities do not "exist" so much as they "subsist", or undergird, all personal experience. They do not "adhere" to being so much as they "inhere" within being, and constitute the very essence of the world as we know it. These essential qualities of being are "absolute" in the sense that they have no context, but, rather, constitute the very ground of being.³

Thus, from the educational intellectualist point of view, the overall goal of education, as defined by O'Neill is "to identify, preserve, and transmit truth (that is knowledge about the underlying meaning and significance of life)".⁴ The consequences for educationalists are derived from within a philosophy which shuns the more pragmatic approach in favour of intellectual development. This choice is based on the rationale that the transmission of truth

² Ibid., p.163.

³ Ibid., p.157.

⁴ Ibid., p.171.

transcends the study of that which is scientifically alterable either now or in the future. For the intellectualist, educational philosophy should be based on the following:

(1) the child is predisposed toward wisdom and virtue, because he is by nature both rational and social; (2) individual similarities are more important than individual differences, and these similarities are properly determinative in establishing appropriate educational programs; (3) children are morally equal in a world of objectively unequal opportunities; they should have equal opportunity to strive for intellectual excellence although the capacity to attain such excellence is not equally distributed throughout the population; and (4) the child is essentially self-determining; he has a personal free will in the traditional sense.⁵

Philosophical Conservatism

From an educational perspective what is being discussed may be classified from a moral standpoint, under what O'Neill refers to as "philosophical conservatism", which, in contemporary education is expressed in educational intellectualism and which adheres to the following values representative of the secular point of view;

(1) The question of value is basically a question of effective behaviour within the natural world, of being able to live in harmony with that which is, of being able to adapt oneself to the imperatives of temperal reality;

⁵ Ibid., p.172.

- (2) In general, the best guide to effective behaviour is a profound insight into the nature of such reality — that is, a true knowledge of that which is objectively good and true.⁶

In intellectualist terms education should promote rational behaviour in the sense that, as Barrow and Woods state "we should aim to promote in children a respect for the notion of giving good reasons, for thinking (and hence behaving) in a coherent manner and, as a natural consequence, for evaluating the arguments, ideas and opinions of others by reference to their emotive appeal, the status of the person arguing or any other irrelevant consideration."⁷

From the intellectualist perspective then, schooling should provide the catalyst necessary to "match the individual's potentiality for knowing (the individual's distinctive intelligence) and the infinitely rational nature of that which is known (the ultimate structure of the intelligible world)."⁸

Practically then, the school should exist to: "(1) teach students how to reason (how to think clearly and coherently) and (2) to transmit the enduring wisdom of the

⁶Ibid., p.168 and p.165.

⁷Robin Barrow and Ronald Woods, An Introduction of Philosophy of Education (London: Methuen and Company, 1982), p.90.

⁸O'Neill, Ideologies, p.156.

past.⁹ To accomplish the task of developing the intellectual potentialities in students, schools should adopt a prescribed curriculum which emphasizes intellectual discipline which "trains the child to be capable of clear and coherent reasoning."¹⁰ Teacher authority should be exercised in classroom control and should be legitimated on the basis of the "teacher's superior wisdom."¹¹

Philosophical conservatism is found within the writings of Plato, Aristotle, and "The Great Books" and in liberal education, and is demonstrated in more contemporary educational theses by, among others, Mortimer Adler and Robert Maynard Hutchins.

As we shall see the "return to basics" slogan in educational intellectualism means a return to a liberal education, based on the intellectual past of western civilization. Meaning for the "basics" question here is established from within education's aim of teaching children how to reason, by reference to established truth and wisdom of previous generations.

⁹ Ibid., p.172.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

Robert Maynard Hutchins

Hutchins has written several books criticizing American education for allowing itself to be taken over by materialism while ignoring what he believes to be the essential interdependency of education, morals, intellect, and metaphysics. In Education for Freedom, he writes:

I am interested in education, in morals, in intellect, and in metaphysics. I even go so far as to hold that there is a necessary relation among all these things. I am willing to assert that without one we cannot have the others, and that without the others we cannot have the one which I am primarily concerned, namely education.¹²

The use of the school for job training, and the rewarding of graduates with higher salaries has, in Hutchins' view, steered the aims of education away from their intellectual and moral goals. According to Ozman;

Hutchins believes that we are becoming too specialized in our approach toward education and that we need more of a grounding in the liberal arts. He advocates that the entire educational system orient itself to an integrated plan of liberal education, to be primarily concerned with the intellect.¹³

Hutchins sets forth his criteria for liberal education, which he believes should be the basis for the

¹² Robert Maynard Hutchins, Education for Freedom, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1943).

¹³ Howard Ozman Contemporary Critics of Education, (Danville, Illinois: The Interstate Printers and Publishers, Inc., 1970), p.79

school system within our democratic society, in his preface to Adler and Wolff's An Introduction to the Great Books written in 1959. He begins by specifying what a liberal education is not; namely, specialized education, vocational or professional education, and adding his temptation to say that "it is the education that no American gets in an educational institution nowadays."¹⁴ He goes on to detail the following view that liberal education

is the education that prepares us to be free men. You have to have this education if you are going to be happy; for happiness consists in making the most of yourself. You have to have this education if you are going to be a member of the community; for membership in the community implies the ability to communicate with others. You have to have this education if you are going to be an effective citizen of a democracy; for citizenship requires that you understand the world in which you live and that you do not leave your duties to be performed by others, living vicariously and vacuously on their virtue and intelligence. A free society is a society composed of free men. To be free you have to be educated for freedom. This means that you have to think; for the free man is the one who thinks for himself. It means that you have to think, for example, about the aims of life and of organized society.¹⁵

¹⁴ Mortimer J. Adler and Peter Wolff, A General Introduction to the Great Books and to a Liberal Education, (Chicago, Illinois: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1959)

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. V-VI, (Preface).

Of particular import in Hutchins' thesis of what exactly the aims of education should be is his point that it is education's responsibility to prepare the individual for autonomy within a free society. It is crucial as well to Adler's linkage of universal schooling and universal suffrage which binds democracy and education in his Paideia Group's proposal for educational reform.¹⁶ In The Conflict in Education, Hutchins cites liberal education as being the education of rulers.¹⁷ He argues that within democratic universal suffrage, which, in theory makes every man a ruler by virtue of his right to self-government, everyone is entitled to a liberal education. Of consequence for education is Hutchins' belief that a liberal education develops individual intellect which in turn enables humans to alter their environment for the better. In his words:

Now, if ever, we need an education that is designed to bring out our common humanity rather than to indulge our individuality. Our individual differences means that our individual development must vary. If we all struggle to make the most of our individual powers, the results will be different, because our powers differ. But the difference is one of degree, and not of kind. In a

¹⁶ Mortimer J. Adler, The Paideia Proposal, (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1982), p.3.

¹⁷ Robert Maynard Hutchins, The Conflict in Education (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1953), p.84.

modern, industrial, scientific democracy every man has the responsibility of a ruler and every man has the leisure to make the most of himself. What the modern, industrial, scientific democracy requires is wisdom. The aim of liberal education is wisdom. Every man has the duty and every man must have the chance to become as wise as he can.¹⁸

Change is born of criticism and is subsequently evaluated as positive or negative from the substance of the accepted point of view. In other words, if man is to alter or change his environment for the betterment of all concerned he must be capable of independent thought based on rational assumptions. In North American democracy the fundamental right of freedom of speech and expression promotes independent criticism essential to the positive growth and survival of the society. What Hutchins is saying is that a liberal education provides the intellectual means to alter the environment positively; and that rather than as his critics say, adjusting the young to their environment, the aim of education should be to provide the young with the means to improve that environment.

In practical terms, Hutchins expresses his concept of what general education should be in The Higher Learning in America. First, he maintains that education obtained through daily life in the home, church, and community, as

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 90.

well as that which is transmitted via the media, should not be overlooked, nor should it be repeated in school. In short, the curriculum should, "exclude body building, and character building, and the social graces and the tricks of trade and should be composed principally of the permanent studies."¹⁹ It should therefore be based on the Great Books of the Western world, because, as Hutchins believes, "it is impossible to understand any subject or to comprehend the contemporary world without them."²⁰ It should include as well "the arts of reading, writing, thinking and speaking, together with mathematics, (as) the best example of the process of human reason."²¹ This common subject matter will, in Hutchins' view, structure a curriculum which will prepare the young for "intelligent action", and instill in them the ability to think for themselves, by being able to learn from what the greatest men before them have thought.

The aim of education in Hutchins' mind should be re-directed from "our erroneous notion of progress (which) has thrown the classics and the liberal arts out of the curriculum, overemphasized the empirical sciences, and made education the servant of any contemporary movements in society,

¹⁹ Robert Maynard Hutchins, The Higher Learning in America, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press (13th printing), 1967) p.77.

²⁰ Ibid., p.79.

²¹ Ibid., p.85.

no matter how superficial, toward the development of intellectual virtues and habits.²² This aim should be based, not upon education adapted to a changing environment, but rather an "education which implies teaching, which implies knowledge, which is truth, which is everywhere the same."²³

Mortimer Adler

In order to understand Mortimer Adler's philosophy of educational aims, it is essential to first understand his belief in the existence of absolute principles from which, he believes, these aims should be formulated. In a disputation with Paul Schlipp in 1941, Adler argued in the affirmative that there should indeed be absolute principles relative to educational aims and that these principles should imply "absolute and universal" goals for education.²⁴ It was Adler's contention in 1941, and again in his recent Paideia Proposal, that educational aims should be absolute, within the educational intellectualist notion that truth is absolute and therefore not relative to time and place, and

²² Ibid., p.65.

²³ Ibid., p.66

²⁴ Adler suggested disputation rather than debate to prevent reducing the argument to "a game of wits" distracting from the reasoning of the participants. See: Mortimer J. Adler, Reforming Education, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1977), p.65.

that educational aims should be universal in the sense that they should be invariable.²⁵ Of primary import in understanding this view is the added qualification that adherence to absolute educational principles does not inhibit actual educational practices from differing with respect of unlike cultures and societies.²⁶ However, acceptance of this latter point does not compromise Adler's position concerning absolute and invariable principles as educational aims, because the aims of education and the means of achieving these aims are segregated inasmuch as an intelligent application of practical educational principles requires that they be adapted to the particular, existing social circumstances.

Adler thus holds the position that individuality is developed from within the same intellectual training in much the same manner as humans develop differently within the same social environment. In other words, the opportunity for individual development is not impeded by the fact that Americans, for example, all live within the same social structure, any more than individual development would be stagnated by having absolute and universal educational principles as educational aims.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., p.66.

Adler defines education as "a process of human betterment" and outlines three factors to support his statement. First, he maintains that if schooling helps man to develop, it can do so in a positive or negative sense. Therefore education must go beyond just helping to develop man, it must help to develop him in such a way that he is changed for the better, both for himself and also for the good of others. Second, Adler justifies his initial point by introducing as evidence compulsory education. He questions why education is compulsory if indeed it does not promote the betterment of man. Adler's third proposition is that "the ends of education are both proximate and ultimate"; the proximate ends being moral and intellectual values and the ultimate ends being "happiness and a good human life".²⁷ Adler further reasons that the proximate ends of education, the virtues or good habits necessary for happiness, are not ends in themselves but are rather part of the means of obtaining the ultimate end, which is happiness. Hence, Adler opines that "the ends of intellectual education are the intellectual virtues; and the ends of moral training are the moral virtues."²⁸

²⁷ Ibid., p.68.

²⁸ Ibid., p.69.

As proof that educational ends as outlined, should be the same everywhere, and that these ends should be the absolute and universal principles basic to all education, Adler reasons as follows:

If specific human nature is everywhere and at all times the same in all men, then all men have the same powers or capacities to be developed — though, as individuals, they differ in the degree or extent to which they possess their capacities.²⁹

If the powers or capacities just referred to are parts of human nature, they are natural capacities, and as natural each has a nature — a determinate character by which it tends naturally toward a certain kind of development.

Therefore, habits, as developments of powers or fulfillments of capacities, can be said to be good if they conform to the natural tendency of the power or capacity they develop; hence Adler argues that a habit is good when it perfects a power, when it develops a capacity in the direction toward which that capacity naturally tends.³⁰

The Paideia Proposal

Adler's philosophical principles relative to educational aims are implemented within his practical solution to the question of contemporary educational reform as set forth

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

In The Paideia Proposal, and the subsequent volumes, Paideia Problems and Possibilities, and The Paideia Program. Along with twenty-one others concerned and involved with education, Adler formed what is called The Paideia Group, to examine the need for educational reform, and to recommend, in what direction the reform measures should aim.

The name Paideia is itself taken from the Greek, but is used here in relation to the Latin "Humanitas", meaning "the general learning that should be the possession of all human beings".³¹ This principle of universality of educational opportunity within our social democracy is central to the proposal. As Conant states,

the doctrine of equality of which De Tocqueville wrote so long ago has come to mean in the United States not parity of status for all adults but equality of opportunity for the young....the nearer we approach, through the management of our schools, to our goal of equality of opportunity, and the better we teach the basic tenets of American democracy, the more chance there is for personal liberty to continue in the United States.³²

According to Adler, educational reform is needed because education has failed to "fulfill the educational obligations of a democracy."³³ The urgency of the charge is

³¹ Adler, Paideia Proposal, p.VI.

³² James B. Conant, Education and Liberty, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), p.56.

³³ Adler, Paideia Proposal, p.4

contained within John Dewey's linkage of Democracy and Education in the sense that, as Adler points out "universal suffrage and universal schooling are inextricably bound together — the one without the other is a perilous delusion."³⁴ Education has gone only halfway by providing twelve years of basic public schooling for all children, inasmuch as it has failed to deliver the same curriculum to all children, and has thus denied them what ~~is~~ their basic democratic right. As well, the very foundation of democracy is jeopardized by the fact that adults, deprived of quality education as children, will be incapable of properly exercising their rights to self-government as adults by being insufficiently prepared to make the necessary responsible choices. For Adler, true universal education means providing access to schooling for all children without sacrificing the quality essential to "the duties of self-governing citizenship and for the enjoyment of things of the mind and spirit that are essential to a good human life."³⁵

Paideia recommends specific educational reforms that are essential if education is to realize its democratic potential. First, schooling is deemed to be only part of

³⁴ Ibid., p.3.

³⁵ Ibid., p.7

the human educational process, and therefore compulsory schooling for children must go beyond preparing some of them for higher levels of schooling. As Adler states:

(school) must prepare all of them (young people) for the continuation of learning in adult life, during their working years and beyond, by imparting to them the skills of learning and giving them the stimulation that will motivate them to keep their minds actively engaged in learning. Schooling should open the doors to the world of learning and provide the guidelines for exploring it.³⁶

The second Paideia proposal is non specialized schooling. As well as preparing children to be responsible citizens and to enjoy a good life, schooling must also prepare children to earn a living. To achieve these goals Paideia proposes that schooling must be "general and liberal" to accommodate the flexibility of man, and the ever changing nature of society.³⁷

Third, the proposal calls for a standardized curriculum in those divisions with elective choice only in the selection of a second language, and corresponding methods of teaching. The course of study is sub-divided into three different ways in which the mind can be improved;

³⁶ Ibid., p.11.

³⁷ Ibid., p.18.

"(1) by the acquisition of organized knowledge; (2) by the development of intellectual skills; and (3) by the enlargement of understanding, insight, and aesthetic appreciation."³⁸

In each allotment the teaching mode includes "didactic instruction, lectures and responses" in teaching basic subject matter such as language, mathematics and history; "coaching, exercises and supervised practice" for skill development such as reading, writing and problem solving; and "maieutic or socratic questioning and active participation" in the discussion of books, works of art and music.³⁹

Thus, teaching is of paramount importance to the proposal.

"The heart of the matter", as Adler puts it, is the quality of learning that takes place in the classroom. Although the curriculum is clearly essential to the fulfillment of the program, the main element is teaching.⁴⁰ To be properly prepared the teacher must "understand how the mind learns by the exercise of its own powers, and on his or her use of this understanding to help the minds of others to learn."⁴¹

Teacher training must ensure that this skill, based on the teacher's own experience, is developed. Adler suggests this

³⁸ Ibid., p.22

³⁹ Ibid., p.23

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.49

⁴¹ Ibid., p.61.

is best accomplished by:

Practice under supervision; that is, by coaching. All the skills of teaching are intellectual skills that can be developed only by coaching; and by lecture courses in pedagogy and teaching methods such as are now taught in most schools or departments of education and are now required for certification.⁴²

Practical Application

2. The Paideia Proposal offers the most contemporary example of the application of intellectual conservatism in the classroom. In fact The Paideia Proposal was implemented at Skyline High School in Oakland, California, in the spring of 1981 for a two year period and, as a result of positive feedback from those students involved, a total five-year program, including feeder, elementary and junior high school, has now begun.⁴³ In addition, the Atlanta Public Schools and the Chicago school system are in the process of implementing programs based on the proposal. Although the three school systems mentioned may vary somewhat, a typical classroom setting may be outlined as follows.

As previously explained the school program is divided into three sections distinct in subject matter, goals, and teaching modes. If possible, the three teaching

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Mortimer J. Adler, Paideia Problems and Possibilities (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1983), pp.105-6.

modes should be integrated; however, the proposal allows that the different modes might necessarily alternate with, for example, didactic instruction three times per week, and coaching and seminar sessions twice. Class schedules would vary from the traditional forty minute periods to include six, one hour lectures and demonstrations in fundamental subjects on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, while coaching and seminar sessions would be held in three two hour time frames on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Tutorials for slower learners and extra curricular activities would take place in the final hour of each eight hour school day.⁴⁴

The physical classroom setting would be altered in that didactic instruction would occur in a lecture hall or auditorium accommodating fifty or so students while coaching sessions would group five or six students into specific skill development areas supervised by one teacher per room, and seminars would group twenty-five students around a hollow square table.⁴⁵

Discipline plays an important role in the learning process of the proposal, radiating down from the school principal to teachers and students. In a Paideia school, the principal would have the power to hire and fire teachers

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.95.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.94

and to establish discipline standards for students. His or her authority, as well as that of the teachers would be legitimated by parents' recognition that "standards of conduct....decorum and good behaviour on the part of the student today (are) indispensable to learning and teaching."⁴⁶ The general conservative notion that authority in the classroom is a complement to freedom is thus upheld in the Paideia school.

With reference to the "return to basics" movement, the application of educational intellectualism may be perceived as encouraging a return to a "basic" curriculum; grading; and an authoritarian classroom setting in which discipline plays an important role. However, upon closer examination of the "basics" question one may be inclined to interpret intellectualism as a return to the knowledge and wisdom of the past, or to that which we already possess, disclaiming, at the same time, that this was ever before attempted in our schools.

⁴⁶ Adler, Paideia Proposal, p.65.

Summary

As Adler maintains in The Paideia Proposal "we are on the verge of a new era in our national life. The long-needed educational reform for which this country is at last ready will be a turning point toward that new era."⁴⁷

However, the reform of which Adler speaks is one of mode more than of substance, in that we possess the knowledge to be provided through schooling, but we have so far failed to deliver that knowledge to our children. In supporting universal quality education Adler points out that "the shape of the best education for the best is not unknown to us; but we have been slow to learn how to provide it."⁴⁸

His belief is substantiated by The National Commission on Excellence in Education report which states, in brief, that "it is our conviction that the essential raw materials needed to reform our educational system are waiting to be mobilized through effective leadership."⁴⁹

In educational intellectualist terms what we possess to be imparted to the young through schooling, is:

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.3.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.7.

⁴⁹ A Nation at Risk, National Commission on Excellence in Education. April 1983, p.15.

certain fundamental truths that are absolute and unchanging and (which) precede and determine personal experience (these truths) must be acquired through learned experience in the natural world....through the exercise of reason.⁵⁰

In a more practical sense educational intellectualism establishes that the school will achieve these objectives by, among other things, teaching a prescribed curriculum based on "abstract ideas and theory, philosophy and the established literary and intellectual classics of the western world."⁵¹ In other words, it is not necessary to invest new areas of knowledge in order to reform education. It is rather only necessary to administer the intellectual excellence of the past, which is already in our possession, through a reformed teaching methodology and a course of study that is both liberal and general.

Educational intellectualism, as represented by The Paideia Proposal, may be associated with the "back to basics" movement if the term basics is, as Adler emphasizes, "interpreted broadly enough to cover everything that should be included in the stage of schooling that is basic because it underlies all other schooling and learning."⁵²

⁵⁰ O'Neill, Educational Ideologies, p.156.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.172.

⁵² Adler, Paideia Problems and Possibilities, p.27

It is the aspect of coaching children in the learning of basic skills, such as reading, writing and mathematics, that aligns the proposal with the "back to basics" movement. However, Adler is quick to point out that "as to other elements in the Paideia program that are also "basic" in our sense, to think of them as a return to something that once existed in our schools is wide of the mark."⁵³ Educational intellectualism is concerned with learning from the past, but it is not suggesting that the past to which it is alluding ever existed in our schools.

⁵³ Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

SOCIAL TRADITIONALISM: (CONSERVATISM)

In Chapter 2 it was established that the writings of Durkheim and Hegel were used to develop the foundation of fascist social theory. However, both Durkheim and Hegel were more conservative than fundamentalist in their educational philosophies. Whereas secular educational fundamentalism is based on "uncritical acceptance of either revealed Truth or established social consensus (common sense)", educational conservatism is developed from within a social conservative political philosophy which stresses "adherence to time tested cultural institutions (and) a proper relationship between reasoned change and reasonable conformity."¹ More explicitly, educational conservatism promotes, as the objective of schooling, the preparation of the individual for life in the existing social structure.

According to O'Neill, the conservative tends to distrust pure theory, free-floating intellectual speculation. Skeptical of both the moral fervor of the reactionary conservative on the one hand, and the intellectual passion of the philosophical conservative on the other, the social conservative is dubious

¹William F. O'Neill, Educational Ideologies (Santa Monica, California: Goodyear Publishing Company Inc., 1981), p.382 and 399.

about utopian visions and romanticized notions of man's potential for self-improvement. He favours ideas that are grounded in concrete situations and that are clearly relevant to the practical problems of everyday living.²

The reflection of social conservative values in (secular) educational conservatism is mirrored in O'Neill's characterization of the principles of schooling and the role of the teacher.³ In Educational Ideologies O'Neill states that: (1) the basic value of knowledge resides in its social utility; (2) education emphasizes man as a citizen, in his role as a member of an established state; (3) education focuses on existing social traditions and institutions, emphasizing cultural stability over reform; (4) it is based on ethnocentrism stressing dominant social traditions and gradual change; (5) it is based on the belief that the ultimate intellectual authority is the dominant culture with its established system of beliefs and behaviour; (6) the course of study should be heavily prescribed placing academic curricula over practical and intellectual, the three R's and more academic approach to the social sciences;

² Ibid., p.177.

³ Note - Social Conservatism and educational conservatism are used here interchangeably. Social Conservatism is used, as in O'Neill's reference, as one of three educational conservative ideologies and is not to be confused with the encompassing reference of educational conservatism.

(7) teachers should use legitimate authority; however, there should be a practical compromise between traditional and progressive classroom procedures.⁴

This generalization of social conservative politics and educational theory is complicated, however, by the realization that similarities in educational discourse can and do exist for different reasons. Closer inspection of social conservatism reveals a subdivision into four distinct categories and several other less defineable ones.

O'Neill terms the four primary relations as "(1) the Establishment Conservatives or Tories; (2) the Laissez-Faire Conservatives or Free Marketeers; (3) the Social Darwinists or Spencerian Conservatives; and (4) the Teleological Nationalists or Hegelian Conservatives."⁵

For our purpose it is worthwhile to note that, although the general characteristics of educational conservatism are consistent within O'Neill's list of secular conservatives, understanding these characteristics relative to "return to basics" is more clearly defined when the

⁴ O'Neill, Ideologies, pp:201-2.

⁵ Ibid., p.178.

philosophies from which they were developed are viewed independently.. With this in mind O'Neill's classification of social conservatives is discussed in three distinct subsections.

The first combines the Tories and Free Marketeers, who, although they differ with respect of political and economic issues, similarly view intelligence as "practical and contextual". The second grouping includes the Social Darwinists and Hegelian Conservatives who restrict individual intelligence to containment within the societal whole, in the form of an "organic" state evolution on the one hand (Social Darwinists) and the "whole" nation state concept (Hegelian) on the other. It is this Hegelian philosophy that, in its extreme political form, emerged as fascism. The third subdivision includes such educational critics as Hyman Rickover and Arthur Bestor who reiterate conservative educational ideology from education's vantage point.⁶

The Tories and Free Marketeers

The Tory view of education is based upon practical values, and includes the following two elements. First, it holds that progressive schooling did not succeed because it

⁶ Ibid., p. 188;

failed to realize, as Buckley points out:

that difference in I.Q. on which educational achievement largely depends, are on the evidence, overwhelmingly genetic, i.e., inherited and fixed at birth.⁷

Attempts to provide equality of educational opportunity in the face of this evidence, such as that which was undertaken by Christopher Jencks in the '70's, proved to be cosmetic and doomed to defeat. As Buckley indicates,

Head Start programs for the particularly disadvantaged....compensatory education for those who had slighted particular educational disciplines....a higher ratio of teachers to students in order to provide more individual attention....compulsory integration in order to raise the standard of achievement for the minority students.... (and) local control of a school (to foster) parent participation and student enthusiasmdid not work.⁸

They did not work because in Buckley's words, "the key is noncoercive education", not impractical solutions forced upon practical problems.

The second element contained within Tory educational discourse is the edict that education should avoid the "radical prescriptions for wholesale change (which) tend to violate the integrity and continuity of the total

⁷William F. Buckley, Four Reforms, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1973), p.76.

⁸Ibid., pp.77-78.

process."⁹ As Oakeshott notes,

The disposition to be conservative, is, then, warm and positive in respect of enjoyment, and correspondingly cool and critical in respect of change and innovation; these two inclinations support and elucidate one another. The man of conservative temperament believes that a known good is not lightly to be surrendered for an unknown better.¹⁰

This attitude to change in the conservative disposition is sometimes seen negatively, as in the common belief associating conservatism with weakness, "not as an intelligible (or even plausible) alternative to our mainly "progressive" habit of mind but (rather) as an unfortunate hindrance to the movement afoot."¹¹ However, Oakeshott counters this position with the declaration that there are indeed "occasions when this (conservative) disposition remains not only appropriate, but, supremely so; and there are connections in which we are unavoidably disposed in a conservative direction."¹² It is this view of returning to rooted educational values which is central to Tory educational philosophy.

⁹ O'Neill, Ideologies, p.180.

¹⁰ Michael Oakeshott, Rationalism in Politics, (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1962), p.172

¹¹ Ibid., p.175.

¹² Ibid.

Thus, progressive educational reform, especially radical educational anarchism which is loosely based on the liberal principles of psychological individualism, would be counter-productive to maintaining the social structure, in the Tory mind, and should not be encouraged.¹³ Instead, change should come about naturally, without governmental intervention and should be contained within the structure of what O'Neill terms as "established frames of reference."¹⁴

For the Tory and the laissez-faire Conservative, classroom demeanour is based on "Locke's notion of freedom (as) the power to act in accordance with choice."¹⁵ It is the justification of authority for the sake of freedom which is central to Bantock's position in Freedom and Authority in Education, which is based on authoritative intervention and the denial of a child's apparent freedom in school in order to allow him freedom later on. Indicative of such an attitude is J.P. White's statement that "the principle of liberty may be overridden, to prevent harm to both the pupils themselves and to men in general", which implies the conservative view that educating the individual

¹³ O'Neill, Ideologies, p.287.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.180.

¹⁵ Howard Ozman and Samuel Craver, Philosophical Foundations of Education, (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1976), p.75.

serves a larger social need. Bantock argues further in support of Locke's philosophy that there is "a general need for authoritative intervention in order to free children within certain disciplines, so that they can take responsible choices."¹⁶ On this point, Bantock agrees with White's proposal which calls for a predetermined compulsory curriculum (basic if you like) that is taught in the traditional mode, alternated with, or accompanied by, an optional program that is available to the individual, and which is tutored by the professional. Hence, the task of schooling is to bring people to a readiness for autonomous choice. For Bantock the essential component is that the material necessary for man's development within society would be compulsory. The theme is central to Tory and laissez-faire Conservative educational theory.

The "return to basics" slogan in this instance means a return to the discipline of traditional type schooling, at least with respect of teaching what is determined to be essential subject matter. The reasoning behind a return to a compulsory curriculum, and disciplined learning, is contained in the assertion that individual freedom is guaranteed in our society, and that education has the responsibility

¹⁶J.P. White, Towards a Compulsory Curriculum (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul Ltd., 1973), p.35, and, G.H. Bantock, Dilemmas of the Curriculum, (Bungay, Suffolk: The Chaucer Press, 1981), p.59.

of preparing the immature so that they may be capable of exercising that freedom as adults.

Social Darwinists and Hegelian Conservatives

For the Social Darwinist the real problem existing in society is that man is basically deficient in the sense that although individual intelligence is real, "it exists primarily as a function of a more encompassing natural evolution (including the evolution of social structure and processes.)"¹⁷ Thus man is not individually capable of his fullest potential until, as O'Neill points out, "the entire process of natural evolution creates the kinds of social and individual consciousness that make the expression of certain kinds of ideas and actions possible."¹⁸ This pessimism is short-term, however, in that it may be overcome by viewing the individual in "evolutionary perspective", which sees "man as involved in a competitive struggle for survival and success in a world characterized by continuing conflict."¹⁹

¹⁷ O'Neill, Ideologies, p.184.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

As O'Neill further explains:

this conflict is seen as ultimately eventuating in the natural selection of individuals and institutions which will have gone beyond the necessity for the old paradigm altogether, having perfected new processes based on a heightened capacity for national cooperation.²⁰

Darwin's cosmological theory popularized the belief that the evolution of the universe and life on this planet are themselves in a state of development, which as Ozman and Craver note, "rejected any notion which saw reality as fixed or capable of being comprehended in its entirety by intellect....(which) came to mean that reality was open-ended, in process, with no fixed end."²¹ This reasoning is rooted in the pragmatic and scientific approach to education which linked man's "biological and social" development, and which ironically, from an educational conservative viewpoint, formed the basis of John Dewey's concept of experience as inseparable from nature, and from which much of his educational philosophy was developed. Consistent with educational conservative ideology, the philosophy of pragmatism which, as Ozman and Craver indicate, "seeks to examine traditional ways of thinking and doing, and where possible and desirable, to reconstruct man's approach to life more in line with the

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ozman and Craver, Foundations, p.80.

necessities of today's human condition", is essential to any theory of educational reform. However, educational pragmatism, fashioned from Social-Darwinist theory, is not confined to scientific pragmatism, but is rather concerned with the pragmatic in an "esthetic, or moral, or even religious" sense.²² It is this pragmatic approach to the teaching of moral values that, in large, differentiates the secular conservative belief from the folklore based morality common to the fundamentalist point of view.

For the Social-Darwinist then, education should be pragmatic, extending to moral issues as well as scientific, and rooted in the belief that existing moral assumptions can and should be ignored if they prove to be false when tested in human experience. However, this pragmatism differs from Dewey's interpretation in the sense that it is based on what will be rather than what is apparent in contemporary society's need for conflict inspired change. This inductive characteristic of pragmatism, which, as Ozman and Craver state, "insists on a rigorous application (and) which yields objective and verifiable data", from which individual intelligence develops, is essential to the social-Darwinist educational concept.²³ The individual is bonded to society

²² Ibid., p.70 and p.72.

²³ Ibid., p.70.

in similar fashion to the way in which George Herbert Mead viewed the self as social, meaning that individuals did not learn to be social, but rather that they had to be social in order to learn.²⁴ The development of individual intelligence for the Social-Darwinist is based on the premise that the individual is a component of the society that tests the scientific and moral issues from which intelligent learning is developed.

Hegelian conservative educational views are best characterized by Durkheim who, as a sociologist, expressed his educational theories to a greater extent than did Hegel.

To understand Durkheim's educational philosophy it is important to note that Durkheim views the role of education, within a society, as reactive. In Education and Sociology for example, he refers to seventeenth century France as having a stable society with therefore no contestation or doubt over the established educational system.²⁵ Likewise, in his introduction to secular morality in Moral Education Durkheim reveals that education "must supply answers to vital needs and that, "when a change in the environment demands appropriate action of us (educators), our hand is forced".²⁶

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 72-73.

²⁵ Emile Durkheim, Education and Sociology, Translated by Sherwood D. Fox (New York: The Free Press, 1956), p.133.

²⁶ Emile Durkheim, Moral Education (New York: The Free Press, 1961), p.1.

If education is reactive to society, it is so to what end? First, Durkheim views education as a variety of distinctions representing the varied moral beliefs and practices found within any given society or individual dictated by the particular environment contained within the given social structure.

These educational variations imply the distinctive traits handed down through generations and which signify characteristics particular to a society. In fact, for Durkheim, society establishes an "ideal of what man should be, which includes the intellectual point of view as well as the physical and moral", and which is diversified to the degree that the society is divided by class or from a more contemporary standpoint, regions of urban social development.²⁷ The function of education is thus:

to arouse the child: (1) a certain number of physical and mental states that the society to which, he belongs considers should not be lacking in any of its members; and (2) certain physical and mental states that the particular social group (caste, class, family, profession) considers, equally, ought to be found among all those who make it up.²⁸

²⁷ Durkheim, Sociology, p.70.

²⁸ Ibid.

These ideals, however, are established through the evolution of a society by the interaction, or cooperation, of individuals possessing the various traits necessary for a society to survive. It is in fact, a society that has evolved from individual acceptance of certain guiding principles deemed necessary for the common good. As Durkheim explains:

society can only survive if there exists among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity; education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the child, from the beginning, the essential similarities that collective life demands.²⁹

As well, it is the responsibility of education to ensure that the individual diversity needed within the make-up of society is maintained by being itself diverse in the reflection of the social structure from which it operates. Education, according to Durkheim, will react within a society which has eliminated them altogether by becoming more uniform.³⁰ Its aim is to regenerate society by dispensing the will and knowledge of adults to the young and immature, without negating the creative quality possessed by man, which is essential to the future.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., p.71.

The method of instruction, or the interaction between teacher and pupil, is for Durkheim, a matter of legitimate authority, not such as that which comes with the teacher/pupil relationship, but rather that which is legitimated by the teacher's "inner belief in his task, and in the importance of his task".³¹ It is a moral, non-repressive authority to which the child submits, consisting of "a certain moral ascendancy". It is authority seen as compatible with liberty within the belief that "the authority of the teacher is only one aspect of the authority of duty and of reason", the understanding of the latter being essential to the child becoming "master of (him)self — knowing how to act with reason and to do (his) duty".³²

Conservative Educational Critics

H.G. Rickover

Though not a professional educator, H.G. Rickover has most assuredly been outspoken in his criticism of American education. Nor has he abstained from offering solutions to what he believes are educational inadequacies in what he terms as "our first line of defense". Rickover's approach to getting education on the right track is straightforward and to the point. He is not opposed to

³¹ Ibid., p.89.

³² Ibid., p.90

borrowing from someone else if what they have can help, (he finds the Swiss educational system superior), nor is he against learning from the competition, in this case, the Soviet Union. However, essentially what he says is that education is necessary for the preservation of our freedom, and that the so-called progressivist movement is a failure. In his words,

Today we must have schools which develop in all children — talented, average, and below average — the highest level of intellectual competence of which they are capable; schools that help young people to understand the complex world of today and how it came to be what it is. This means that our schools must return to the traditional task of formal education in Western civilization — transmission of the nation's cultural heritage, and preparation for life through rigorous training of young minds to think clearly, logically, and independently.³³

Rickover, like Rafferty, places much of the blame for educational deterioration on John Dewey, or at least on those who, as Rafferty puts it, "swallowed" Dewey's line of reasoning. However, Rickover stops short of chastizing Dewey totally. In fact, he lauds many of the progressive classroom techniques inspired by Dewey which fostered the demise of an "altogether too autocratic a relationship between teacher and pupil" and for "bringing a relaxed and

³³ Hyman G. Rickover, Education and Freedom (New York; E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1959) pp.17-18.

friendly atmosphere into our classrooms".³⁴ In Rickover's view though, Dewey went too far in two areas that caused serious harm in the school. First, Dewey's dislike of school discipline, which helped establish a much less authoritarian classroom approach, did not produce the self-discipline that formal education should have. In fact, Rickover views the problem of juvenile delinquency and eroding moral values of youth as a direct and negative result of the adherence to this Deweyan principle.

Second, the progressivist attitude towards a curriculum based on the child's interest has, as Rafferty also complained, "led to substitution of know-how subjects for solid learning and to the widespread tendency of schools to instruct pupils in the minutiae of daily life".³⁵

What Rickover is suggesting is an abandonment of what he considers to be frill courses within the school curriculum. He views the function of the school as developing intellect, however, as he outlines in his 1962 appearance before the Congressional Committee on Appropriations, the school should share this intellectual

³⁴ Ibid., p.138.

³⁵ Ibid., p.139

development with the home, church, and community, concentrating on twelve "basic" subjects ranging from English and Mathematics through to and including History and Geography.³⁶ Rickover goes on to explain his pessimism concerning efforts to improve American education as being founded in the fact that this reform is being led by "the very people who got us into the educational crisis with their life-adjustment training and their progressive theories".³⁷ For him, education needs reform starting with the administration, whose responsibility it is to prepare teachers, and select curriculum. An entire reversal of thinking is needed, save that he does not suggest ignoring the progressive influence in classroom technique that helped encourage the development of the individual as opposed to the subservience of traditional teaching.

Arthur Bestor

Like Rickover, Arthur Bestor is considered to be an educational conservative by O'Neill. In his book Contemporary Critics of Education Howard Ozman introduces

³⁶ House of Representatives, Education for all Children, Hearings before the Committee on Appropriations 87th Congress, 2nd Session, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1962.

³⁷ Ibid., p.153.

Bestor as one who

has often been referred to as a "gadfly" of American education, and he has achieved notoriety for his opposition to "frills" in place of sound academic programs in our schools. Bestor has been outspoken in his criticism of Progressivism and "professional educators". He has been praised as a crusader, and damned as a troublemaker. He believes that at the present time our schools seriously lack any direction, and that the goal of all education should be the development of man's intellectual powers.³⁸

Bestor outlines his educational philosophy in his own introduction to The Restoration of Learning. His belief in universality of educational opportunity in American democracy is prefaced here by his conviction that "in extending educational opportunity, we are honourbound not to lower its quality, for, if we do, we are defrauding the common man of the very intellectual and cultural privileges we have promised, at long last, to open up to him".³⁹ The educational quality to be preserved in Bestor's ideal is academic, or interchangeably intellectual freedom, which he views as synonymous with liberal education. His criticism is directed at teacher training institutions and the educational associations that have as bases, a progressivist

³⁸ Howard Ozman, Contemporary Critics of Education, Danville, Illinois: The Interstate Printers and Publishers, Inc., 1970), p.21.

³⁹ Arthur Bestor, The Restoration of Learning (New York: Alfred E. Knopf, 1956), p.5.

philosophy that Bestor regards as being "anti-intellectual and in the last analysis, anti-democratic".⁴⁰ For him the central question concerns the direction that education is to take if democratic freedom is to be maintained. The most disconcerting educational scenario to Bestor is the one in which support among educationists for debilitating educational theory has not yet reached its full effect and that as more and more traditional teachers leave they are replaced by those indoctrinated through reward by superintendents of the anti-intellectual, thus anti-democratic, ideal.⁴¹

Unlike some liberal, radical, and even other conservative educational critics, Bestor praises the American educational system for helping to make America what it is today. However, he believes not only that education today has its faults, but also that, as an educator it is his duty to expose the imperfections to the American public and to enlist its support in redirecting the course of educational philosophy by outlining sound principles upon which this redirection should be based.

First, Bestor argues that education must be aimed at developing man to his highest intellectual level through disciplined intellectual training by teachers qualified and

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.4

⁴¹ Ibid., p.6.

capable of doing the job. As he states,

if a man does not believe that thorough intellectual training is valuable and appropriate for every citizen, then he ought not to masquerade as a democratic educator, for he is in effect admitting that the opponents of democracy were right when they said that the masses of men were uneducable in the ordinary sense of the word and ought only to be adjusted to the mindless kind of life they were bound to lead.⁴²

Second, he opines that educational reform should include squeezing out the frills of "consumer" and "life-adjustment" education from the school day and allowing teachers to concentrate on better training in the "three R's". As Bestor says, "the persistent cry that schools should provide more adequate training in the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic can be interpreted in no other way than as a mandate from the public to devote the full resources of the public schools to improved and intensified training in the fundamental intellectual disciplines."⁴³

Third, Bestor believes that education at every level should strive to produce the intellectually disciplined mind essential to the rational decision making necessary for the preservation of a democratic society. Although as Barrow and Woods imply, in one sense of the word all men are

⁴²Ibid., p.22

⁴³Ibid., p.23.

rational, and therefore it seems odd to argue that education should be concerned to make men rational; rationality, in a social democracy, is, according to Bestor, the ability to make responsible decisions that consequently benefit that society.

Fourth, Bestor declares "that schools exist to teach something" which is diametrically opposed to professional educationists who claim "we don't teach subjects....we teach children".⁴⁴ Of import here is the dependence of education upon good teaching. Revitalizing basic intellectual curricula is not a denial of this fact but is rather a condition reliant upon it, which in accord will produce the desirable educational objective. As Bestor writes,

The issue in American education today is not drawn between those who believe in good teaching but are indifferent to scholarship. The issue is drawn between those who believe that good teaching should be directed to sound intellectual ends, and those who are content to dethrone intellectual values and cultivate the techniques of teaching for their sake, in an intellectual and cultural vacuum".⁴⁵

In answering the question of "return to basics" both Rickover and Bestor would point to education's need to get back to a basic curriculum, including the "three R's".

⁴⁴Bestor, Arthur The Restoration of Learning, p.110.

⁴⁵Ibid., p.110-111.

Returning to basics would mean reviving the more traditional, authoritarian classroom demeanour of pre progressivist days, based on the teaching of the fundamentals necessary for teaching the young to become assets to society.

Summary

The secular conservative is concerned with a practical approach to schooling inasmuch as it is essential to the preservation of the society. As O'Neill outlines in his summation of "secular educational conservatism",

their primary concern is with the school's role in preserving and transmitting established social institutions and processes, and they seek to propagate the sort of information and skills that are necessary in order to ensure the individual's success within the secular society that presently exists.⁴⁶

This is not to suggest that educational conservatism maintains societal status quo. Rather this ideology enlists established intellectual and cultural institutions as bases for expanding the social structure through the nurturing of individual intellectual freedom deemed essential to the very survival of the society. In this case, the fact that we are discussing a democracy is paramount to the conservative educational thesis, as it is the development of a reasoning

⁴⁶ O'Neill, Educational Ideologies, p.201.

individual that is the essence of national survival. This aim is seen to be attained through education which is concerned primarily with intellectual development and a curriculum which focuses on practical disciplines such as "history and biological and physical sciences which are viewed as more directly relevant to the immediate problems of contemporary living".⁴⁷

Of practical import to our look at social conservatism with respect of "return to basics" is O'Neill's outline of conservative education which summarizes its application.

The social conservative inspired classroom would in fact resemble those found in the late fifties and early sixties with perhaps a touch more emphasis on progressive teaching methods to help get the message across. Teacher discretion would be encouraged with respect of how material should best be disseminated, however, teacher authority would be used to maintain classroom control.

The curriculum would emphasize "the academic over the practical and the intellectual (and) should stress basic training in the fundamental learning skills (the three R's), an overview of the basic natural sciences, physical education (including health instruction) and a relatively academic

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.199.

approach to the more conventional social sciences (American history, American political institutions, world history, and so on)."⁴⁸

In short, for the social conservative, a "return to basics" would seem to imply a return to the standard, fundamental fare of thirty years ago.

⁴⁸Ibid., p.202.

CHAPTER 5

EDUCATIONAL CONSERVATISM: AN OVERVIEW

At the outset it was maintained that the task at hand was to determine meaning for the movement which rallied to the "return to basics" slogan. The question raised was: if we are going to follow the "basics" movement, then what do we mean by "basics"? The starting point of the inquiry was a determination of the meaning for a slogan itself as put forth by Scheffler, and by Komisar and McClellan. Subsequently it was resolved to restrict the investigation of the "basics" question to the conservative educational ideologies as outlined by O'Neill.

From the literature reviewed in the middle chapters it is apparent that educational conservatism provides an assortment of ideological positions with respect of educational objectives which are reflected in conservative educational reform philosophies. As we have seen, O'Neill outlines three conservative educational ideologies which, on the surface at least, identify different educational goals. In short, O'Neill summarizes the fundamentalist educational goal as the revival and reaffirmation of the older and better ways; and that of the intellectualist as the identification, preservation and transmission of truth.

O'Neill's own assessment of the social conservative goal for education is the preservation and transmission of established patterns of social behaviour.¹

However, as distinctly different as O'Neill's conservatives might be, there exists within each certain generalities which identify them as conservatives. For example, conservative criticism of American education in the 1950's, which is basic to the conservative resurgence in the call for educational reform today, was aimed at what conservatives saw then as the negative influence of progressivism. The criticism of education came from general conservative views which Wingo summarizes as follows:

- (1) Americans have largely lost sight of the true purpose of education, which is intellectual training.
- (2) The rigor of our educational programs and teaching methods has been declining steadily for several decades.
- (3) We have failed to provide for our brightest children because instruction has been pitched at the level of the mediocre student and the ablest have been systematically deprived in the name of "equality" and democracy.
- (4) The curricula of our schools have been diluted by the introduction of courses consisting largely of "life adjustment" trivia, and these worthless substitutes have crowded out the historic disciplines that are the core of a true education.

¹William F. O'Neill, Educational Ideologies, (Santa Monica, California: Goodyear Publishing Company, Inc., 1981), p.297.

(5) Intellectual achievement has declined steadily among American students. (6) The schools are failing to meet their obligations to American youth and to American society.²

This reaction to the influx of progressivism in education in the 50's is apparent in conservative educational ideology today as a synthesis of conservative views aimed at educational reform. These views are contained within the theory of essentialism which is the thread that weaves its way consistently through O'Neill's conservative demarcations.

Of particular import to essentialist theory is the primacy of the free public school system within our democracy. As Conant makes clear:

To use taxpayers' money to assist private schools is to suggest that American society uses its own hands to destroy itself. If one accepts the ideal of a democratic, fluid society with a minimum of class distinction, the maximum of fluidity, the maximum of understanding between different vocational groups, then the ideal secondary school is a comprehensive public highschool.³

Justification for Conant's declaration, that a public school system is indispensable to American democracy and vice versa,

²G. Max Wingo, Philosophies of Education: An Introduction (Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Company, 1974), pp.51-52.

³James Bryant Conant, Education and Liberty 4th printing (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965), p.81

comes from Kandel who proclaimed, in the 1930's, that:

In the same sense that society is prior to the individual, the social order is prior to the school. As a profession, we may have ambitions to do more than this — to criticize the existing order, to help build a better future, but the fact is inescapable that the school is the servant of society.⁴

The relationship between Conant's public school system and Kandel's view of the role of the school in society is evident in O'Neill's educational conservatism, though it bears explanation. As Wingo states, conservatives share the view that, from the standpoint of the individual, "the purpose of education is intellectual discipline and moral discipline, and these two are intimately related. From the standpoint of society, the purpose is to transmit the essential portion of the total heritage to all who come to school."⁵ For some, like T.S. Eliot and Nock, equality in education is a false ideal that cannot be attained. It was Eliot's claim that intellectual discipline should be the reserve of "a hereditary aristocracy that would guide and direct the community"; while Nock insisted that "because not everyone is educable to the same degree, intellectual education should be segregated from instruction and be provided

⁴ Issac L. Kandel "Can the School Build a New Social Order?" Kadelpian Review 12 (January 1933) pp.147-152, quoted in Wingo, Philosophies, p.61.

⁵ Wingo, Philosophies, p.61.

by private, independent schools".⁶ However, in supporting Eliot and Nock as to the importance of a liberal education for securing the future of American society, Hutchins stops short of accepting that educational equality is a false ideal, preferring instead to suggest educational reform be aimed at providing a basic liberal education for all.⁷ Hutchins' view of educational equality is put into perspective by Adler. As Mason points out:

Mortimer Adler interprets the American tradition of equality in proportional terms. He interprets the maxim that all men are born equal to mean that they should be treated equally. Then he argues that since there are natural inequalities among men, "equal treatment" must mean treatment proportional to the natural inequalities.⁸

The overview of educational conservatism then establishes that educational reform should be based upon a return to traditional, basic schooling purveyed by a public school system and provided for all citizens. It is exactly this that was referred to earlier in the National Commission on Education's report: A Nation at Risk. How this conservative proclamation interprets "return to basics" is evidenced in two ways. First, as has already been noted, the

⁶ Robert E. Mason, Contemporary Educational Theory, (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1972), p.55.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., p.52

report reflects the theories of such educational conservatives as Rykover and Conant, and outlines an educational reform platform which leans towards O'Neill's social conservative position on his conservative ideological spectrum. Second, and in some ways more explicitly, the meaning for "return to basics" is expressed within the criticism initiated by the report. Hall, for example, cautions that "proposals for a return to the traditional and basic curriculum of the past need to be examined in terms of why curriculum and instruction were changed and how alternatives relate to excellence in education for the future". In his words, "the basics were stultifying and deadening; they stifled curiosity, creativity and significance; and they did not challenge students and muted the urge to learn".⁹

Critics argue that the report has misread the reasons for the apparent failure of education and that this error is reflected in recommendations that revert to a more traditional educational situation. As Slavin states, "We cannot turn back to the clock to deal with the problem; rather, we must confront the new realities".¹⁰ He sees the problem as the failure to provide the resources to adequately prepare

⁹Peter M. Hall, "Contemporary Educational Reform", The Elementary School Journal 84 #2 (November 1983): 146.

¹⁰Robert E. Slavin, "Contemporary Educational Reform", The Elementary School Journal 84 #2 (November 1983): 138.

enough teachers as to "when and how to use a variety of specific, effective procedures for teaching basic skills."¹¹ This view, that it is a waste of time to return to a "basic" curriculum while ignoring how it is to be taught, is shared by Bossert who notes that:

The Commission's recommendations seem to reinforce a very traditional view of instruction at all grade levels that has been typified by "back to basics" and "direct instruction" approaches that rely solely on textbooks, workshops and recitation. Perhaps the greatest error in these approaches, one that is reflected in the Commission's inattention to teaching methods, is a faith that the content of the curriculum is the most important feature of instruction.¹²

Others are critical of the report because they do not see the urgency for educational reform in the first place. Unlike Adler and his Paideia Group, who make clear the opportunity for educational reform may not come again, some believe the need for change is contained by what they refer to as the practical perspective, or the reality, of American education, which is seen to alternate between traditionalism and progressivism while avoiding the radical side of each. As Kaestle metaphorically points out:

¹¹ Ibid., p.136

¹² Steven T. Bossert, "Contemporary Educational Reforms", The Elementary School Journal 84 #2 (November 1983): 138.

The rhetoric of educational reform suggests that schools are like sailboats, veering off on radical tacks toward more centralized authority, increased bureaucracy, and tougher standards at one time, then toward imbecilic coddling of children at another. But most real schools don't change that much or that fast.¹³

This cynical view of interest in educational reform is shared by Patricia Cross who warns against supporting contemporary reformers who:

definitely want each child to master the basic and higher level learning skills (while) paying little attention to the creation of an atmosphere that stimulates enthusiasm for learning. Nor do they accord more than a modicum of patience and interest to slow learners, who will almost certainly constitute one of the greatest problems of the learning society in the 21st century.¹⁴

Although much of the criticism noted is directed at the need for improved teacher training and the misinterpretation of what problems exist in education today, the commonality of each is the understanding that the Commission identifies "return to basics" as a return to traditional, authoritarian, schooling. The recommendations are perceived to incorporate the "three R's, rote, and discipline, with high moral standards and respect for law and order, exemplifying the conservative notion of the role of the school

¹³ Carl Kaestle, "Education Reform and the Swinging Pendulum", Phi Delta Kappan 66 #6 (February 1985): 423.

¹⁴ K. Patricia Cross, "The Rising Tide of School Reform Reports", Phi Delta Kappan 66 #3 (November 1984): 172.

in society. The report represents a particular conservative ideological position with respect of what is meant by "basics", but it is, as has already been seen, only one of several conservative perspectives.

The Commission represents what O'Neill has identified as the secular conservative opinion with respect of what shape educational reform should take. It does not reflect the notion, as the Paideia Group does, that knowledge is an end in itself. Nor does it promote the "populist" belief that the standard for moral values is to be found in the folklore of American frontierism. What the report does do is to reflect the very properties of the "return to basics" movement itself, which in Gardner's analysis in the negative sense oversimplifies the reform issue, while on the plus side attracting attention to problems at hand and the urgent need for attention. Gardner warns that "we could adapt the Commission's recommendations and mislead ourselves into thinking that much has been accomplished when little has".¹⁵ It is in fact the very same problem facing those who express educational reform in the slogan: "return to basics". In the ceremonial sense of Komisar and McClellan, the slogan attracts attention

¹⁵ William F. Gardner, Journal of Teacher Education XXXV #1 (January-February 1984): 13-15.

to the plight of education and the need for change. However, the use of the slogan itself oversimplifies what we have seen to be a very complex term indeed. We know too that from the criticism previously noted the term "basics" is restricted and oversimplified to the point of representing the distinct traditional school of decades ago, including curriculum, untrained teachers and all that was responsible for the rise of progressivism in the first place. Surely this is not the intention of those who call for reform in the tradition of conservatism.

What Does Basics Mean?

Perhaps the question of what basics means needs not to be answered definitely after all in order for us to determine whether or not to jump aboard the bandwagon. It may be that we should not make the same mistakes that elicited negative criticism of the Commission's report. The prudent reaction to the question of "basics" might well be to allow that the complexity of the term, in the context of education, not be disturbed by attempting to identify a simplistic meaning for us to judge. It seems to make good sense to accept that, as is the case with most educational terminology, particular circumstances and philosophies create unique definitions. We can, however, gain insight as to what "basics" means by summarizing the differences

and similarities apparent in conservatism.

Generally speaking, the differences in the three conservative ideologies lie in the area of subject matter and in the philosophical characteristics of what education should be. Similarities are generally found in the practical approach to schooling, the method of instruction, and the maintenance of established moral standards. For example, fundamentalism is,

anti-intellectual in the sense that it seeks to minimize philosophical and/or intellectual considerations, and tends to ground contentions upon a relatively uncritical acceptance of either revealed truth or established social consensus ("common sense"). In its political expression, the reactionary conservative advocates a return to the real or imagined virtues of the past".¹⁶

For the fundamentalist a "return to basics" would be a return to the pure moral standards found in the folklore of emerging American society. The role of education is to return society to its virtuous past by providing the instruction and guidance necessary to prevent the child from adhering to his natural tendency which is "predisposed toward error and evil".¹⁷

¹⁶O'Neill, Ideologies, p.363.

¹⁷Ibid., p.150.

Classroom methods would emphasize traditional procedures.

In contrast, intellectualism,

emerges out of those expressions of political conservatism that are based upon relatively rigid and fundamentally authoritarian philosophical systems of thought. In general philosophical conservatism seeks to change existing political (including educational) practices in order to make them conform more perfectly to some established and essentially unvarying intellectual ideal.¹⁸

In the intellectualist's view "return to basics" means that, we already possess what is needed for education in the Great Books of the liberal arts tradition. It means as well providing equal educational opportunity for all to "help each human being become as good as he is capable of becoming", through provision of "a course of study designed to produce an intellectual elite (which is also) a course of study in which all are carried as far as their abilities will allow", measured in terms of truth, goodness and beauty.¹⁹

The child, unlike in the fundamentalist view, is seen as being "predisposed toward wisdom and virtue" and the nature of the curriculum reflects this positive perception.²⁰ However, as in fundamentalism, classroom emphasis is placed in traditional procedures, with the exception

¹⁸ Ibid., p.364.

¹⁹ Mason, Contemporary, p.51-

²⁰ O'Neill, Ideologies, p.172.

of the Paideia Group proposal.

The social conservative

is concerned with the necessity of preserving and transmitting existing beliefs and practices as a way of ensuring both social survival and personal effectiveness. (Social) conservatism espouses adherence to time-tested cultural institutions and processes, coupled with a deep respect for law and order, as a basis for any sort of constructive social change.²¹

In terms of the question at hand the social conservative sees "return to basics" as the study of the established social values, emphasizing cultural stability, and based on ethnocentric social traditions.²² The child is viewed as "requiring firm guidance and sound instruction before he becomes effectively socialized as a responsible citizen."²³ Classroom methods emphasize "a practical compromise between traditional and progressive-classroom procedures", in much the same manner as Adler's Paideia Group proposal suggests.²⁴

The New Conservatives

If it is acceptable to evaluate "return to basics" in terms of educational conservatism then it follows that understanding the new conservatism in America will be helpful

²¹ Ibid., p.364.

²² Ibid., p.202.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

in that evaluation. However, conservatism is itself not uniform therefore, the meaning for "return to basics" must be sought by referring to particular conservative philosophies. The groundwork for America's new conservatism is found in the conservation of liberty. As Rossiter notes:

The new conservative in America, like good conservatives everywhere in the West, will pledge himself firmly to the defense of liberty. If it is for the liberal to expand liberty, it is for the conservative to defend it, especially against experiments that appear to sacrifice real liberty for specious equality. He can do this by prizing the old freedoms to over the new freedoms from, by emphasizing the reciprocity of rights and duties, and by reminding his fellow citizens that their liberty will rise and fall with the level of faith, virtue, and knowledge, animation, and industry they display in their daily lives. As a conservative, he will pay particular attention to three great institutional complexes that he has always counted on to support ordered liberty: the churches, the schools and colleges, and the economic system.²⁵

Rossiter's identification of the new conservative was put forth in 1955. He was wrong in his assessment that "the influence of conservatism on American education is certain to be greater in the years ahead", however, it appears that this judgement may be true some thirty years later.²⁶ In any case the conservative influence in present

²⁵Clinton Rossiter, Conservatism in America (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), pp.281-282.

²⁶Ibid., p.283.

day educational reform comes in response to the failure of the progressivism of the 60's and 70's and again raises Rossiter's question as to what kind of conservatism is going to gain prominence. In Rossiter's words,

The answer depends largely on the wisdom and resolution of the new conservatism. Its leaders must represent the interests of the whole community and refuse to succumb to the pressures of organized minorities. They must guard our schools against the extremists of the Right as well as of the Left; shield our colleges against "the revolt of the primitives"; and seek earnestly to narrow the distressing rift between the academic and the business worlds.²⁷

American education has indeed always been conservative. Education has resisted the radical philosophies of progressivism, and should not be tempted again by reaching to extreme conservative ends. Even liberal minded reformers cite the need for the transmission of knowledge and academic disciplines as an essential component to the self-realization of man in the complex American society of today. As Chanan and Gilchrist point out,

If we are concerned that people should be equipped, psychologically and in their skills, to do several different jobs, we are far more likely to get satisfaction from the traditional curriculum in some form, however rationalized and reevaluated. If this is all

²⁷ Ibid.

that the aim of deschooling or progressive education amounts to, it is a miserably narrow aim compared even with that of traditional schooling, namely to equip a person with knowledge which will enable him to understand any situation.²⁸

From what we have already seen the conservative views man as a composite of good and evil. As Rossiter notes:

If educated properly, placed in a favourable environment, and held in restraint by tradition and authority, he may display innate qualities of rationality, sociability, industry, decency, and love of liberty. Never, no matter how he is educated or situated or restrained, will he throw off completely his other innate qualities of irrationality, selfishness, laziness, depravity and corruptibility.²⁹

Educational reform, from a conservative perspective, must incorporate the authority and discipline of traditionalism with the successful teaching methods of progressivism. In promoting "basics" it must not deny the contribution of progressivism to changing the staid manner of the 1950's classroom, which encouraged acceptance and discouraged curiosity. If we are to accept the need to "return to basics" as a legitimate educational reform, then we must at least define the aim of education before attempting to define "basics". In searching for a definable educational objective

²⁸ Gabriel Chanan and Linda Gilchrist, What School Is For (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1974), p.5.

²⁹ Rossiter, Conservatism, p.21.

which embodies the characteristics of the different conservative educational ideologies previously discussed, and which respects the task of the new conservative, one might backtrack to the 1940's and reflect upon the words of Maritain who reasons that;

The aim of education...is to guide man in the evolving dynamism through which he shapes himself as a human person — armed with knowledge, strength of judgement, and moral virtues — while at the same time conveying to him the spiritual heritage of the nation and the civilization in which he is involved, and preserving in this way the century-old achievements of generations. The utilitarian aspect of education — which enables the youth to get a job and make a living — must surely not be disregarded, for the children of man are not made for aristocratic leisure. But this practical aim is best provided by the general human capacities developed, and the ulterior specialized training which may be required must never imperil the essential aim of education.³⁰

The practice of Western intellectual tradition is what gives man the ability to reason, to develop his mind to the fullest potential, and thus to equip him to best attain the goal of self-realization. The new conservative must be aware that the development of reason in man is essential to

³⁰ Jacques Maritain, Education at the Crossroads, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943), p.10, quoted in Mason, Contemporary, p.43.

his understanding the world in which he lives. To be prepared for educational reform, which accepts the pragmatism of our economic society, developed through the knowledge and wisdom of the liberal arts tradition, the new conservative must define the role of education to handle the task.

In terms of "basics" the meaning here is clear. The elementary school should: (1) foster in the child that which makes it possible for a mature life ruled by reason, (2) teach self-discipline and good moral habits, (3) direct moral virtue through the structuring of habits, and (4) introduce the first steps of mastery of the tools of learning.³¹

The role of secondary schooling should be to, (1) teach language and reading, (2) help the student read meaningfully, i.e., to reason with the book and think about its issues, (3) to teach mathematics, philosophy, history, natural science, literature, and the fine arts in order to refine the liberal discipline, (5) to help the learner understand the content of the Great Books so that he may develop cultural and intellectual roots.³²

³¹Mason, Contemporary, pp. 43-44.

³²Ibid., pp. 44-47.

More directly, Adler puts the aims and obligations of basic schooling into this perspective. First, in ascending order of importance, the objectives of "basic" schooling are:

(1) preparation for earning a living; (2) preparation for the duties of citizenship in a democracy, in which the citizens are the ruling class and holders of public office; and (3) preparation for self-development, which cannot occur without continued learning and personal growth during maturity after all schooling, basic and advanced has been completed.³³

Second, to fulfill its obligation "basic" school must:

(1) give the young an introduction to the world of learning; (2) give them all the skills of learning; and (3) give them the incentives and the stimulation to continue learning without end after schooling is ended.³⁴

For Adler and the Paideia Group it has been the failure of "basic" schooling which has prevented colleges and universities from achieving their main purposes, namely: (1) "preparation for a vocation that requires specialized knowledge and technical training"; and (2) "the pursuit of general learning itself by students who are older and can build on their basic schooling, to do more advanced work".³⁵

³³ Mortimer J. Adler, Paideia Problems and Possibilities (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1983), p.8.

³⁴ Ibid., p.9.

³⁵ Mortimer J. Adler, The Paideia Proposal, (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1982), pp.70-71.

The Need for Quality Teachers

Finally, it must be mentioned again that a common criticism of education is the lack of quality teachers. In Paideia it is thought that teachers would have to be trained specifically for that program because, (although)

there are and always will be a relatively small number of highly gifted, strongly motivated teachers who manage, in spite of all adverse conditions, to perform creditably, even magnificently; that number is far from enough to achieve the desired quality of teaching for all.³⁶

As well a 1966 study by the United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare investigating the equality of educational opportunity for minorities concluded that unequal educational opportunity, for blacks in particular, was a direct result of inferior teaching.³⁷

Regardless of what curriculum is designed, and regardless of what authoritative intervention is applied; a "return to basics" education, if desired, cannot be accomplished without first providing for the means of developing enough qualified teachers to handle the task. If this is not first done, educational reform, in whatever shape or form it takes, will be doomed to failure.

³⁶ Ibid., p.57.

³⁷ U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Equality of Educational Opportunity, by James Coleman, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1966) pp.21-27.

Concluding Remarks

It has not been the intention here to determine a particular meaning for the "basics" slogan. Rather, this paper is an attempt to provide insight into the various possible interpretations that may be given to the "return to basics" slogan, and to the movement it inspired. It is thus intended to be more cautionary than prescriptive, although one may perhaps be influenced by a particular philosophy which puts into words what one may already believe to be the ideal solution to education's needs. The Paideia Group proposal, for example, is a most concise, and contemporary, outline of what educational reform should be. It leaves no detail to chance in its recommendation for educational objectives in our democracy, and it expertly supports its claims to those who question its methods. Paideia also uniquely ignores objections to its proposal while fielding questions about its principles and methods that might well advance the proposal in favour of more widespread implementation, but this rejection reflects the urgency of the situation rather than the unwillingness to answer critics.

As was said at the outset the cry for educational reform is loud, and much of that voice is aimed at a "return to basics". Initial reaction of those who travelled

the route of elementary and secondary schooling in the 1950's and early 60's may well be one of caution against returning to an experience that for many was as unrewarding as it was inescapable. For others it may mean just that, a return to schooling as they knew it, an outright rejection of all that went on in the progressivist experience.

However, whatever our intentions regarding the future of education, two points must be made absolutely clear. First, it must be remembered that little has changed since Thorndike and Gates summarized in 1930 that,

the ultimate aim of education is to realize a condition in which human wants may be most fully satisfied. To realize this objective we must concern ourselves with methods of assisting young people to acquire knowledge, skill, moral ideals and attitudes, culture and mental power of certain kinds and in certain degrees to secure happiness, to grow, and to perfect themselves in certain ways.³⁸

However, since that time much has been said about the methods of achieving this aim and much of that can be said to be basic education.

Second, one must realize that educational terms can have quite different meanings within different philosophies and ideologies. It is not just that we must explain another's meaning of "basics" in order to establish what it

³⁸ Edward L. Thorndike and Arthur I. Gates, Elementary Principles of Education, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1930), p. 31.

is he is trying to say, it is also that we cannot accept someone else using the term without first clarifying its meaning in that particular context. The question of whether or not one should jump on the "return to basics" bandwagon may have best been answered by Adler when he reasoned that Paideia might suggest a "return to basics", provided that "basics" encompassed all that Paideia was attempting to do. One might well jump on the "basics" bandwagon if indeed the term "basics" was adaptable to a variety of interpretations. A "return to basics" slogan means nothing in itself. To have any educational value it must relate to a particular philosophy and be understood in that context.

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