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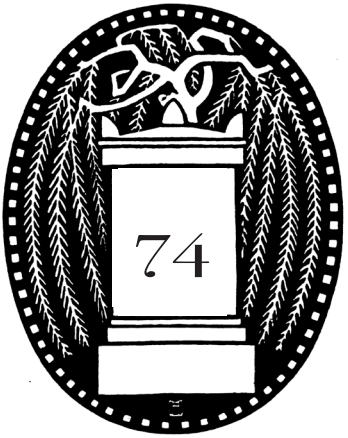

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Does the U.S. Have a Uniquely American-Thinking Philosophy and Education? Conservative Liberal Arts vs. Liberal-Pragmatist Education

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Introduction

In principle, the institution of education in a democratic society functions to serve its citizens. As a result, societies charge colleges and universities with identifying how best to serve citizens and democratic society through education. The question is, what kind of education at once best serves citizens and democratic society? From the early 19th Century through WWI, higher-education students earned a "classical liberal-arts education," an education premised on its students' leisure-class status. Grounded in such "ancient" or "classical" studies in the liberal arts as philosophy, literature, history, and languages (beginning with ancient Greek and Latin), classical liberal-arts education's proponents positioned such studies as higher education's curricular focus, viewing the classical liberal arts as providing the knowledge necessary to live as free, informed citizens of leisure. Even today, many spend their lives, as John Dewey (1859–1952) observed, studying a metaphorical five-foot bookshelf of "Great Books."[1] Because huge social changes and expectations occurred with WWI's horrors, calling, among other things, the value of classical liberal-arts education into question, progressive liberalism emerged. Wanting to make education more democratic and egalitarian than did classical liberal-arts proponents, whose curriculum focused upon leisure-class students, progressive liberals did not begin their thinking about the kind of education required to produce free, informed citizens from all walks of life with the disciplines but with students, their interests, and experiences, and in general relation to contemporary social life. Often identified as proponents of vocational, professional, technical, and science education, progressive liberals focused their work in common schools while questioning the 19th-century dichotomy between common and postsecondary educations.

Because educators continue to ask how best to educate students to become free, informed citizens in democratic society and because those answering still tend to align with either the classical liberal arts or the

progressive-liberal camps, I investigate the issues of classical liberal-arts education vs. modern or progressive-liberal education, especially as they pertain to postsecondary education. To do this investigating, I focus on Alexander Meiklejohn's (1872–1964) vision for a classical liberal-arts education specific to the U.S., John Dewey's responses to Meiklejohn's experiments in university education, Meiklejohn's criticism of Dewey's progressive-liberal education, and key distinctions between the two men's educational starting points and philosophies. I begin by positioning Meiklejohn's philosophy and education experiments atop early Americans' striving for a uniquely American thinking and uniquely American philosophy from which a uniquely American education would emerge. I turn next to the history of Alexander Meiklejohn's life in education beginning with his student days because they greatly influenced him as an educator and education thinker. I emphasize both his vision and his influence not only on conservative liberal-arts education but U.S. education, note Dewey's review of Meiklejohn's Experimental College, and finish my history of Meiklejohn's life in education and of his educational thought noting his writing and innovations after the Experimental College. Finally, I ask readers to look to the ongoing debate, indeed dilemma, between these two quite-different kinds of liberal education in order to ask themselves "What kind of person do we as a society want to create?"

A Uniquely American Thinking and a Uniquely American Philosophy

Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) advocated a system of public education where, regardless of social class, students of ability could continue their educations. He suggested creating ward schools, district secondary schools, and a state university consisting of classical studies, moral and natural philosophy, foreign languages, mathematics, sciences, medicine, and law.[2] Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) thought the American scholar should begin by studying nature, continue by studying the past through books, progress to studying common life, trades, and manufacturing, and finally launch their knowledge into action.[3] Emerson essentially depicted the conflict over education that would define its future.[4]

Emerson casts upon the scholar the responsibility to become more than his social roles. The scholar is to become "Man Thinking": accumulating, organizing, classifying, learning his environment, and applying his intelligence. Although, in the scholar's pursuit of knowledge, what past scholars have learned and book-knowledge become important, Emerson warns that dependence upon past thinking and book-knowledge can limit one's thinking, for the past may dangerously become the end rather than the means: "…instead of Man Thinking we have the bookworm. Hence, the book-learned class, who value books, as such; not as related to nature and the human constitution…."[5] Some declared Emerson's "The American

Scholar" to be the Declaration of Independence from European thought and the beginning of a truly American way of thinking. Similarly, Walter Lippmann (1889–1974), later, in his 1915 review of John Dewey's *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy*,[6] deemed Dewey's philosophy wholly American. Based on empirical and scientific methods, experience as knowledge source, and waning interest in ideal and metaphysical assumptions about truth, Dewey's wholly American philosophy is experimental; Dewey "is urging us consciously to manufacture our philosophy…[not] draw sanction from God, or nature, or evolution…to make our philosophies for our own needs and purposes."[7]

Meiklejohn's Impact on Conservative, Liberal-Arts Education

Meiklejohn's position on college education originated partly from personal experience. As an undergraduate, he found he had too much freedom to choose his courses. Although his first year included a set of prescribed courses, subsequent years allowed increased freedom to select courses interesting him, until the fourth year was totally elective. His college experience and course selection led Meiklejohn to distrust the college elective system in favor of more controlled course offerings, especially for younger students: "the elective transition was on and there seemed to be no guiding ideas. …[rather] an absence of structure" in undergraduate courses.[8] His encounter with philosophy reinforced his drive for "the cultural stability and moral certainty of the classical curriculum."[9] During his teaching tenure at Brown, he considered developing a block of courses that would provide a canon of knowledge all students would acquire before beginning their personalized studies for realizing their personal and professional goals. In his teaching, Meiklejohn emphasized the Socratic process of consideration and discovery of the broader meaning of all aspects of life. As professor and dean, he sought ways to empower students by acknowledging their ideas and experiences and through democratic participation in college governance.

Always an avid athlete, Meiklejohn, as a graduate student, devoted himself as much to sports as to philosophy. He played cricket, tennis, soccer, squash, lacrosse, and ice polo and participated in the first intercollegiate hockey game against Harvard. Ultimately, his professor, James Seth (1860–1925), warned him to concentrate more on his studies than his sports. After graduation Meiklejohn followed Seth to the Sage School of Philosophy at Cornell where "between tennis matches and hockey games, Meiklejohn managed to pass his qualifying exams at Cornell and finish a 153-page, handwritten dissertation entitled *Kant's Theory of Substance*.[10]

In 1897, having earned a philosophy Ph.D. from Cornell University, Meiklejohn returned to Brown University as an assistant professor. He avoided lecturing in favor of Socratic debate and open discussion. His students often questioned his restraint in disciplining them and the

scattergun focus of his teaching. One of his undergraduates named Meiklejohn's course in logic at Brown, "Rag Chewing 19."[11] Although none of these remarks deterred Meiklejohn, he lamented,

> …my most active students say, with ever greater insistence, "Are you sure you are asking a real question? Perhaps there are no bearings to find; perhaps your questions are themselves false; perhaps human living does not mean this or that, but only happens in this way or that."[12]

In his course offerings—Introduction to Philosophy, Scientific Methods, Discussions in Casuistry, and Kantian and post-Kantian Philosophy—Meiklejohn focused on analyzing philosophy and the implications of Kantian idealism. During Meiklejohn's fifteen years at Brown, he rose to the position of Dean of Students with responsibilities in discipline, athletics, and student government. As Dean, he focused on democratizing university governance even when students' decisions went against his own judgment.

During his tenure at Brown, Meiklejohn developed his ideas concerning the role of a college education. Part of defining what college education should be and should do is to identify those things an education should neither be nor do. In his 1908 article in *Education*, "College Education and the Moral Ideal," he expressed his disdain for education as preparation for life if such preparation is limited to vocational or practical studies. Lamenting college students' blindness to the importance of investigating the art of living without perceiving the importance of training to make a living, Meiklejohn asked whether "our college graduates go out to make a life or is their ideal simply to make a living?" He observed with chagrin that "most of us are sadly discouraged by the results at present"[13] of students merely training to make a living.

> …the aim of the American college…is not primarily to teach the forms of living, not primarily to give practice in the art of living, but rather to broaden and deepen the insight into life itself, to open up the riches of human experience, of literature, of nature, of art, of religion, of philosophy, of human relations, social, economic, political, to arouse an understanding and appreciation of these, so that life may be fuller and richer in content; in a word, the primary function of the American college is the arousing of interests.[14]

Moreover, Meiklejohn determined training

> …for success in pursuits which violate our ideals, is not only not the aim of the college; it is one of the tendencies in our civilization against which the college must stand and fight, and in such a fight must succeed as best it may.[15]

Beyond attacking the notion that college education's purpose is "preparing" students for success in life, Meiklejohn maintained meeting

society's demands and performing social service also to be unfit purposes of a college education, for students are automatically to serve society because the "natural" education–society relation induces students automatically to serve. Indeed,

> …the college must send its students out to serve, but it must first open their eyes and give them a vision which they may carry with them as the guide and inspiration of their work…and to send men out instructed and inspired by the possession of the best things of which our human nature is capable.[16]

What then should a college education be and do?

> It is the aim of the college life to give to a student the capacity for and the possession of healthy recreation, generous friendship, earnest work and ideal interests.[17]

> In a word, the primary aim of the college is the development and enrichment of the better tastes or interests. [That] interest should be aroused in the great impersonal universal things of human experience. In the order of nature as revealed by the sciences, in the fundamental puzzles and problems of human thought as defined by philosophy, in the experiences of religion, in the beauties of nature and of art, in the significance of literature, in the history of mankind, in the economic and social problems of the time.[18]

If the education colleges offered in 1908 discouraged Meiklejohn because that education often catered to frivolity in a time of life when students performed as little serious work as possible so to enjoy a young adulthood free from most social constraints, when Amherst College selected him as its president in 1912, he found himself in a position to do something about it. In his Inaugural Address, Meiklejohn laid the foundation for his liberal college-education vision, asserting the "college curriculum should be so arranged and our instruction so devised that its vital connection with the living of men should be obvious even to an undergraduate."[19] Identifying five essential elements to a liberal education—philosophy, humanistic science, natural science, history, and literature[20]—Meiklejohn viewed college "not [as] a place of the body, nor of the feelings, nor even of the will; [but]…a place of the mind"[21] and college education to mean one primarily pursues intellectual ends, leaving technical and professional training to other institutions. Meiklejohn based his exaltation of intellectual training and activity on two assumptions: "First, knowledge and thinking are good in themselves. Secondly, they help us in the attainment of other values in life which without them would be impossible."[22] For,

> …the principle underlying all our educational procedure is that, on the whole, actions become more successful as they pass from the sphere of feeling to that of understanding…to take human

> activity as a whole, to understand human endeavors not in their isolation but in their relation to one another and to the total experience which we call the life of our people.[23]

Meiklejohn continued teaching and developing curricula combining his five disciplinary pillars so that by 1915 the new curriculum, an endowed professorship, and a set of eight courses across the four years of undergraduate studies, began as a freshman elective. The Course of Study in Social and Economic Institutions "was [designed] to help students develop a general perspective on twentieth-century American civilization as a synthetic whole. Its emphasis was on intellectual rather than professional or vocational training."[24]

By the time Meiklejohn's freshman program elective was in place, Europe was entrenched in WWI and calling for the U.S. to join. Just as Meiklejohn had shot down the idea that college education's purpose is to prepare students for the workplace, he was skeptical of using colleges to prepare students for military mobilization and therefore resisted compulsory military training in the college.

> I do not believe that by any great miracle this people is to be integrated, is to be fused into a single Will. A war might do it but we hope that we shall not have a war. But lacking that we must win our unity not by some miracle of will, but by growing understanding of each other, by growing considerateness for our fellow citizens.[25]

According to Nelson, Meiklejohn supported "compulsory moral education, not compulsory military education, [as] the nation's best hope for peace."[26] Although he condemned hyper-nationalism as toxic to a shared national purpose, he told his students "to obey the laws of the United States, to go to war when called, to fight with conviction and confidence, but also to think—and think hard—about the war and its meaning."[27]

For Meiklejohn moral education found its source in his conception of the liberal-arts education he was trying to develop at Amherst: "intellectual training of the liberal type."[28] He wrote, "our hope lies not so much in the growth of a Will as in the development of a Mind, so that by our understanding of each other we shall learn to will together."[29] The changing times and conflicts among faculty, especially conflicts between the faculty he inherited and the faculty he brought in, caused slow erosion in the Board of Trustees' confidence. Just before the 1923 commencement, they asked for his resignation as President with retention as philosophy professor. Meiklejohn moved his family to Manhattan, gave public lectures and wrote essays, mainly for *The Century Magazine*. He turned down offers to teach at Harvard and The University of Chicago and refused requests for consideration for presidencies at Reed College, Knox College, and The University of Oklahoma.[30]

Meiklejohn sought the means to start a new college and with the assistance of *The Century*'s editor, Glenn Frank (1887–1940), assembled a group of supporters to fund the project.[31] Meiklejohn published his general proposal for such a college, "A New College: Notes on a Next Step in Higher Education," in *The Century* in January 1925.[32] One year later, he published a more-detailed proposal, "A New College" in *The New Republic*.[33] Based on lessons learned as Dean of Students at Brown and experiences from establishing the "Social and Economic Institutions" freshman program while President of Amherst, Meiklejohn presented a comprehensive proposal for creating a new liberal college, asserting the "interrelation of separate fields of knowledge is a primary task of those who seek to understand the world and our experience of it."[34] This new college consisted of a lower college for freshmen and sophomores and an upper college for juniors and seniors. For Meiklejohn it was necessary for the lower college to be limited in size: 250 students and 25 teachers with a "range of knowledge" and the ability to engage students not as lecturers but in a conference or seminar setting.[35] He wanted to integrate lower-college instruction in modern studies of the social, natural, and physical sciences in "terms of the more stable and permanent insights of…philosophy, history and literature and the other arts."[36] To provide the student with a grounding in the knowledge of the past with a view to how that knowledge influences modern studies, the lower-college curriculum focused on general enquiry and the development of "intelligence for living." The student must "begin to know both how knowledge is made and what it means."[37] The lower colleges provided the opportunity for social and intellectual development in preparation for the specialized study and scholarly development in the junior–senior upper college.[38] Although "Meiklejohn College" never materialized, he applied his ideas and program at the University of Wisconsin as the "Experimental College."

After Glenn Frank stepped down as *The Century*'s editor to become President of the University of Wisconsin in 1925, Meiklejohn joined him the next January as professor of philosophy and designer of the proposed Experimental College. The model for Experimental College was similar to the proposal for the lower college outlined in *The Century* and *The New Republic*, but instead of a new independent college, Experimental College was a college within a university. The plan was for a small faculty to collaborate on a course of study based on Athenian civilization for Experimental College freshman, on American civilization for its sophomores, and on studies of their own region during the summer: "we have the complete picture of a college run without classrooms, lectures, or text books; founded on a theory of education the purpose of which is to find and to teach a new way of life,"[39] leading "the student toward acquaintance with Human Intelligence as seen in two typical illustrations of its activity."[40]

Meiklejohn "interpreted [intelligence] as meaning all the creative activities, whether or not consciously directed, by which men strive to raise the quality of human experience."[41] For Meiklejohn, the

> …process of learning was a process of drawing connections between the specific and the general, between the particular and the transcendental, between the individual example and the universal essence. Liberal education, in other words, tried to interpret the meanings of human civilization through the major problems and intellectual controversies presented in books.[42]

Socratic exploration in a conference or seminar setting would encourage thoughtful enquiry. Student assignments ranged from directed reading and notetaking to reflection, essays, and research papers.[43] At its inception Experimental College had about 120 students and a dozen advisors, several of whom Meiklejohn selected from Amherst and Brown. After two years enrolled in Experimental College, many students transferred to other colleges and universities with great success. By 1931 economic conditions of the Depression, lack of administrative support, antagonism between Experimental College faculty and the College of Letters and Science faculty and its Dean, and personal animosities led Meiklejohn to ask his advisors to end Experimental College. A victim of the economy, university and state politics, and the animosity of those who desired the *status quo*, Experimental College ceased to exist until its rebirth as The Integrated Liberal Studies in the late 1940s.

Meiklejohn's 1932 book, *The Experimental College*, was a serious appraisal of his philosophy, plans, and experiences. He expanded on his ideas in the "New College" essays, citing his experiences, adding an appraisal of what went wrong, and offering suggestions for a liberal arts program in universities. Especially important was the development of faculty's teaching.

> …future professors are rigorously prepared for the activities of scholarship. We demand and require that they "know their subjects." But we do not demand that they understand or master the teaching process, that they know what students need and how their needs can be supplied.[44]

Dewey Reviews Meiklejohn's Experimental College

In "The Meiklejohn Experiment,"[45] John Dewey reviewed *The Experimental College*, expressing his appreciation for the efforts required to put a philosophy of education into action in opposition to higher education's *status quo*. Dewey viewed *The Experimental College* as a proposal for comprehensive rearrangement of universities not just a piecemeal incorporation of a few ideas. Reorganizing the university into a number of "lower colleges" with integrated general curricula and "upper colleges" with specialized practical or scholarly pursuits would take into account the

mission both to develop students' intelligence and provide professional training.

> [Meiklejohn provided] the philosophy of an actual undertaking, not as a full bolt from the blue of abstraction. Moreover, the educational ideas presented are tied up with a clearly thought-out conception of the nature, the defects and promise, of American culture and life.[46]

Dewey further complemented Meiklejohn by noting he did not claim unqualified success but proposed "a scheme of teaching whose merits have been demonstrated…[that] have a plan which seems worthy of consideration by an American college of liberal arts…and a contribution to the art of teaching—its discussion of what goes on, or may be induced to go on, in the contact of mind with mind."[47] Dewey assessed Meiklejohn's book detailing the experimental college at Wisconsin as

> …an account of a particular experiment undertaken in a particular American college…[which] attracted great attention, not to say controversy. … It excited enthusiasm and animosities…and involved a clash of persons as well as of educational principles and practical policies. It engaged the emotions quite as much as the intellect.[48]
>
> The Meiklejohn experiment was such a challenge to the accidental empiricism which so controls our college studies and teaching methods, that it's not surprising that it evoked bitter opposition or that it failed of achieving its supreme purpose.[49]

Dewey nevertheless wondered if the "methods actually pursued did not involve an overestimate of the function of books in developing intelligence."[50] Recognizing American society does not value literary heritage as much as it should, Dewey supported the movement toward curricular integration and the integration of social interactions between teacher and student, observing "a genuinely integrated learning and discipline cannot be attained without an integrated relationship of teacher and student."[51] He was nevertheless concerned that

> …the development of intelligence, not the assumption of intellectual responsibility; nor that the function of intelligence was conceived to be "service of men in the creation of and maintenance of a social order, a scheme of individual and group living, which will meet the human demands for beauty, strength, justice, generosity."[52]

Dewey viewed the experimental college as a proposed comprehensive rearrangement of the university not just a piecemeal incorporation of a few ideas. Dewey considered Meiklejohn's experiment such a challenge to most college studies and teaching methods that it evoked bitter opposition and failed to achieve intended purpose.

Meiklejohn's Innovations after Experimental College

After ending Experimental College, Meiklejohn moved to Berkeley, California where he began translating his ideas into the adult education movement. From 1934 until 1942, the San Francisco School for Social Studies (SFSSS) enrolled over 1,700 adult students in over 120 study groups from the San Francisco Bay area. Meiklejohn proposed the School's program as a "new branch of public education in America…[with a] comprehensive scheme of adult education."[53] The adult school would differ from the college by focusing on the condition of American society without grounding that study in the general background he thought one obtained from the study of ancient Greece. "The end to be served by this new teaching [would] not be vocational…[but the] creation of an active and enlightened public mind."[54] Pragmatic in his outlook, Meiklejohn defines

> …the practice of democracy in teaching…[as] one of 'free inquiry.' It seeks to create and develop the will and the capacity for independent judgment. It regards its own beliefs as open to study, to criticism, to revision. … [We] cannot teach democracy unless we trust it in action, practice it in our teaching.[55]

Meiklejohn modeled the SFSSS on his previous work at Brown, Amherst, and the Experimental College at the University of Wisconsin. He suggested the study of great books found in programs at Columbia and The University of Chicago.

> Basic to all these enterprises was a principle which, though constantly ignored, is as old as teaching itself. … [T]he best external help in learning to think about human problems is to get into living contact with the ablest men who have thought about these problems.[56]

For Meiklejohn, "democracy must arouse and sustain the creative intelligence."[57] The new adult education assists in "the beginnings of the making of an American mind."[58] Although loss of funding accompanying the United States' entry into WWII ended the school, Meiklejohn's experience with adult education programs and curricula caused him more poignantly to shift the educational focus to the meaning of American society, as he attests in several magazine and journal articles and two books, *What Does America Mean* (1935) and *Education Between Two Worlds* (1942). In these works, Meiklejohn outlines his perception of American society's condition, expressing his discomfort with what he called the "American problem."[59]

One way Meiklejohn seems to have worked through his discomfort was by contrasting past knowledge from two scholars and by looking to the past itself, in this case, when schooling was grounded in Christian beliefs and morality and when England broke from such schooling. In *Education Between Two Worlds*, Book I, Meiklejohn contrasted Comenius' (1592–1670)

thought with John Locke's (1632–1704), positing that "Comenius…better than anyone else I know, expresses, in its early Protestant form, the Christian view of what schools are and do."[60] He suggested had Comenius been successful in establishing a Pansophic College in 1641, and, had the Civil Wars (1642–1651) in England not ended its Pansophic College project, his influence would have forestalled the transfer of education from church to state. Religious elements aside, Comenius' focus was universal education, the idea of pansophia, universal wisdom, and sense realism.[61] Although his belief in universals would require the teaching of Latin since Latin was considered the universal language of scholars, children's educations would have begun in the vernacular with students' everyday experiences.

In the writing of John Locke, Meiklejohn found self-contradictory social tendencies which have dominated the Protestant–capitalist era. Locke's vision for education was more limited than that of Comenius. Locke mirrored the aristocratic structure of his society but sought to reform the teaching of young aristocrats whose experiences at even the best boarding schools could be quite unpleasant while those at the hands of personal tutors could be limited by the tutor's personality and preparation.[62] Meiklejohn disagreed with Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, and the "uncompromising attitude towards dogmatism and the construction of abstract systems generally; its method demands a close adherence to reality, and full allowance for the results of concrete thinking. The claims of authority are confronted by the assertion of the absolute necessity for independence of mind."[63] Meiklejohn also disagreed with Locke's view of individual rights, and the role of the state. For Locke, "the rights of the individual acquired a moral superiority over civil law and order."[64] Meiklejohn preferred his view of Comenius who seemed to him to overcome the authority vs. independence of mind dispute.

In *Education Between Two Worlds*, Book II, Meiklejohn continued his look to past knowledge from past scholars. Focusing on Rousseau's flawed view of government and his unworkable plan for education, Meiklejohn pits Rousseau against Dewey and Pragmatism. Meiklejohn recounted the roots of "modern teaching" in the views of Rousseau (1712–1778) as "the most stimulating, the most suggestive, the most provocative of all recent students of a society and its teachers."[65] For Rousseau, "the rights of the individual and the authority of the state spring from the same stock. They have the same moral status."[66] That the state determines rights and may deny them is clear. The issue remains that there are more rights than the state confers. Will and Ariel Durant observed of Rousseau's philosophy, "There is a social contract…not as a pledge of the ruled to obey the ruler, but as an agreement of individuals to subordinate their judgment, rights, and powers to the needs and judgment of their community as a whole."[67] In his review of *Education Between Two Worlds*, Sydney Hook asserts:

> From Rousseau and his theory of the General Will[,] Mr. Meiklejohn openly derives his clue. The General Will takes the place of God as the only and absolute source of all moral authority. The author seems unaware that weak as are the arguments for the existence of God, they are stronger than the arguments for the existence of a General Will.[68]

Ultimately Rousseau substituted a secular supernatural belief in place of religion and rejected representative democracy, reasoning that legislators will make laws that benefit themselves first. Meiklejohn says, "Rousseau combines, as no one else since Plato has done, the study of society and the study of education. Better than anyone else he seems to me to lead the way into the consideration of 'modem' problems."[69] Meiklejohn concluded, "It may be that we moderns can create a nontheological civilization which can carry on the work of morality and intelligence."[70] Hook noted that for a world state, Meiklejohn recommended

> …a common education with fixed goals and prescribed content, scholarship harnessed to true politics, training for world citizenship, and an extended program of adult education. Excellent suggestions—some of them. But those that a democracy can use are compatible with a theory of democracy entirely different from that of Mr. Meiklejohn.[71]

In skipping from Rousseau to Pragmatism, Meiklejohn ignored Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche's powerful contributions as well as Dewey's tracing of his own educational thought through Rousseau's in *Schools of Tomorrow* (1915).

In his 1941 article, "Higher Education in a Democracy," Meiklejohn structured his criticism of Pragmatism and Dewey that he later followed up with in *Education Between Two Worlds*, Book III, where he continued his focus on pragmatist thought in general and John Dewey's pragmatism, in particular.

> The pragmatic attempt has failed at its most essential point. It is significant chiefly because it is so faithfully representative of the inner failure and collapse of the civilization for which it speaks. If that is true, then we must try to go beyond pragmatism.[72]

Meiklejohn's article began his serious attention to the role of pragmatism in education and society. "If you will look back at democracy and education," Meiklejohn wrote, "and ask where John Dewey stood and what he had to say to America and for America twenty-five years ago, you will find it summed up in that statement in which he characterizes his own argument, 'I took democracy for granted.'"[73] Meiklejohn seriously misquotes and misrepresents Dewey's writing and thought, for Dewey did not take democracy for granted but "took for granted the democratic criterion and

its application in present social life."[74] In suggesting technology facilitated the development of democracy, Dewey did not preclude other outcomes for the effects of technological advances. Aristocratic domination was superseded by domination of the economic class. Meiklejohn found the problem in the limited effect of religion. He attributed the changes in societies to the influence of technology and the sciences. He disregarded the impact of economic conditions and the rise of nationalistic ideologies.

Meiklejohn identified "two things the dictatorships are saying: first, down with religion, the opiate of the people. Then they have a second one. Not only down with religion, but up with the state."[75] The rise of the totalitarian state, however, was neither scientific nor technological, neither political nor economic, though each sector made its impact. The fascist ideology was the victory of feeling over thinking, the emotional over the rational. Bolshevism succeeded in response to intolerable conditions and the promise of a new social structure. Meiklejohn opposed modernity and its increasing domination by the apparatus of the state to the detriment of religion, especially in education: "The place to discover a society most clearly and most directly is in its schools. There you will find what the society thinks and what it values, as you will find them nowhere else."[76] The waning influence of the church from whence schools and colleges originated heightened the differences between the secular and the sacred. Meiklejohn forgot, however, that religion, no less than government, is a human enterprise, equally subject to abuse and self-interest. Ultimately, for Meiklejohn,

> Higher learning in a democracy is criticism, and democracy is self-criticism. I appeal to you in the name of American democracy to make sure that every institution of higher learning in America is studying dictatorship and democracy so that we may not only beat the dictators but understand them; not only conquer them, but ourselves.[77]

Hook observed that Meiklejohn

> …expresses with feeling and unrestraint a growing mood in the country. It is cut to order for groups who would like to save democracy from itself, not by appealing to common interests and negotiating those that are not common, but by invoking a Public Good or General Will, interpreted by themselves, that has no relation to anybody's interest except, accidentally, to their own…. In the pre-Hitlerian era it would be sufficient to say that this is a false and foolish book. In the era of Hitler it must be characterized as false and dangerous.[78]

Along that same line, Dewey suggested that education takes more than "a study of democracy and dictatorships. All intelligent political criticism is comparative."[79] He wrote, "It deals not with all-or-none situations, but with

practical alternatives; an absolutistic indiscriminate attitude, whether in praise or blame, testifies to the heat of feeling rather than the light of thought."[80] In his criticism of Dewey and Pragmatism, Meiklejohn sought to follow the example of Socrates, "to limit the argument to the evidence presented by his opponent."[81] The Socratic method, however, has its uses and misuses. Dialectically, it provides all sides of a question to be examined. Critically, the inquisitor structures the questions to obtain the desired answers. Though he accepted the waning of the theological and the supernatural, Meiklejohn states, "Pragmatism is Darwinism applied to human intelligence. It is scientific naturalism, as opposed to a theological supernaturalism."[82] For Meiklejohn intelligence was the outcome of educational experiences with thinkers of the past. Conversely, Dewey maintained education was the application of intelligence through experience in the present, identifying the philosopher's task to be determining "what criteria and what aims and ideals should control our educational policies and undertakings."[83] The revival of the movement toward "Liberal colleges" bothered Dewey. Insisting the progress of the pragmatic and progressive in education was the breaking down of the chasm between utilitarian and liberal views of education, Dewey suggested the liberal is not necessarily liberating, that Liberal is not liberalism: "The traditional idea is that a certain group of studies is Liberal because of something inhering in them—belonging to them by virtue of an indwelling essence or nature."[84] Purveyors of classical Greek education, separating education of the aristocratic, leisure class from the training of the peasant, working classes, and later education of gentlemen from the training of tradesmen, premise their model on aristocrats' noble, refined nature and everyone else's baseness.

> A five-foot bookshelf for adults, to be read, reread, and digested at leisure throughout a lifetime, is one thing. Crowded into four years and dealt out in fixed doses, it is quite another thing. … It marks reversion to the medieval view of dependence upon the final authority of what others have found out—or supposed they had found out—and without the historical grounds that gave reason to the scholars of the Middle Ages…[and] it marks a departure from what is sound in the Greek view of knowledge as a product of intelligence exercised at first hand.[85]

Meiklejohn responded to Dewey's concerns noting their goals as very much the same and that he also

> …accepts as his own the goal at which his opponents are driving. He, too, hates incoherence and painlessness…would like to know what he is doing, where he is going. [He identifies] the common problem. How can the curriculum be simplified?[86]

To illuminate the matter, Meiklejohn focused on his ideas behind Experimental College at Wisconsin and the liberal arts curriculum at St.

John's College. He found two issues: the choice between the study of the past as opposed to the study of the present, and imitation of the past in liberal-arts studies. Although Meiklejohn wrote "that all education should be a study of the present…[that] the goal of teaching is an understanding of the present,"[87] he based the study of the present on a study of past writers and scholars. Meiklejohn wanted an educational structure that would meet the needs of a modern, democratic society, but his view of a liberal education missed the broader point that such education originated from and perpetuated a dualistic education. He favored liberal education as the focus, leaving students to work out professional, vocational, and self-fulfillment goals over time: "liberal teaching must be deeply concerned with the vocations of men…[not] centered upon the specific vocation of that pupil."[88] He concluded that although he could not

> …accept the pragmatic interpretation of the modern and the new…that does not mean that my heart is fixed upon the past rather than upon the future…. American students of education… have tragically serious and sober work to do. We have common problems to tackle.[89]

Meiklejohn's heart, however, remained chained to a narrow perspective of the educational enterprise.

Conclusion

In Isaiah Berlin's words, Alexander Meiklejohn was a hedgehog.[90] First, at Brown as Professor and Dean, Meiklejohn tried to provide an open-democratic environment based on Socratic teaching. His classes were discussion; his leadership *laissez faire*; neither resulted in him realizing his goals. Amherst's entrenched faculty, whom he did not bring into planning and implementing the program, doomed his vision for a freshman liberal-arts curriculum. At Wisconsin his Experimental College enjoyed brief success but proved unsustainable as a model for expansion across the university, and the San Francisco School for Social Studies (SFSSS), dependent on external support, expired with Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. Fixing upon "cultivation of intelligence" on an international scale, Meiklejohn's vision extended to "internationally minded" universities and worldwide adult education[91] in his UNESCO consulting work for the United Nations. Cultivating intelligence significantly contrasts with Dewey's stress on the responsibilities of intelligence. Similarly, Dewey distinguishes his focus on students, their contexts, and their experiences with Meiklejohn's focus on the disciplines, maintaining conservative, liberal-arts education and its educators as authoritarian: "There is implicit in every assertion of fixed and eternal first truths the necessity for some *human* authority to decide, in this world of conflicts, just what these truths are and how they shall be taught."[92]

The end of WWII and the passing of the GI Bill of Rights provided a watershed for higher education. Meant to support GIs' reintegration into a peacetime society in which they would live as productive citizens, most veterans wanted a practical, useful course of study they associated with professional studies and vocational training. Initially the education only the leisure class would enjoy, conservative, liberal-arts education, democratized into the norm for public schooling during the 19th Century, now reverted to its place as leisure-class education. Meanwhile, educators structured liberal-arts education in public secondary schools, colleges, and universities for a quasi-leisure class. The subsequent growth of postsecondary education has, almost a century later, resulted in the general expectation that common-school curricula should support teachers preparing all public-school students for college and university studies. Many students begin that path but drop out or continue until earning a degree yet live most of their adult lives repaying loans. Although secondary and postsecondary vocational and technical campus curricula offer students an opportunity to train for work, they create a separate track that often separates vocational students from mainstream school activities.

The conservative liberal-arts education with its perceived authoritarianism versus liberal pragmatism with its perceived emancipatory premise and structure remain a dilemma each time one considers the kind of education to which U.S. citizens should have access. Few higher-education institutions emphasize the conservative, liberal-arts education one often associates with a scholarly rather than useful education. Required courses for beginning college students provide whatever grounding students need in mathematics, physical sciences, fine arts, humanities, and the social sciences to specialize in a work-focused field. Courses students need for their majors take precedence over courses through which they might explore and deepen their knowledge and understanding. Insofar as schooling-for-function, has U.S. education become uniquely American because its uniquely anti-intellectual and anti-thought? Are the U.S.-educated condemned to repeat the past because they know nothing of it? Today's U.S. secondary and postsecondary school curricula reveal that those deciding which kind of education has value have abandoned conservative, liberal-arts education's strictly regimented curriculum in favor of the required, "useful" curriculum and continuing self-education, an expansion of the idea of a five-foot bookshelf that reflects neither Meiklejohn's nor Dewey's goals for an educated U.S. citizenry. What kind of person do we in the U.S. want to create, and which kinds of things do we want this person to be able to do and contribute?

Endnotes

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