

EDUCATION IN THE CLASSICAL MEDITERRANEAN WORLD

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INTRODUCTION

The following essays an examination of the nature of education in the 'World of Antiquity'. It attempts to answer how people experienced education, how they viewed it, supported it and were changed by it.

It is well at the outset to establish limits for the inquiry. The World of Antiquity, a priori, includes the cultures and civilizations bordering the Mediterranean, particularly the Eastern where grew the most active civilizations, the cultures to which twentieth century societies trace their beginnings. The time span of 1000 B.C. to the establishment of Christianity neatly brackets not only the glories of Athens and Rome, but also the changes wrought by religion, which ethic is held to be basic to Western European Civilization.

The usual terms – culture, social agency, civilization, etc. are used according to usual scholarly protocols. Education, however, the central concern of this essay needs to be defined more carefully.

Education is usually accepted as that collection of customs, duties, exercises, formal and informal arrangements by which members of a culture can be said to become assimilated. By historical, social and anthropological standards, education is the process, no matter how conducted, of acculturation.

Historians are wont to view education as the process,¹ that a culture or a civilization establishes in order to safeguard and carry on its traditions and its values. In a narrower sense, education becomes the formal process by which a child is taught those things necessary to become accepted in the world of adults and eventually function as an effective member of society.

This view is unnecessarily limiting. Central to the thesis being

explored is that education goes well beyond the formal and informal processes, and includes the total world in which the person operates and is in touch with. Further, formal, systematized education can be seen as a frequently limiting agency, that reduces, rather than enlarges a person's scope of action. (Aristotle Book VII No. 15)

For the purpose of this paper then, education is taken to be as any activity, casual or formal, directed or accidental, which tends to make the individual more sensitive to his environment, and better able to control or react to it.

I

The easiest starting point for this exploration is the self-same 'World of Antiquity' in Marrou's landmark and still definitive work: *History of Education In Antiquity*. It is convenient because his world of antiquity is coterminous with the subject area – the Mediterranean, the concern of this paper and this symposium. He writes of the same time span as well. Further, one may borrow his justification for his work for this modest essay.

Everything we have of any importance in our society, had its beginning in the Graeco-Roman world. This is especially true of education.²

Beyond academic interest, the significance of these concerns with education would be evident from the most cursory glance at headlines the world over. Whether named directly, or by implication, the assurance of a future for each of our societies, the most often accepted goal of education and educational systems, is a globally recurring theme.

After acknowledging a debt to Marrou for providing so excellent a starting point, it is necessary to indicate the departures from his form. In addition to the different usage of the term cited previously, this essay includes and gives equal weight to Hebrew culture. Further, since education is being viewed as a far more diffused process than that of historians in general and Marrou in particular, this essay does not limit itself to historical 'record' alone, but includes the writings and traditions extant at the times, including scriptures, and the epics as well poetry among its sources.

Lastly, in addition to the historical perspective, the topic will be examined from the point of view of evolution and social change. The intrinsic nature of education – that of the changing individual, his growth and development, social and intellectual is also considered.

It seems most assuredly true that the dramas of yesterday are constantly reenacted with only changes in scenery and in dramatic personae.

II

Man shares with all other organisms, a need to protect and prolong life; to procreate and continue the species. Man differs from all others – at least according to what science can thus far determine, in that he is aware of himself and his eventual death. While unable to achieve immortality, he has managed to not only ensure his continuity but simultaneously, increase his chances. While true for man as individual, this is even truer for the societies he has designed. He has established additional means beside self reproduction to protect life and expand his kind and his culture – his kith and kin. Economics, bureaucracies, armies, family and social organisations are among the agencies that evolved and have been constantly improved to feed, protect and continue specie and culture. Any living organism can be born, grow and mature, given a set of environmental factors over which it has little or no control. Man cannot. Left by himself, he would hardly survive birth. He cannot grow without the social organization of the family to provide for him. With only limited control of his environment, he can grow, but not mature, without the intervention of the family as well as other social agencies. He is not fully a member of society until his growth and maturity are shaped into molds and behaviors that form the value systems of his culture, necessitating a degree of interaction with and control of his natural as well as social environment.

These interventions, by the family and other social agencies are the formalized aspects of his education. From the very earliest of societies:

... hunting is a set of ways of life. It involves division of labor ... sharing according to custom ... planning ... knowledge of many species, ... areas ... technical skills.³

Clearly, man learns by imitation. From the earliest that he was able, he learned the rudiments from observing his elders and then assumed or was given responsibilities as he was able to discharge them. The games of childhood, his very play included elements of adult behavior be it hunter or warrior – (or today's jet pilot), and was encouraged and aided by adults as part of his 'learning'.

If imitation however were the sole or even the major source of learning, then it would seem that culture would be stultified and

unchanging. The 'learning' process must include some elements either intrinsic or extrinsic that enable the learner to transcend the immediate stimulus and rather than react to it in the 'patterned' behavior common even to social insects like bees, to take bold, new, innovative, strange avenues. That this is a slow, difficult and frequently dangerous process can be seen in the fact that while man has been 'around' at least a half a million years, he was hunter for all that time save the last five or six thousand. From earliest times it was the family that was the most important and most vital element of 'education'. This remains true even today, although the technical aspects have been, for several hundred years, given over to 'Rabbis' or other teachers. Marrou, among others cite the fact that all of the child's earliest training is done by the family – even in as highly specialized and narrowly directed a culture as Sparta's. The most eloquent of 'proof' is that of Marcus Aurelius who opens his Meditations by stating:

From my grandfather Verus I learned good morals and the government of my temper.⁴

Historical references indicate convincingly that in Hebrew culture in particular as well as most Middle Eastern cultures in general, the family's educational responsibilities extended even into vocational training. As became widespread later, a person's field of endeavor – his trade – his contribution to society – was most often dictated by his family's. The sons of herders became herders themselves, children of nomads and farmers grew up to become nomads, farmers, etc. In a society with very little differentiation among its members, especially true in the Middle East, clans and whole tribes were all farmers or herdsmen or warriors.

As society became complex and needs for artisans, merchants, scribes became felt, these functions were assumed by families insuring the continuance of a skill and its refinements.

In the simpler societies of the Hebrew culture and in the earlier beginnings of Greek and Roman civilizations, whatever education was necessary, even for the specialities that the rudimentary technology was beginning to identify, was available through the family.

There occasionally appeared an individual, necessarily self taught – an astronomer, a poet, a prophet whose personal qualities and exceptional skills made him a leader or at least made people listen to him. If not killed as dangerous to the status quo, or shunned or exiled and thus lost to history and to us, he was honoured or even deified. Since he alone possessed the skill, he alone could pass it on, and the sole means of doing so was for his

pupil or pupils to go and live with him. The necessity of daily bread made this most difficult and explains why so few of the above managed to establish their skills and their names until a more complex – a surplus based society that afforded a leisure class could be supported. A Sappho, a Solomon, a Homer could achieve immortality and lend credence to the graces and achievements of an era that allowed many others to vanish into the dust of the ages.

The needs of a growingly complex society were responded to by the appearance of innovators who gave the sharpened javelin more range by adding a throwing stick; who bound layers of springy wood with sinew to make the more powerful composite bow, who noted and told others how crops grew better when planted at the right phase of the moon and better still when irrigated. These boons however were limited to those who saw them or heard about them at least until the advent of the scribe.

Until the appearance of writing in some form or other, education was essentially that gained from immediate observation and local training. Differences in language, customs, traditions, styles even in the conceptualization of the world around them must have characterised even peoples living in close proximity:

Cultural differences ... have been ... explained by diverse geographic or economic conditions ... of endlessly varying social contexts ...⁵

Histories, epics, advice, all lore transmitted by word of mouth necessarily suffered – or enjoyed a local translation and coloration. No hegemony could be imposed or achieved as long as clans and tribes, no less than nations and cultures had no permanent record to refer to. Therefore it is not surprising that the first schools as we would recognize them today were for the teaching of scribes, and even less so that the scribes, because of their unique position, transcribing, recording and transmitting the important events and knowledge of their own and of previous ages, became associated with learning and even wisdom. No doubt, the diligence required in learning the early systems of writing, hieroglyphics, pictographs etc. requiring as it did a lifetime's devotion indicated unusually apt and highly motivated pupils. For the most part, however, scribes, while enjoying a much easier life in terms of sheer fatiguing labor, and a status superior to the general population, were not regarded as particularly learned or wise. Their status did not automatically confer on them even the regard that literacy would enjoy among the illiterate. They were, except for the chief scribes, the court attendants, the chamberlains, no more

than skilled artisans.

While knowledge, wisdom, being learned and accomplished in the things that each society deemed important, ordinary literacy was not to be highly prized until much later, certainly not until writing became simplified into the twenty characters of the Phoenician, or the thirty characters of the Hebrew Alphabet which one could master in a lot less than the lifetime that earlier systems required.

This, then, is the gradual evolution of the system of education by which societies sought to insure the preservation – but not necessarily the diffusion – of the skills, crafts and knowledge it deemed important. Temples took on priests and scribes. The palace supported artists, poets, bards and musicians. Families of craftsmen passed technology on, and the family taught language, manners, tradition and values.

As each society became more complex, it stratified into classes from farmers to free holders to rulers. The role each member had to play became increasingly differentiated, and what may loosely be called teachers – tutors is a more accurate term, came into being, supported either by public funds, or by private donations.

The place where they taught was not always specialized. Of course, the temple was necessary for the training of future priests, and part of it as well as rooms in the palace were set aside for training and using scribes – astronomers, magicians, prophets or seers each were given such room as was available – for as long as they were popular, interesting, or at least useful. For the military skills that Greek societies prized, appropriate grounds were necessary and built at public expense. These provided settings for racing, javelin throwing, wrestling, dancing and the other parts of the physical curriculum that made a boy into a warrior. The values and philosophies that he needed to be imbued with – heroism, patriotism etc. were of necessity made a part of this curriculum through the recitation of poems and their accompaniment in music, and therefore, at least in the beginning, were conducted in the same setting as the physical preparations. For the rest – of whatever a child needed to be taught there were usually no specially provided places.

Throughout Asia Minor, then, the beginnings of each system of education was marked by a recognition of immediate social needs and an attempt to meet them by the provision of people and places specifically employed.

III

Social evolution resulted in two and eventually three classes.

Beginning as hunters following game, then domesticating some species and turning to nomadic and semi nomadic herdsmen and eventually to agriculture; social and cultural changes, gave rise to basic peasant societies. Differential access to resources enrich some to establish a small but powerful ruling class. Speaking of Mayan cultures, Redfield quotes Dr. Pedro Armillas:

(there became) formed two social groups ... dominant, aristocratic, ceremonial and hamlet dwelling farmers. The dominant group ... (developed) commercial and martial ... later.⁶

Having the leisure, the means and the clearest reason to do so the ruling classes established and supported the 'schools' and systems of their day.

Whenever they could spare them and could afford it,⁷ the peasants, laborers, and especially the artisans sent their children to these schools.

David, Hero of Alexandria and Euclid, came from these classes and may well have attended some schools. However the wisdom of David, Hero's steam engines and jet propulsion, Euclid's geometry did not spring from and could not have been based on so limited though rich a curriculum as was available to them. Springing from what the Greeks referred to as the demos - the ordinary people of the day, these three and the legion like them of innovators, independent thinkers, who were 'educated' in the truest sense must have had available to them much more than the tridam and quadrivium, the gymnasium and olympiads. Certainly the schools produced famous people of the day. Rhetors and advocates who were renowned in Greek and Roman worlds - but they are known to us mostly because they were noted by the Homers and Plutarchs of whom they were contemporaries. Few, if any are known because of their surviving works, unlike the men of the people who left behind them, if not their names like Democritus and Archimedes, their works - the compass, cartography, the arch, medicine, and similar pillars on which not only societies, but civilization itself is founded.

These usually nameless benefactors had a richer source, and when free, or at least able to utilize it, were able to grow in 'knowledge and wisdom'. This source was free of tuition, and not only available, but by circumstances enforced itself on all - though not many could make much use of it for much profit. This source was simply the world they lived in - their environment.

Whereas the children of patricians attended schools or had tutors who taught them, told them what to look at, for and how to look at it, the children of farmers and artisans had a whole world

of work and worry, of conflict and concern, needs and necessities thrust upon them. Where the children of the ruling classes met with other children of ruling classes, and played with them and the frequent visitors, ambassadors and other assorted nobles, and became, in addition to their own cultural patterns and skills, also fluent with similar patterns and skills of other peoples; the children and the adults of the working class, to a smaller extent the peasants' and to a larger extent the artisans', met with the people and problems of classes above and below theirs. Met with tradesmen coming from neighbouring and distant cities, with sailors from different climes. Their needs to adjust were stronger, the opportunities to do so, vastly greater. Just as today we consider the press and other media as 'educational'; and travel, 'broadening', we must take into account the press of different and often conflicting values and customs to which ordinary folk were exposed, and from which the ruling class were generally insulated. The educational system was used to give a Hellene identity, as is demonstrated by the fact that they established identical schools with identical curricula when expatriated as a means of self recognition and to maintain their Hellenism. The haphazard, unregulated 'education' of the common man in the street made him a man of the world, the very phrase we use to describe an educated person today. The end product was, though not identical, still the same man of 'virtu'.

Safa points out that this 'open community' is accompanied by:

a growing outward orientation ...

increasing importance of institutions ... banking ... trade

changing standards and aspirations ...

emphasis on status and upward mobility ...

growing inequality in the community leading to ... heterogenous

community including white collar workers, artisans ...

professionals.⁸

She continues, quoting Nash that children in open societies show a decided break with community roles and ties and indicate their willingness to risk their future in the outside world and further points out that

the schools are not seen or used as catalysts in social change, but are confined to the transmission of elementary skills, patriotism, and some minor facts about history, etc ...⁹

Education is usually viewed as a process extrinsic to the individual, that changes him into a member of a particular culture. The universality of culture itself would tend eventually to, if not

obliterate these differences, at least render them of secondary importance.¹⁰

Education however implies an intrinsically human process. It is most successful not when imposed as a 'smoothing off the rough spots', but when 'internalized', when the process is not just simply a part of the individual's daily behavior, but an awareness of it and its conscious control. Piaget writes that:

intellectual evolution requires that both mind and environment should make their contribution. This combination has, during the primitive stage, a semblance of confusion, but as mind adapts itself, it transforms it.¹¹

Education, as well as the psychophysical process itself, is not an automatic process, Since man is autonomous, he goes well beyond the 'specie specific behavior of primates. He must not only react to the environment, but interrelate with it.

Perception, basic to the psychomotor process, is not simply an awareness of the environment, a sensory impression of the world around us, but an expression of active relation to it. This 'active relationship from which the ruling classes were protected dated back to the shipping and trade of the Pharaohs, the camel caravans, the markets as well as the circuses, frequent religious observances and rituals. The world was not only made up largely of the common man in the streets. It was made, and eventually run, if not ruled, by him. It made him as much as he made it.

IV

By 1,000 B.C., then, these societies had become sufficiently complex to become differentiated into classes, at least the three broad ones of serf, freeholder including artisans, and the aristocratic ruling classes, whose privileges included that of being the warrior group. The values of this class becoming dominant, education became oriented toward their skills and ideals. The following five centuries, with varying degrees of complexity saw the establishment of a systematized approach toward the teaching of these values.

Though largely true for the entire world from the yet to be recognized Roman Empire eastward to what was to become Islam, there were sufficient variations to merit a brief survey.

Based on agriculture, Roman society counted heavily on its ties with the soil and was therefore sturdily rural and family centred.¹² The mother took complete charge, and it was her honored responsibility to look after and bring up her own children. She

began their teaching of manners and morals and the traditions that one day they would find

'lovely and splendid to die for'.

About seven, the father would assume responsibility for his sons, teaching them all that his father taught him while the girls learned domestic skills from their mother. At sixteen boys entered public life, usually under the tutelage of a friend of the family's. This apprenticeship involved actual attendance at the forum and was soon followed by at least a year of military service and its attendant training.

The more frequent, though small scaled military involvements of the fiercely independent city states of Greece made training for military service, the basic goal of education. Racing, wrestling, shotputting and similar sports, because of their direct bearing on militarily useful skills as well as toughening, so essential to their small, but effective armies, became central to the curriculum. The odes, poems and sagas that gave the life of the warrior-to-be its meaningfulness,¹³ were necessarily included. Dancing and singing were essential to the recitation of these lessons. Then there were the peripherally useful skills such as arithmetic, medicine and astronomy.

It is useful to note here two factors that romanticists often misconstrue. These are the military nature of Sparta and the place of music, dancing and poetry in a military curriculum. The two misconceptions are not unrelated. Further, they underscore the central theme this essay pursues, that much of what truly constitutes education is incidental.

It is true that Sparta was a military state, and its ideals, uncompromisingly militaristic. Dancing, singing and poetry were important accomplishments for all Spartan men – and women – along with physical prowess. The arts formed a basis for religious life and rituals of Spartans (and all others of that time who counted). They formed a matrix of grace, beauty of movement and expression that linked the physical skills and formed them into a way of life. Lastly and importantly, Sparta had had a tradition that can be described as chivalric, at least until the sixth century B.C. Great feasts, religious observances, even funerals were beautiful and moving events, as well as important state functions. Dancing, music and poetry were the modes of expression, the basic means of celebration. In addition to its beauty, poetry embodied the moral and historic traditions. To a people not given much to writing, poetry was the only means of passing on, these sagas, the ancient wisdom.

Replete with expeditions, wars and rebellions, Sparta's history understandably misleads one into thinking that they did nothing else but fight. Warfare was not practical except in good weather anyway. In the interim, the households held dinners and other 'entertainments'. Until professional singers and dancers came into vogue – very late if at all in Sparta, the accompaniment to the many courses, and the periods in between, were the occasions for the guests, as well as the host, to sing, dance, play, recite poetry or make it up, all to their own musical accompaniment. Such schools as existed at the time, beside those for priests, were to teach singing and playing the lyre.

While true for Sparta, the place of the arts in the rest of the Greek States was even more exalted, especially after the fifth century. Of course, the military games and sports and contests, needed and had special areas designed to accommodate the activities. These were provided, as were tutors, helpers, coaches and trainers at public expense. This was also true for Greece in general, with the difference that the arts were given stronger emphasis in the rest of Greece than in Sparta. Private tutors were more often employed, and beginning with the fifth century, reading and writing were more commonly taught, occasionally in a place and by a pedagogue who taught nothing else.

Going eastward, we find a different people, the Hebrews, whom history slights somewhat. Having simplified the alphabet, and written down the 'laws', their covenant with God, and further, basing their culture on their unique image as the Chosen People, the Hebrews based their education on a knowledge and understanding of the laws that governed their behavior as a compact with their Creator. Thus in addition to the family's contribution in terms of manners and morals that they shared with the Greeks and the Romans, the Hebrews early established means of teaching, reading and writing to all (at least all males). From the very earliest times – when a child first could speak, his father would teach him to repeat some biblical passage or aphorism. Another difference for the Hebrews was that there was no limit – education was never completed but was considered to be a lifetime process. It is most important to note that while teachers and tutors and pedagogues, though sometimes famed and occasionally even respected in the rest of the world, those in Hebrew society were honored and held in awe and even revered. The rest of Asia Minor, Egypt and the areas that were to become Islam shared traces of Hellenic elements, reflecting Greece's influence on their waning power, but mostly retained the rigid, stratified system typical of the advanced society it represented. Scribal and priestly schools

were established in every temple. The aristocracy were taught by tutors. The army was professional, and individual scholarship which in calendars, astronomy and medicine was considerable, was supported by the throne and individual aristocrats.

Summarising then about 500 B.C. we see systems that tended to maintain the status and privileges of the few in all but Hebrew societies. Military and artistic skills were taught as a means of class identification and participation. These systems depended on the family in the beginning then on institutions that were aided by professionals for specific skills. It was not only education that identified the Jew as such and allowed him to participate in his society. Not only the outward behaviors and skills, military or artistic, or more accurately, vocational, but the inner adoption of a relationship with God that governed his relationship to man, that identified the Hebrew.

It is significant then that the best organisation of the system, military oriented for the Hellenes, Landowning and managing for the Romans, Scribe, Priest oriented for the Egyptians, appeared after the organisation of society on the basis that characterized it which then organised the education along appropriate lines. That of the Hebrews, however, modified Hebrew society itself so that 'ahl el kitab' - the people of the book, rather than fashioning an educational system to suit their needs, were changed - their customs, traditions and laws became fashioned on what their studies and explorations revealed to them.

IV

The next five hundred years brought tremendous political and historical changes - the decline of Sparta, the Homeric Platonic era, the end of the Egyptian and Persian empires, the turmoil in Israel-Judea, the ascendancy of Rome to its glory and the dawn of Christianity. No less dramatic, but far more elusive were the changes in education. The formalized aspects remained - indeed those of classical Greek are largely extant today. Beginning dimly in the change of orientation of the Spartan citizen, and in the emphasis of Hebrew culture and religion, modified by Christianity and still later by Islam, education was to have a different goal, that of service to God and man(kind) rather than personal achievement and gain. In addition, education, instead of identifying, separating, excluding, maintaining, through communication and diffusion, came to have a totally different goal and impact.

The era 500 B.C. to the beginning of Christianity saw the increasing specialization of areas of skills and knowledge. One

might say the curriculum was becoming differentiated and articulated. Reading and writing and arithmetic were taught more commonly, and regarded as basic skills. Literacy was no longer casual, but a useful, and eventually an indispensable skill – though except in Hebrew societies, still not taught to any but the upper classes. Grammar and rhetoric, geometry and astronomy, the natural and physical sciences, philosophy and logic, began to crowd sports out of the curriculum. Classical education was still the same, albeit more complex. It was the mark of a Hellene that his curriculum was the same in Athens as it was in Alexandria. It was still limited to the upper classes and such of the rising middle classes that could afford it.

By five hundred B.C., however, there was a profound change in the nature, and therefore the goal of Spartan education. Originally the ideal of the military culture was the military hero, besting his opponent in single combat.¹⁴ Each Spartan had as his goal to become an invincible fighter, and as such he sought to excel in everything – to stand out individually. This changed however from individual goals of excellence to common ideals of solidarity. Not the man who was mortal, but the state, which was to go on forever, was supreme. The human person now became only a part in a political collective. The free citizen, the knight, was now a soldier in a city-state, and the highest virtue was not strength or individual distinction but courage, valor, being steadfast in battle. The goal of Spartan education submerged the individual in his meaning and service to the state.

Hebrew society, shaped as it was by the laws of the TORAH, welded into a nation by its monotheism, drew its temporal as well as its spiritual power from the Temple in Jerusalem, resulting in urbanisation and its attendant social disjointment. The laws, through prophecy and through study and development applied themselves to these injustices, to the relationships between rich and poor, to the dealings among men. Most importantly, these laws were widely broadcast, carefully studied, interpreted and reinterpreted, so that there was a constant flow and interchange of opinion and information which by discussion and word of mouth, by frequent and regular religious observances and by the (easily read) written word reached every member of society and was made available to every member of the family through the joint responsibility of the parents.

Although in the beginning excluding physical sciences, and foreign languages because they might adulterate Scripture, by 500 B.C. Jews began to find that the 'Greek Studies' were useful and were teaching philosophy and arithmetic, as well as medicine

and astronomy.

These two factors then, the submergence of the individual to the state – similar to the submission of the Jew to God, and the universal nature of Jewish education, modified the course of mankind's aspirations. No less important than the actual physical diffusion of knowledge and wisdom to all Jews, rather than the 'ruling' classes (of course widely different levels of attainment were found and expected) was the extreme reverence accorded to learning by the Jews, far surpassing the respect and occasional honor conferred upon the learned few of Greek and Roman cultures.

Christianity, and later Islam, continued the bent that Judaism gave to education. To Christians and Mohammedans, in the same measure that it was for the Hebrews, life was a relationship with God and it governed every phase of his behavior. Whereas the Jews codified these laws and taught them as central in their education, early Christians as well as Mohammedans felt that Christian Education could not be given in a school, but only through the Church and the family. Indeed the first hundred years of Christianity, the main concern of the Church, besides proselytizing, was how parents should bring up their children, thus continuing and reinforcing a Judaic tradition.

V

The transition is now clearer. From a system that was designed to embellish the character and skills of an individual to make him outstanding, an important contributor to the state, and its defender, education becomes a type of behavior that regulates man's conduct with others and with the world around him in recognition of the power and glory of God and in order to serve Him better on Earth to enjoy the eternal rewards that early Christians and Mohammedans took pains to picture. Judaism, Christianity and Islam replaced the State as the supreme power in a person's life. All three detailed and described minutiae of daily life that must need be observed to 'live rightly' and gain salvation. Military skills and the arts were no longer meaningful in this context and both virtually disappeared except in classical formalized education which was hardly central any longer to the daily life of the Christian or the Moslem as it had been to the Spartan, the Greek or the Roman. The mission of Christianity was to evangelize – to spread. To do this it needed the tools of classical education. Reading and writing became basic, then poetry and drama to illustrate and instruct. So that in spite of its almost cavalier attitude to classical, formalized education, Christians rapidly translated scriptures into

all known languages and added these and whatever was specifically religious training to the schools and institutions already established in the graeco-roman world. They also set up similar schools all over those parts of Asia and Africa that had not yet been touched by either Greek or Roman classical education. Thus Christianity achieved what the Hellenes or the Romans never even thought of trying – exporting or imposing classical education and making it almost universal. By translating scriptures and presenting them in Greek forms eventually making use of dance and drama, poetry and myth Christianity succeeded, shortly before the rise of Islam (and then to be imitated by it) in making classical education universal. Christian scholars, drawing on Greek learning in spite of early reluctance to become involved with ‘impurities’ – as their predecessors, the Hebrews had, and assuming provenance over all knowledge for their purposes, for evangelizing, for learning about man and the world, the better to understand him, the more easily to Christianize him, made scholarship a universal factor, erasing the old tribal or national boundaries, engaging in free exchange of knowledge (at least in the beginning and speaking in the lingua franca of scholarship).

As in Judaism, in order for a man to be able to understand his duties and responsibilities, he had to understand himself, nature, and his relationship to the world around him. This necessitated a far more sophisticated person, as the Hebrews discovered than ancient paganism or pantheism required. This was another factor that the Church assumed as a necessity to enable ‘His will to be done on earth ...’

The change is now complete. From being a limited and limiting exercise, education has become diffused to all of mankind, at least on the way to becoming available. Instead of being the ‘mark of a Hellene’ or ‘what it is that makes a Spartan’ – instead of distinguishing among men, and separating them, education becomes a homogenizer, making all men ‘the same – sons of God and therefore brothers’. Instead of being a development of traits skills and characteristics to raise a man above his fellows, it becomes a means for him to learn about his fellows, to love them and serve them better.

This phenomenon, the change of education from what may rightly be called a ‘rite of passage’ into a more active, more responsible role, albeit still an individual one, into a ‘leading out’ process, a transcending of self, a sublimation, cannot be explained simply on the basis of even so revolutionary a development as Christianity. Monotheism was present in Judaism. Sublimation – even if only to the state was a feature of Spartan Life.

Education had made the individual either subject to the state or so narrowly and closely identified – ‘Hellene’, ‘Roman’, that no other life was available, indeed, no other condition was conceivable than the one he was educated into. The epitome of education, particularly after Christianity and the attendant rise in scholarship tended rather to ‘free’ the individual from temporal power, eventually even from state control. Properly regarded, education came to mean freedom from servitude, at least in attitude if not in fact. Servitude became willing service – to all mankind, not to an autocratic state, or church.

One needs to look beyond the actual methods, the content or curricula, to attempt an explanation of so profound an impact.

What is the nature of the educational process itself? What happens to an individual when he is taught, when his eyes are opened, his horizons expanded, even in a narrowed, controlled direction? How does he change from a casual, carefree youth, a privileged son of a privileged family, hardly different in boyhood from the children of serfs playing the same games, learning the same language on his father’s estate, to the grave, responsible citizen of adulthood? The most prevalent educational theory, not completely discredited yet, though known to be unsatisfactory in explaining all the above phenomena, is that of the ‘tabula rasa’. It has been current for the past several centuries and led or misled historians into accounting for the change as a simple accumulation, an accretion, a concatenation of knowledge, skills, arts, artifice and accomplishments. Simple observation, repetition, recitation and refinement is all that was needed.

As the Hebrews discovered, and the Greek philosophers were to find shortly after them, independently and for different reasons, whatever the senses absorbed had to be categorized, modified, changed, evaluated, shared with others, tried, changed again. Knowledge was never complete, but was always a continuous and a changing process. The educated man was not he who reached a level of accomplishment, but he who discovered his goal, and sought a way of reaching for it. Unlike the arts, where style and pleasure afforded easily marked acceptance, knowledge, was always the same, though also always changing. It always involved ‘eternal verities’, ‘heavenly harmonies’, truth, beauty and especially justice. These, a man became aware of gradually in a slowly growing awareness which eventually came to imply that the virtues were the same for all men at all times, that they did not change with the times or with political parties. They could not be learned from any poem or song or lesson, but had to be fashioned elaborately by each man for himself and for all men to share.

Avoiding hazardous theoretical speculation, it was evident that it was not only the senses that had to be refined and trained, nor just the body that had to be strengthened and made graceful. As Marcus Aurelius says in book IV of his Meditations one did not just have to remember the sequence and pattern of events as they followed each other like links on a chain, but to perceive the meaning of the pattern and the organization of the events – and for this was needed another kind of vision.

That is indeed implicit in how humans learn. They share memory and vision and movement with most other creatures. But they also have reason and judgement. This reason for which man is richly equipped, is available to all men who exercise it. Both the systems of servitude, and the sublimation either to the state, or to individual excellence tend to confine the discovery of individual goals as well as the means for reaching them. Means tended to become goals in themselves. This was especially demonstrated in Greece when athletic games rather than being a means to a healthy body became themselves goals to reach for, to the extent that as professional singers had earlier replaced the people of a city state in religious observances the citizens mere spectators, so did professional athletes become the central concern of gymnastics. A town would take pride not in having many fine racers or wrestlers, but in having a few who were chosen for the potential and limited all their training to become the best. The systems also tended to minimize contact among men except from similar classes, so that the interchange of ideas and judgements was necessarily limited to the common – local – experience. Yet communication had been a fact of life from the earliest time of the Egyptians. Their vast commerce, by land and sea, brought them in contact with the rest of the world. Seamen, merchants, scribes, brokers, bureaucrats, all sort of working people were in touch with each other. The world's seaports, oases, crossroads, caravans, each grew into metropolitan centres with free exchange of tongues and ideas. As commerce expanded and as cities grew into empires, a vast portion of the peoples began to have their ideas as well as their horizons expanded. Society now began to witness the familial tradition, status by status quo, by role, change into something different as farmers went to sea, seamen became tradesmen, and tradesmen made their impact on commerce and politics. The frequent invasions and expeditions also served to break down the provincialism that held thought in check and kept different ideas from surfacing. Even the gory circuses, no less than the olympics served in their way as immediate, though extrinsic education. Egyptian commerce on the seas, Greek wars, levantine caravans and Roman administration were educational

influences without parallel. It was on this fertile soil that the seed of Judaic universal culture and Christianity's transcendence of self (an idea of Plato's and Aristotle's) took root and flourished.

Education, formal or informal, planned or incidental, as any factor with universal application, as a system, must conform to structural analysis. As such it must have a clear process, a predictable change, and clearly defined properties, boundaries. Examined structurally, education in antiquity responds to this process, but only one includes all the other contributing factors in addition to the formalized systems. The process is clear – acculturation – but it is self-limiting. Its results are merely a repetition of what had gone on before. For the system to be structurally sound, it must include provisions for change. Both the family, at one extreme, and the schools that were established at the other were (as they tend to be now), staunch guardians of the status quo. Whatever changes occur, come from without, through invasion, official fiat, or other factors unrelated to the system. If one includes the self induced changes, the people who saw and perceived, who changed themselves and therefore brought the change to succeeding generations, then it would be a self generating change and not only desirable, but also foreseeable. The established schools did have particular identifiable properties, but the properties were more closely related to training – as soldiers or monarchs, scribes or astronomers than they were the property of education itself.

The property of education is clearly identifiable when one again includes the whole wide world which was more easily and literally within the grasp of the hewers of wood and the drawers of water. This property was freedom. Education freed the individual from the immediate environment when he grasped, along with his labor, the scheme of it and how he and it fitted into the continuum of life and nature. This is why formal education as usually studied was limiting and structurally unsound. The privileged few who learned dance and rhetoric and archery became good dancers and better archers – they would hardly have survived if they did not. In doing so, they were cut off from the general scheme of things and until the philosophers and the Jews and the Christians established man in nature, it was more difficult for them to be freed of their accomplishments. Finally, the ultimate nature of this freedom, structurally, was that it could not be limited. Once education begun, if it were true education, it could neither be controlled nor limited. The church itself attempted to limit this education and control access to it as well as its diffusion and only succeeded eventually in freeing it – and men – completely. More recently in modern history, any number of dictatorships have attempted to control edu-

cation, both the formal system as well as the casual exchange of knowledge and information. The revolutions, purges of intelligentsia and growth of the university attest to the fact that it cannot be done. The most important contribution of education of antiquity, in addition to the grandeur of the classics and the glory of poetry and drama, was the discovery that education helps man transcend himself – and history.

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NOTES:

¹ Though frequently the term is used to describe the result.

² Marrou, p. xi, xii.

³ Lancaster in Washburne, p. 217.

⁴ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, Book I, line 1.

⁵ Murdock in Washburn, p. 230.

⁶ Redfield 'Peasant Society & Culture'.

⁷ Also, whenever and wherever it was permitted.

⁸ Wax, Diamond & Gearing, p. 219.

⁹ Ibid., p. 222, 223.

¹⁰ Murdock in Washburn, p. 232.

¹¹ Piaget, p. 258.

¹² 'The Dispossessed' the first of Vergil's Pastoral Poems makes five 'rural' references in the first six lines of verse.

¹³ How many generations of schoolboys recited the words of Telemachus from Book XX of the Odyssey?

Let none abuse the stranger
Let no man in this house show rudeness
Better far were death than behold disgraceful deeds
Strangers abused, damsels dragged to shame.