



The Aims of Education

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The aims and objectives of education can be stated after defining the difference between education and instruction.

Education helps in the complete growth of an individual's personality, whereas instruction merely trains an individual or a group in the efficient performance of some task. A human being may be a great general, an efficient carpenter or a first-class pilot, a lawyer, a mechanic or a pathologist, a renowned doctor, a chemical engineer or a chartered accountant, but still remain a semi-educated, ill-mannered, immoral, unrighteous or unjust person. Similarly, someone may be a very fine painter, a good poet; or possess a love of beauty which is highly delicate and sensitive, but may, at the same time, be cruel or brutal, or an untruthful, unsocial individual, who deliberately ignores his or her duty towards neighbours or even spouse and children. We can say that people who have specialized in certain educational fields are well-instructed individuals, but we cannot necessarily regard them as truly educated. On the other hand, someone who knows and performs his or her duty towards self, family, neighbours and humanity, and at the same time has acquired a basic knowledge about how to earn a livelihood honestly and live a decent life, should be called an educated person. Such a person may not have specialized in a particular field of knowledge, but lack of expertise does not automatically prevent him or her from being recognised as an excellent human being.

Good people are not necessarily complete people. In fact, no-one around us can be regarded as complete, because there is no end to the growth of human personality. A wide knowledge of many subjects helps in the growth of personality provided that we know how to adjust our knowledge to our behaviour, and how knowledge and action are to be integrated into a broad,



total framework of life. The outlook of an educated person is not static, but is modified and mellowed as he or she applies principles to practice and acquires an outlook enriched by experience.

In order to achieve such integration, we need some basic values, and the society in which we live needs some basic, unquestioned assumptions. The human being is both an individual and a member of a community. One cannot be separated from the other without destroying something vital in both. The individualism that stresses complete freedom from any kind of social control is in practice impossible because it leads to the disintegration of society and gives complete licence to the individual to break or make social institutions at will, and overthrow the ideals and value-assumptions of the community according to whatever individual whims dictate. Similarly, a complete social control that represses the creative and critical urge of the individual cripples the spirit, and leads society either to degeneration and stagnation or to sudden and violent social upheaval. Education preserves the basic structure of society by conserving all that is worthwhile in basic values and institutions, by transmitting them to the next generation and by renewing culture afresh whenever degeneration, stagnation, or loss of values occur. At the same time, the job of education is, to use the words of Professor Jeffreys, 'the nurture of personal growth.' It is through this nurture of the individual and the preservation and transmission of culture that both the individual and society attain a 'quality of life', which as Whitehead says, 'lies always beyond the mere facts of life'. Education conveys this sense of quality to pupils, the quality that has an objective status beyond any subjective assumptions and assertions, but which requires individual cognition if individuals are to grow as full men and women.

There are various interpretations of this

quality of life. The most significant are the secularist-modernist, the humanist, and the religious. As the system of education depends on these interpretations, it is necessary for scholars to take them into account in order to emphasize and be appreciative of the typically Muslim point of view.

Secularist-modernists do not distinguish conceptually and practically between education and instruction but regard education not as a conservator of human values – the guardian of tradition – but as a process of change and a venture into the unknown. 'Organisation of new knowledge' seems more important than the preservation of knowledge already acquired. The modernist concept, stated clearly and forcibly by John Vaizey in *Education in the Modern World*,¹ does not draw any distinction between the universal and the absolute, and the local and relative, between revealed knowledge (*'ilm naqli*) that a Muslim believer derives as a direct gift from God, and acquired knowledge (*'ilm kasbi*) that human intelligence and imagination have succeeded in accumulating. Vaizey goes further, and points out that even this accumulated knowledge which for generations past scholars and thinkers analyzed, classified and graded with reference to the 'liberal' concept of man, and values that humanists believe in (which even a modern non-Christian or anti-religious thinker like Bernard Russell used to stress), is of arguable relevance. This conclusion has been reached by secularist-modernists only because they conceive education as a process that helps humanity to live well in this material world. They do not believe in fundamental, unique, immutable, moral or spiritual values.

The humanists also deny the concept of man that 'revealed' knowledge has given to us. They conceive education as a continuous

¹ John Vaizey, *Education in the Modern World* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1967).

process of mental, emotional and moral development, as an initiation into a quality of life which helps humans to see different points of view and the relationship of these various points of view to one another. As Peters says,

The great teacher is he who can convey this sense of quality to another, so that it haunts his every endeavour and makes him sweat and yearn to fix what he thinks and feels in a fitting form. For life has no one purpose, man imprints purposes upon it. It presents few tidy problems; mainly predicaments that have to be endured or enjoyed. It is education that provides that touch of eternity under the aspect of which endurance can pass into dignified, wry acceptance, and animal enjoyment into a quality of living.²

The unfortunate thing about this attitude is its vagueness. It considers education as having 'no ends beyond itself'. It makes a person, as Newman rightly pointed out, into 'a gentleman' and not necessarily 'a religious man'. The spiritual world or the world after death do not have any relevance to the process of cultivating this quality. 'Humanistic thinking,' as another humanist has said, 'is the cultivation of man, his self-cultivation and self-unfolding into full humanity.'³ What this cultivation of self means to a modern humanist has been explained by Hitt in his book entitled *Education as a Human Enterprise*.⁴ It means the cultivation of a scientific attitude of a kind which demands rejection of dogma, and questions absolutes, and, instead of faith, demands a reliance on 'reason' alone. It stresses 'human values' and the complementary roles of science and those

human values.

It is this concept of man which humanists preach that differs fundamentally from the concept of man that religion gives us. Insofar as values are concerned, there appears to be a good deal of similarity. Both humanists and religious thinkers agree on the 'objective' status of values, but humanists think that through man's efforts the value concept has emerged and human rationality has succeeded in formulating an objective concept of man. But there is a possibility of further improvement, modification and change. The religious thinker, on the other hand, says, 'It stands to reason that if education is supremely concerned with the quality of people, it needs the inspiration of some vision of what human beings ought to be – some notion of what is a good kind of person. This is a moral and spiritual quality and one to which it is very difficult to get a clear and united answer in these days of confused and disintegrating values.'⁵ The humanist approach is ineffective in such crucial days as ours only because if man is the sole arbiter of his own destiny and vision, if human beings are imposing their own purposes on life, there is no reason why they cannot change them and imprint upon life a completely new purpose and thus discard the old purpose altogether. The disintegration of values can be justified from this point of view. If nothing is absolute, constant change and fluctuation of aims and purposes is the logical outcome. It is obvious that here humanists suffer a defeat at the hands of the secularist modernists, and then must emphasise only the rational element in man, or like Russell, fall back on certain values which they choose to consider as genuinely 'human'. Religion, on the other hand, places the human creature in a very large perspective – the perspective of eternity and infinity. Human beings

2 R.S. Peters, *Education as Initiation* (London: University of London Institute of Education, 1964), p.48.

3 Laszlo Versenyi, *Socratic Humanism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963).

4 William D. Hitt, *Education as a Human Enterprise* (Worthington OH: C. Jones, 1973).

5 M.V.C. Jeffreys, *The Aims of Education* (Glaucon) (London: Pitman, 1972), p.xiv.

partake of that eternity and infinity through their spirits, which alone are regarded as custodians of eternal Truth. This philosophy has a longstanding tradition, and has proved its worth by creating those saintly men and women whose character and action have earned the reverence of good people in all places and ages.

Religion thus provides an all-comprehensive norm of the human creature, and an all-inclusive goal for education. This norm has a stability because the values are regarded as absolutes derived from the absolute attributes of God, which are being continually realized in a relative context in time and space. Contextual change only leads to a change in emphasis and focus, with the modification, and alteration of stress, of the relative importance of certain values in different periods and cultures. It does not entail any change in values themselves. Religion, in this way, furnishes education with a meaningful goal. According to religion, this goal has been revealed to humanity, and thus possesses an objective status. It is not concocted by wilful human beings, or just derived from experience. All experience is tied to time and space, and is hence relative. By contrast, the goal of religious education is verified by experience as the most desirable one because it has succeeded in transforming barbarous people like the pre-Islamic Arabs into the most advanced, civilized and cultured peoples of the world, and produced individuals of outstanding depth of character.

Islam has thus established a goal which is uniquely integrative, balanced and comprehensive. The human being is regarded as potentially the vicegerent (*khalīfa*) of God on earth. God has given humans authority over the entirety of creation. In order to realise this responsibly, they must acquire the wisdom which will transform them into good men and women, and therefore into wise custodians of the earth. Education is

that process which helps us to acquire this wisdom. It is therefore an all-inclusive process because it trains emotional, intellectual and sensual faculties simultaneously. God has revealed the nature of humanity to humanity, together with the laws which lead us to the total flowering of our personalities. We are expected to learn through experiments and work out the details of that process whose broad foundations are given to us in the Holy *Qur'ān*, and whose human example is historically preserved in the life, activities and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him.

One great advantage that this concept has over the humanistic concept is that it provides a supreme ideal and a stable norm for educationists to aim at when they plan an educational system and work out its methodology. It saves the human subject from drifting. It possesses, also, a remarkable advantage over apparently similar definitions of humanity given in other religions because Islam presents a universal and rationally acceptable norm. It offers the concept of one God, one humanity, and one religion which has existed since the days of Adam. As such, the norm of human values is considered to be the same for all humanity in all ages. Moreover, it saves human beings from arrogance, by teaching them that all their power over nature or themselves is a power delegated to them by God. It is not their own. This wisdom leads them to a deeper understanding of others, and to peace and happiness among nations and races.

Last, and not least: the total framework of values is also dependent on the principle of faith in the hereafter. Men and women are to consider this life not as an end in itself, but as a process that leads to a complete and better life which is to come. Thus the attitude that is cultivated is one of acceptance of faith and action according to a norm. In order that action may lead to greater human and

social contentment, a methodology of self-analysis and criticism, and also social criticism, is taught which generates acutely sensitive individuals fully aware of rights, duties and responsibilities, and thoroughly conscious of their own shortcomings. As love of God and the Prophet ﷺ are the major means of acquiring this sensitivity, this methodology includes both intellectual awareness and an innate response. Moreover, as the whole of creation is regarded as potentially under the custodianship of humanity, science and values are made to play inseparably complementary roles, with values providing overarching guidance and purpose. This is far more satisfying than the dry intellectualism of humanism, because it gives cardinal importance to love, and hence to the deepest human sensibilities. ☞