

An Essential Knowledge: That On Which Cooperation Rests

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Human beings cannot survive without education. Both, the individual and society require the transmission of those excellences, dispositions and values which will let us evolve in humans and survive as humans and as species.

Looks like we are the only organisms which its self-preservation depends totally on the capabilities, skills and knowledge we do not inherit biologically. We lack genetically the skills which are needed to survive. We have to replace that lack for something more dynamical, adaptive and changing, which is all that builds the spiritual environment or the cultural environment.

The transmission of that knowledge for self-preservation is done thanks to what we generally call education which is done in both formal and informal ways. The philosophy of education, from the Greeks to our times, has taken in charge the reflection about those fundamental facts of the educational process. Other disciplines such as pedagogy have been oriented towards the methodological facts of the educational process.

Concerning the philosophy of education we find valuable reflections and different emphasis. But in general, it looks like we can establish an important separation which has to do, for one side, with those educational philosophies which make emphasis on the subjects to teach, the skills to develop and the values to instill. And, on the other side, we

have the philosophies of education which surround the pupil, his growth, development, maturity and interests.

The first of those divisions is represented by Aristotle and Kant. Both are in charge of pointing which subjects and skills have to be developed in the student.

The second is very well represented by John Dewey's thought, for whom the student is the center from where it is decided what and when to teach.

Those two ways of considering the educational process have given place to different methodologies due to a proposal of a particular method always starts from the subject to teach or the psychological development of the student.

It was in the old Greek environment where a serious reflection about the fundamental questions which are on stake on the educational process, started. The Greek term PAIDEIA that we translate today as education meant for the old Greeks FORMATION, and the objective was the kid. In that context education was oriented toward the configuration of the civic character on the little kids that would make them fit to coexist peacefully as citizens. So we can say that it was the process thanks to which an organism that is part of nature, as any other, is converted into a social being.

Let's not forget that the Greek notions of the citizen and the social being were related to the very particular structure of the Greek POLIS. Any way, it started from the premise that we are not born with dispositions and skills needed for life in society. It was so obvious for the Greek thought, that Aristotle kept an anthropology in which living in the POLIS, was the

reference point to define man. And those who never lived in a POLIS were less than man, for Aristotle. He meant the nomads groups, also known by the Romans, and catalogued as barbarians by the Latin mind. For Aristotle: man is a political animal.

The term PAIDEIA was assimilated by Romans once they were culturally conquered by the Greeks. The term used by Romans was Humanitas. A good definition for Humanitas was established by Aulus Gellius, on the second century of our age, in the work: *Attic Nights*.

Those who have spoken Latin and have used the language correctly do not give to the word humanitas the meaning which it is commonly thought to have, namely, what the Greeks call φιλανθρωπία, signifying a kind of friendly spirit and good-feeling towards all men without distinction; but they gave to humanitas about the force of the Greek παιδεία... Those who earnestly desire and seek after these are most highly humanized. For the pursuit of that kind of knowledge, and the training given by it, have been granted to man alone of all the animals, and for that reason it is termed humanitas, or "humanity."¹

Humanitas preserve in essence the Greek idea but added a universal dimension in junction to the greatest complexity of the Roman Empire. Both, Marcus Porcius Cato and Marcus Terentius Varro, had on mind the great amount of peoples which build the Empire and needed to maintain in peace thanks to a common language and common laws: Marcus Tullius Cicero mean while emphasizing it, the ideal of the Roman citizenship of the culturized and highly refined men.

¹ http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Gellius/13*.html

The occidental civilization (and now the entire world) has agreed with the Greek and Roman idea which establishes that education has, as primary object, to build us as humans, civilized beings, capable to dominate biological strengths and instincts. That the authentically human consist in patterns of behavior highly refined, cultured along the centuries which permits the peace full coexistence and the cooperation based on the division of labor.

The family and the school, meaning informal and formal education, dedicate great part of time to transmit, develop and gain that civilized character which transform in acts the most elevated values of the civilized life.

Now what we haven't achieved teaching, is that life in society functions based not as much in what we know, but in what we ignore. Highlighting this property of the civilized life, is, maybe what it is the center of Friedrich August Hayek's work.

In his 1960's work *The Constitution of Liberty*, Hayek dedicates one entire chapter to our ignorance. He points that limitations of our own reason take us to accept that the institutions, which permit life in society, were not created or invented intentionally by our own rational capacity. He clearly says that:

To understand how society works we must try to define the general nature and extent of our ignorance of it.

In his *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, Hayek invites us to have... *Present at all moment the needed and irremediable ignorance that we are subject of respect the majority of the single circumstances that determine the conduct of any of us who integrates society.* And he follows to point that: *Talking about a society which is known in all its parts by an observer –or by any of its members- supposes talking about something that never existed.* And in his very interesting essays collection *Studies on philosophy, politics and economics*, writing on *Theory of the Complex Phenomena*, he declares: *... is time to take more seriously our ignorance.*

Hayek emphasizes that our ignorance about how life in society works, has to do with two relevant aspects, one: the emergence of institutions that make cooperation possible, and two: the effects and circumstances that have to do with our actions on the world. In one word: No human being is capable of knowing all the details, facts, interests, decisions and goals that constitute the frame in which we cooperate. If this is real I think is urgent to create a course to point this important human limitation. It would be a course about human ignorance. This subject would be taught in early ages, during the formative years. So our students, and future citizens will learn soon in life not to trust in those economic, politics, moral and sociological theories that pretend to leave the social life in hand of “experts” or “specialists”.

It would be also achieved that, later on, when they have to dedicate to a professional career, they had a clear idea that the economist, lawyer, politician or the sociologist should take care to understand the function of life in society instead of pretending to organize it or rule it.

I consider very important such a subject on human ignorance for defending the individual freedom, not only in the present, but also in the future.

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