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"THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY": ALDOUS HUXLEY'S CRITIQUES OF UNIVERSAL EDUCATION

The aim of this essay is to give a coherent analysis of Aldous Huxley's critiques of universal education with the purpose of reconstructing his cultural criticism within its historical context and evaluate its usefulness as a contribution to today's debate on the problems of formal education. In order to achieve this aim, my objectives are first of all to classify Huxley's arguments on education and divide them into five categories for which education has a particular significance, secondly to illuminate the historical, ideological and theoretical background against which Huxley's arguments attain cogency, and finally to present his solutions and assess their relevance with respect to current concerns in Western education. I begin with education and human nature, since a prevailing theory on human nature inevitably determines the prevailing theory on education.

1. Education and Human Nature

Huxley's first critique of universal education attacks the prominence it affords to nurture over nature, and in his own survey of humankind, *Proper Studies*, he sets out to refute what he calls the "entirely false conception of individual human nature,"¹ namely the ideology of the "blank slate."² It is furthermore his contention that modern institutions such as schools have evolved to fit this erroneous view. Since he claims that "the only social institutions which will work for any length of time are those which are in harmony with individual human nature," he predicts that "institutions which deny the facts of human nature either break down more or less violently, or else decay gradually into ineffectiveness" (*CE*, II, 146). In his view this has happened to education. Huxley's critique is rooted in a partisan understanding of human nature that is mirrored in some important aspects by Steven Pinker's recent study *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*. Like Pinker, Huxley felt that the denial of human nature is in itself treacherous because it puts too much trust in the efficacy of social engineering.³

The conception of the blank slate furthermore leads to two important misunderstandings about the human mind, the first concerning egalitarianism. Locke declared: "The Difference to be found in the Manners and Abilities of

Men, is owing more to their *Education* than to anything else” (*Education*, 137–138).⁴ Thus education came to be regarded as the central formative influence on people and the only viable explanation for existing inequalities (see “The Idea of Equality” [1927], *CE*, II, 155). The Aristotelian postulate that men are in essence and originally equal and the Cartesian tenet that reason is the same in all men prompted eighteenth- and nineteenth-century political and social reformers to declare that all members of society have an equal capacity to be reasonable and could therefore be educated for a rational life. Yet by refusing to acknowledge the Hobbesian “universe of Behemoth and Leviathan”⁵ with its pessimistic view of human nature, reformers like Godwin were, according to Huxley, taken in by a false psychology.⁶ He claims instead that people react more readily to appeals to their lower passions and that “no amount of education or good government will make men completely virtuous and reasonable, or abolish their animal instincts” (“The Future of the Past” [September 1927], *CE*, II, 93; see also “On the Charms of History and the Future of the Past” [1931], *CE*, III, 137).

The second misunderstanding is based on the belief that the Lockean mind is uniform in its ability to achieve anything, and Huxley thinks that this behaviourist theory exercises a “baneful influence on current systems of education”, first by regarding the mind as a box into which ideas can be introduced with impunity and second by treating all minds as identical (“Education” [1927], *CE*, II, 194, 197–198; see also “The Idea of Equality” [1927], *CE*, II, 155). The, in Bantock’s words, “uniformitarian tendencies”⁷ of nineteenth-century reform were a logical reaction to the unregulated, haphazard and fairly rudimentary educational system in existence at that time, because only by believing in the homogeneity of human ability could a standardised system succeed.⁸ But for the future Huxley hopes that such a reductive science of mental processes is replaced by a new “psychological realism” in education (“The Outlook for American Culture: Some Reflections in a Machine Age” [August 1927], *CE*, III, 193), by which he proposes “simply applied psychology, applied heredity and applied psycho-physiology” (“Education” [21 December 1932], *CE*, III, 350).

First steps to diverge from uniform standards were taken in the 1920s. IQ testing⁹ as a regulative measure to override the still existing class bias in education, or IQ-elitism, as Gordon and White call it, was an attempt to realise a meritocracy, a Platonic denial of class-bound intelligence and ability.¹⁰ Another approach was to classify the mind into three categories, abstract, mechanical and concrete, for which a tripartite system of grammar, secondary modern and technical schools was devised.¹¹ However, the link between meritocracy, IQ testing and social success is not self-evident. It implies that the “technocratic-meritocratic ideology” is inherently egalitarian and that social success is solely based on technical and cognitive skills.¹² Even though access to grammar schools was thereby eased for lower classes,

Gordon shows how the provision of scholarships to disadvantaged children and the extension of selection principles did not counteract the demands of the 11+ examination in which social factors still played an important role.¹³ Huxley's view of IQ testing and tripartism is similarly negative. He believes first of all that the mind, "hereditary make-up and acquired attainments", is an organic whole whose constituent parts cannot be isolated in this way ("Varieties of Intelligence" [1927], *CE*, II, 181). He also realises that educational provisions were in effect based on status and income, not ability: "Class and money determine not the nature of the individual's intelligence but the way in which it shall be used and the ends which the individual sets himself to attain" (192).

Huxley concedes that universal education is by necessity democratic and standardised, but that even standardised education should provide for people the opportunity to benefit individually from it. His favoured educational strategy was the Dalton Plan, by which children with individual talents, abilities and aptitudes control their own learning process in an environment geared towards mutual support and cooperation ("How Should Men Be Educated?" [December 1926], *CE*, II, 75).¹⁴ The Dalton system addresses all the problems Huxley identified with universal education. It takes individual human nature for granted and does not believe in mechanistic teaching methods that treat the mind as a uniform receptacle. He blames the failure to adopt Daltonised schools as a standard educational provision on the endurance of Lockean and Helvetian doctrines, the "blank page of pure potentiality [...] capable of being molded by education into any desired form" ("Where Do You Live?" [1956], *CE*, V, 175). It remained his lifelong conviction that Helvétius's *De L'ésprit* is a preposterous book and that Watson's and Skinner's work was tainted by their oversimplification of human nature. Huxley fears that in order to solve the conundrum of universal education, governments might go further than just pretend that every child has the same intellectual potential. In the grip of a totalitarian doctrine, social engineering leads to a Brave New World instead of a democratic utopia (*Brave New World Revisited* [1958], *CE*, VI, 279 – 286).

II. Education and Social Control

The excessive "uniformitarianism" of the Brave New World may be a dystopian vision, but throughout the nineteenth century the "blank slate" was commandeered to prove the efficiency of education in controlling required outcomes and initiate fundamental social and political changes. Working-class and middle-class educators each attempted to assume control over popular education, yet this class-struggle reinforced the instrumental function of education as a means of social control rather than social change. Andy Green illustrates in *Education and State Formation: The Rise of Education Systems in England, France and the USA* how the monitorial system set the

institutionalised parameters of universal education by enforcing industrial and capitalist values like punctuality, obedience and discipline.¹⁵ When the state finally took over the provision of popular education at the end of the century, it put similar emphasis on the non-cognitive values of discipline and authority, thus transforming education into a political acculturation to the values of a dominant class. In “Nationalizing Education” (1916) Dewey asserts how exploiting it for such ends undermines the democratic claim of education and helps “refeudalizing” the system.¹⁶

This charge is not new. Universal education as a means for social control had previously been criticised by the philosophical radicals. J. S. Mill commented: “A general State education is a mere contrivance for moulding people to be exactly like one another; and as the mould in which it casts them is that which pleases the predominant power in the government [...] it establishes a despotism over the mind.”¹⁷ Mill’s estimation feeds into Huxley’s investigation into the nature of ideals, *Ends and Means*, in which he identifies what lies at the bottom of the contemporary crisis in education, namely that the “strict authoritarian discipline of state schools” emphasises values which primarily benefit a hierarchical and militaristic social organisation. In Huxley’s opinion it is therefore no wonder that the “decline of democracy has coincided exactly with the rise to manhood and political power of the second generation of the compulsorily educated proletariat” (“Education” [1937], *CE*, IV, 269 – 270). In this light “universal education has proved to be the state’s most effective instrument of universal regimentation and militarization, and has exposed millions, hitherto immune, to the influence of organized lying and the allurements of incessant, imbecile, and debasing distractions” (“Politics and Religion” [1941], *CE*, V, 12). Only a ruling oligarchy benefits from the social engineering education provides, be it in the form of an uncritical mass-consumerist population or an army of specialized stooges for political ends (*Science, Liberty and Peace* [1946], *CE*, V, 273 – 274). Huxley’s warning of universal education resulting effectively in the decline of democracy comes after it had earlier become reality in Italy and Germany.

However, the dream of positive social engineering was not yet dead at the beginning of the twentieth century. Progressives like Dewey still regarded education as a countermeasure to the authoritarian bias in popular education and still believed in it as “the fundamental method of social progress and reform” (“My Pedagogic Creed” [1897], *Dewey*, 234), if only the syllabus and the methodology emphasises freedom and responsibility enough. Yet Huxley is sceptical that “any great scheme of human regeneration,” be it religious, economical or political, could be achieved through education, simply because history has shown how these intentions were habitually reverted to the opposite. A “religious faith in the efficacy of education” has by the end of the 1920s not succeeded in abolishing the Edwardian stratified society (“The New

Salvation” [September 1929], *CE*, III, 212 – 213), because, in Bernstein’s words, “education cannot compensate for society”.¹⁸

The reason that radicals and socialists initially lobbied against state education was not only because they feared its abuse as a means of social and political control by the government, but, as Alan Richardson shows, they were also suspicious of the knowledges and methodologies that such an education system perpetuates, such as overtly imperialist, capitalist and nationalist doctrines.¹⁹ A. V. Kelly asserts that these knowledges are often treated as positivistic facts, decontextualised and compartmentalised in order to be transmissible by the teacher and passively absorbable by the students.²⁰ Yet Huxley exposes such “reasonable” world-views we obediently accept as “metaphysical entities” (“Varieties of Intelligence” [1927], *CE*, II, 191) based upon cultural preferences (“No Disputing About Reasons” [May 1927], *CE*, III, 143 – 144). He criticises that “we are taught in terms of rigid formulas, we are made to believe dogmatically that only one thing can be true or right at one time and that contradictions are mutually exclusive” (“Some American Contradictions” [October 1929], *CE*, III, 213). His criticism thus anticipates the postmodern crisis of epistemology which in Kelly’s definition regards “knowledge as a social, even a personal construct”, an ideological device for the maintenance and exercise of power (63).

Stripped of any supreme claim to truth, knowledge is thus not only ideologically determined but also hierarchical. The ability to project its own convictions onto others which then becomes the “natural” way of seeing the world is what Antonio Gramsci termed the hegemonic power of the dominant social group.²¹ The definition of cultural capital transferred via education represents such a moral-intellectual leadership and it is, as Pierre Bourdieu in “Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction” has shown, only valuable to those who, by descent and privilege, already own it.²² The education system reproduces cultural and social values and exercises hegemonic control over those who do not own cultural capital and is thereby again closely linked to social control and discipline.²³ Post World War II attempts to level out this hierarchy and elevate popular “lowbrow” disciplines to the same status as traditional “highbrow” subjects are in Huxley’s eyes equally misguided. Pandering to a culture-free concept of knowledge, the resultant “anarchy of values” merely leads to “conformity to current conventions of personal and collective behaviour” (“Knowledge and Understanding” [1956], *CE*, V, 213). Yet he concedes that the perennial values of a highbrow curriculum are not always relevant to contemporary life and should therefore be adapted to match the realities of the modern world (215 – 216).

Huxley feels that what is generally termed the “essentialist” approach to education places too much emphasis on remote and externally imposed learning objectives.²⁴ This entails conserving and transmitting a common conservative culture and does not initiate independent inquiry. Teaching is

based on rigour and achievement and passing exams is as important as discipline. In contrast Huxley puts forward a disinterested model of moral education based on the non-attached individual. This model emphasises personal autonomy and can e.g. be projected via the “bovaristic” quality of literature that offers models for judicious analysis of society (“Bovarism” [27 May 1933], *CE*, III, 362 – 364). By building “up in the minds of their charges a habit of resistance to suggestion” teachers instil in children the necessity to rely on their own resources and resist external stimulation (“Education” [1937], *CE*, IV, 288 – 290), thereby underpinning the democratic freedom to question loyalties.

III. Education for National Efficiency

Yet education is often perceived not as instruction for life but training for a livelihood. Huxley’s third critique of universal education condemns its utilitarian emphasis on human capital and the economic value of skills. National efficiency, a highly prized function of education at the beginning of the twentieth century, was impeded by what adherents to the “two cultures” controversy called the breakdown in communication between the arts and the sciences. It fuelled the “declinist” view of economic history that a humanistic prejudice in education left Britain without properly trained specialists and workers. By refuting that the measure of man is only his “socially valuable abilities” (“Education” [1927], *CE*, II, 216), Huxley is an outspoken critic of the increasingly specialised “second heroic age of industrialisation” at the beginning of the twentieth century (“Abroad in England” [May 1931], *CE*, III, 271 and “On the Charms of History and the Future of the Past” [1931], *CE*, III, 135). He asserts: “The worship of success and efficiency constitutes [a] menace to our world” (“Spinoza’s Worm” [1929], *CE*, II, 330),²⁵ a premonition of the technocratic nightmare of World War II. Huxley’s criticism of students entering “the world, highly expert in their particular job, but knowing very little about anything else and having no integrating principle in terms of which they can arrange and give significance to such knowledge as they may subsequently acquire” (“Education” [1937], *CE*, IV, 276) prepared the ground for the war-mongering machinery.

Still, educating a skilled and specialised workforce was the primary aim of nineteenth-century utilitarian education, and a second was projected social mobility for the lower classes.²⁶ But basic literacy and the diffusion of “useful knowledge” did not have the desired effect since, well into the twentieth century, only a tiny minority could climb the ladder of opportunity and attend the necessary secondary schools.²⁷ It was not until the late 1930s that attempts were made to re-fashion the education system on one based on “parity of esteem”, which afforded technical education the same social kudos as grammar school education. But the quick demise of technical schools as the third column of tripartism in the 1940s soon minimised the choices for the

lower and middle classes again. The paucity of technical schools and the low esteem in which scientific and technical education was allegedly held in England, was, according to Wiener, based on the gentrification of the nineteenth-century middle classes, which were in his eyes reluctant to support a more efficient and vocational education system. In fact, the middle-class mandate for more vocational training was fulfilled when e.g. the home and imperial civil services began to recruit on a meritocratic system of competitive exams and instruction at grammar schools became more academically rigorous after 1870.²⁸ This progression from patronage to merit actually imposed what Harold Perkin called the “entrepreneurial ideal” on secondary and higher education.²⁹ At first glance it looks as if Huxley confirms Wiener’s prejudice of an inherently anti-modern culture at public schools and universities when he concedes that these institutions were often nothing more than a “delightful social club” (“Education” [1927], *CE*, II, 214). Furthermore he agrees that the liberal ideal is not one that should be elevated to a universal ideal.³⁰ Yet his critique must be located within the revisionist school to the Wienerian thesis.³¹

In contrast to Wiener, Huxley does not see the liberal ideal winning out against the vocational. On the contrary, he believes that a humanistic education is under attack by technocrats and that more students go to universities because the pragmatics of the job market demands it (“Literature and Examinations” [1936], *CE*, VI, 62), despite Huxley’s contention that a liberal education cannot lead to social success for the many (“Foreheads Villainous Low” [1931], *CE*, III, 248). In turn, university subjects in the humanities were taught according to scientific standards, even though “the scientific student of literature is one of the most comical figures of our day” (“Education” [1927], *CE*, II, 215). Huxley maintains his position also in post-war times by emphasising that humanities “do not lend themselves to being taught with an eye to future examinations and the accumulation of credits” (“Censorship and Spoken Literature” [October 1955], *CE*, V, 323).³²

Thus by the 1930s scientific methodology and the emphasis on quantifiable outcomes were winning out against a culture of disinterested, “useless” knowledge. In Huxley’s eyes, technical and vocational education threatened to overwhelm a more eclectic liberal syllabus and narrow the horizons of those it educated to a point of absolute specialisation which, as mentioned above, ultimately led to the technocratic nightmare of World War II. In order to avoid a recurrence of this dangerous one-sided barbarism,³³ he advocated the integration of scientific and emotional truths for which the study of literature is again a valuable foundation. First, it has practical value. Students learn how to express themselves in writing and speech and evaluate the opinions of others (“Literature and Examinations” [1936], *CE*, VI, 59 – 62).³⁴ In addition, its immediate and moral point of view can mingle with the objective point of view of science in order to address fundamental questions

about human nature, truth and social harmony.³⁵ Huxley's answer to the "two cultures" debate is thus one that integrates what he calls Snow's "bland scientism" and Leavis' "moralistic literarism" (*Literature and Science* [1963], *CE*, VI, 90 – 91).³⁶

IV. Education and Cultural Degeneration

So it seems as if literature was the ideal subject for an integrated and disinterested education, though Huxley's fourth critique of universal education shows how literacy was a double-edged weapon in the fight for social improvement and acculturation. On the one hand, book reading is traditionally the tool for self-improvement and, as an heir to the Arnoldian tradition, Huxley feels that "culture is not derived from the reading of books—but from thorough and intensive reading of good books" ("Reading, the New Vice" [August 1930], *CE*, III, 48 – 50).³⁷ On the other hand, lower class literacy after the French Revolution was regarded as subversive, so that the dominant social powers strove to control the reading material of the newly literates, a process Harvey J. Graff calls "recreating cultural hegemony".³⁸ Richardson similarly illuminates how, as soon as it was realised that a substantial number of the populace could spell, political, religious and utilitarian groups vied for the attention of the reading public with useful, spiritual or improving literature in order to contain any seditious thoughts that may result from the "unfettered" literacy of the lower orders (Richardson, 44).³⁹ This inhibited the development of a confident literary and cultural taste amongst the lower classes and resulted, according to Huxley, in an inverted snobbery.

Now as then, the hierarchy of cultural capital posits a literate culture at the top, controlled, according to Graff's "literacy myth", by the middle classes (1987, 335). For the lower classes, imperfect reading skills and the lack of opportunity made it difficult for them to cross this cultural divide. Instead, their culture was dictated to them by the dross and trivia of popular mass publications particularly at the beginning of the twentieth century, and they were regarded as particularly hapless in their choice of reading matter.⁴⁰ Even though Jonathan Rose has recently denied this thesis,⁴¹ Huxley judges the keenness of barely literate workers to access the nation's cultural capital rather more pessimistically. Commenting in 1934 on the newly literate Mexican Indians, whose situation in many ways mirrors that of nineteenth-century British workers, he underlines that a love for reading cannot make up for a lack of understanding (*Beyond the Mexique Bay* [1934], *CE*, III, 578, 602).

This combination of untutored literacy with an intrinsic debased taste is held responsible for the perceived cultural degeneration of the early twentieth century. Although virtually all popular reading matter was derided as sensationalist and culturally impoverished, it provided for many the only

chance to own their reading skills without feeling inferior.⁴² In any case, functional literacy was applied to activities of which book reading accounted for only a small percentage.⁴³ Most workers, as Mitch similarly illustrates, preferred the Sunday papers and sports journals (60 – 1). Despite the fact that leisure seemed to be the main incentive to acquire literacy (Mitch, 78), reading was for pleasure rather than improvement.⁴⁴ In light of this, Huxley punctures the utopian dream of unlimited leisure leading to enlightenment and disinterested scholarly activity, as people would not in general devote themselves willingly to a “rational existence” (“Work and Leisure” [1925], *CE*, I, 416). Simultaneously he understands how literacy does not necessarily present the cultural pinnacle. Prompted by his interest in mysticism, he commended the staple of modern mass entertainment, the radio and the gramophone, as a didactic tool,⁴⁵ modelled on the old traditions of an oral and auditory culture.⁴⁶ But by then a hegemonic literary culture had largely destroyed the old oral traditions, and the common sensibilities of the people, fed on a “peculiarly shoddy kind of sensational and sentimental trash” (“Paper” [5 February 1932], *Hearst*, 318 – 19), were twisted into nationalistic and militaristic doctrines.

Thus the philanthropic dream of an enlightened rational existence for the masses is limited by, what Huxley terms, the ‘law of diminishing returns’ (“Work and Leisure” [1925], *CE*, I, 415; see also “Boundaries of Utopia” [1931], *CE*, III, 127). It puts Mill’s dream of a “reign of reason and democracy” based on universal literacy out of reach (*Science, Liberty and Peace* [1946], *CE*, V, 254 and “Propaganda in a Democratic Society” [1958], *CE*, VI, 242 – 243). Even though literacy enables us to understand our place in our culture, culture can also be “a negative force, a something which prevents persons, living in certain places and at certain times, from being able to think certain thoughts or adopt certain styles of expression” (“Variations on a Philosopher” [1950], *CE*, V, 97). Huxley says: “If we want to understand, we must uproot ourselves from our culture, by-pass language” and generally leave behind all emotional links to the world. But knowledge is often rooted in an unhealthy and “almost maniacal over-valuation of words” (“Knowledge and Understanding” [1956], *CE*, V, 219). So as a remedy for the failings in universal education, the overspecialization of technocrats, the indoctrination of the populace and the degeneration of culture, education must include thorough linguistic training.

V. Language and Critical Thinking

By the beginning of the twentieth century, language itself had become the focus of investigation. The paradigmatic change came with Saussure’s structuralist approach that severed the study of language from mainly philological concerns and created a system in which the signifier and the signified interact to create meaning devoid of reference to an objective

material reality. Another strand of linguistic theory emerging in the early twentieth century was that of relativism, emphasising the power of language to manipulate, constrain or even render incapable the understanding of a particular reality if language does not provide for it. The binary bind between language and thought is sometimes judged to be so strong by cognitive scientists that, as Mark Turner explains, “speech and writing could be ways for the brain of one person to exert biological influence upon the brain of another person”.⁴⁷ In other words, language can physically change the way people are able to think. Huxley similarly believes that the self-sufficiency and separateness of the Western alphabet conditions thought processes. Thus he views the invention of the alphabet not only humanity’s highest achievement, but also its most dangerous weapon (“Adonis and the Alphabet” [1956], *CE*, V, 235 – 239). The view that language can only give an inadequate and conventional view of reality and that it is riddled with ambiguity and vagueness, was influential in what has been termed the “linguistic turn” in philosophy.⁴⁸ Huxley’s musings on the nature and importance of language and thought are thus crypto-linguistic inquiries into the workings of language in an ideological context, emphasising its power to manipulate the understanding of a particular reality. He regards language as a vague system bearing no relationship to an unknowable reality, even though our being is determined by words. He feels that education unfortunately puts too much significance on the importance of words and the resulting verbalized, abstract knowledge is therefore only a kind of pseudo-knowledge. (“Can We Be Well-Educated?” [December 1956], *CE*, VI, 206) and “The Education of an Amphibian” [1956], *CE*, V, 199). “As we believe, so we are. And what we believe depends on what we have been taught”.⁴⁹ The first step to thorough understanding, Huxley advises, is to become more knowledgeable about the linguistic reality that surrounds us.

Today, Critical Language Study underlines the “significance of language in the production, maintenance, and change of social relations of power”.⁵⁰ This methodology uses the strategies of discourse analysis to investigate the expression and reproduction of social identities and social power relations. Norman Fairclough quotes Michel Foucault: “Any system of education is a political way of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourses, along with the knowledges and powers which they carry” (65). He puts forward a model in which language and discourse are described, interpreted and explained, so as to raise awareness of the social operation of linguistic features. His model aims to facilitate emancipation not only in newly literate societies (which is the main focus of Paulo Freire’s path breaking project in Brazil) but also in developed countries like Britain. I propose that Huxley may have had a similar model in mind when he criticised the dangerous distortions of meaning which language underwent in the late 1930s. Huxley claims that “all propaganda directed against an opposing group has but one aim: to

substitute diabolical abstractions for concrete persons” (“Words and Behaviour” [1936], *CE*, IV, 57 – 8). In reference to Hartley, Huxley feels that the most important part of language teaching is the art of dissociating ideas. But “that the art of dissociation will ever be taught in schools under direct state control is, of course, almost infinitely improbable” (“Education” [1937], *CE*, IV, 292 and “Education for Freedom” [1958], *CE*, VI, 284 – 285).

Huxley’s concerns were in unison with those of other cultural critics. Orwell famously stated: “Political language [...] is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind” (“Politics and the English Language” [1946]).⁵¹ The ideological distortion of language has furthermore been examined by Mikhail Bakhtin and his model of the dialogic nature of understanding has been tremendously influential for postmodern theory.⁵² He states: “The very same thing that makes the ideological sign vital and mutable is also, however, that which makes it a refracting and distorting medium” (*Bakhtin*, 55). In *The Dialogic Imagination* he makes clear that “language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into private property of the speaker’s intentions; it is populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others” (*Bakhtin*, 77). Although it is unlikely that Huxley was familiar with Bakhtin, the Russian usefully augments Huxley’s link between language, social interaction and political consciousness, even though the Marxist view of relations between human consciousness and the material world should be opposed by Huxley as an advocate of human nature. Yet this assumed discrepancy could be resolved if we bear in mind that unawareness and lack of self-knowledge was, according to Huxley, one of the major weaknesses of modern civilization. Language can be decoded if people were made able to tap into their innate abilities, something akin to Pinker’s “language instinct”.

Teaching the “capacity for autonomous thinking and decision-making”, which A. V. Kelly defines as the basis of democratic education (112) was for many educationalists epitomised by the classical syllabus of the grammar school.⁵³ Yet the way Classics were taught, as passive absorption of knowledge through rote learning, made it ineffectual in producing real understanding. At grammar schools, for instance, most students would sweat over Latin and Greek translations without really understanding the content, a fact on which Huxley has often remarked (see e.g. “Doodles in the Dictionary” [1956], *CE*, V, 429). What is more, critical thought and self-knowledge, which Huxley regards as an important educational goal (“Ethics” [1937], *CE*, IV, 401), cannot be assessed in standardised exams. Huxley himself submitted *The Perennial Philosophy* in 1946 as an educational reader for people who want to attain total awareness, but feels it is important to provide alternative ways of achieving an understanding that “comes when we are totally aware” (“Knowledge and Understanding” [1956], *CE*, VI, 225). For those who cannot derive any benefit from a liberal education Huxley

advocates non-verbal education as a way to understanding and self-knowledge.

Huxley was an enthusiastic supporter of the Dalton Plan, because it made the learning experience relevant to the life experience of the child (“How Should Men Be Educated?” [December 1926], *CE*, II, 75). It presents a shift in emphasis from *what* is learned to *how* the learning process is handled (“Education” [1927], *CE*, II, 212 – 30). Physical activity is an important aspect of it, and Huxley, like Dewey, is a keen supporter of F. M. Alexander’s kinesthetic training (“How to Improve the World” [December 1936], *CE*, IV, 139 – 140). Yet for Huxley Dewey’s learning-by-doing approach does not go far enough, because the ideal non-verbal education must also cater for the “not-selves”, our spiritual and vegetative soul. (“The Education of an Amphibian” [1956], *CE*, V, 197 – 208). He furthermore speculates that mind-enhancing drugs in connection with a superior kind of education will have revolutionary results,⁵⁴ because drugs “potentiate the non-verbal education of adolescents and [...] remind adults that the real world is very different from the misshapen universe they have created for themselves by means of their culture-conditioned prejudices” (Article in *Playboy* [November 1963], *Moksha*, xix). In “Education on the Nonverbal Level” Huxley lists a whole range of (unlikely) subjects that should be taught at school to aid awareness, such as yoga, meditation and Tantrik exercises and Gestalt therapy. Techniques for elementary pain control (autosuggestion, hypnosis) and ethical training and auto-conditioning also potentially generate self-awareness ([1963], *CE*, VI, 311 – 316).

VI. The End(s) of Education

As a supporter of the progressive child-centred approach which, despite several attempts, never seemed to get a foothold in the traditional British education system,⁵⁵ Huxley has a jaded view of education as a means of perfection. He insists that education must address the individual differences of human beings in order to be effective—differences that include varied levels of ability and intelligence. In addition, he questions not only the means of education but also its ends. Many educational activists declare that only an educated person can make a valuable contribution to society,⁵⁶ but this humanistic objective has resulted in indoctrination for political ends and specialisation for economic gains. So Huxley’s critiques of universal education overlap with his cultural criticism, because he is not blind to the fact that formal education can influence the future of human society. His hopes are for a future in which next generations would grow up impervious to political propaganda, advertising and religious indoctrination, fortified by a balanced and integrated education and instruction how to attain self-awareness and understanding. This could not be accomplished by the standardised, authoritarian and specialised system that emerged at the

beginning of the twentieth century. Yet Huxley is also aware that social experiments cannot be conducted under laboratory conditions. In 1933 Huxley presciently averred that “whenever new educational methods are introduced, we can only watch and wait how the experiment will unfold” (“Discipline” [8 August 1933], *Hearst*, 370 – 371), a statement he repeated in 1956 (“Can We Be Well-Educated?” [December 1956], *CE*, VI, 203). Today we are now in the position to judge tentatively if universal education has proved to be a successful experiment or if Huxley’s arguments still have some validity. In any case, the continuing debate about education signifies that concerns about the ends of education have not yet been satisfactorily resolved.

Looking back on Huxley’s suggestions, first of all his call for a non-competitive, individual education, we can see that the actual implementation of the comprehensive system in the early 1970s with the aim of abolishing selection and providing for children of all abilities may have been a step into the direction Huxley favoured. Yet today the current trend is again towards more selection under the cloak of diversity and choice. The inevitable result is segregation on mainly social factors, determined by parents’ buying powers in desirable catchment areas. Comprehensive schools were also the first institutions attempting to change instead of reproduce the existing inequalities in society. Today, education has the status of a human right whose provision cannot depend on a return for society in terms of useful skills and manpower, even though A. V. Kelly reiterates how most governments would nevertheless treat it as an investment in the economic and political future of the state and its members (107, 119, 124). Joel Spring’s exploration of Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights also exposes that education is continually and habitually misused for political and religious indoctrination.⁵⁷ Thus the hold of the government over those it educates has actually increased. The National Curriculum, introduced in 1988, specifies what children must study and what they are expected to know at certain key stages. This does not leave much room for the cultivation of critical faculties. Even the introduction of “Citizenship” as a foundation subject in 2002, with a mission statement highlighting “knowledge and understanding” is imposed by the state and cannot therefore count as a step towards Huxley’s call for “disinterested” education.

The National Curriculum is also based on an extensive system of tests at every key stage to check whether children are meeting the pre-set targets. Test results, league tables and the need to quantify educational outcomes is not in any real sense a way to encourage children to learn at their own pace and in a cooperative environment. Furthermore, parcelling knowledge up into disparate disciplines works against a system of integrated education. 28 years after Lord Callaghan’s Ruskin Speech, the current government continues to uphold that education must profit society in terms of a competitive national economy, for which the term “knowledge economy” has been coined. The

trend for educating for the workplace has infected the humanities to such a degree that they “now seek to justify their value in terms of ‘embedded transferable skills’ of potential use to employers”.⁵⁸ The purely functional aspect of education also impinges on the teaching of literacy and numeracy. The former Minister of Education, Kenneth Baker, said in 1986 that literacy is valuable only for the job market.⁵⁹ In any case, analytical linguistic skills may be no longer adequate for today’s visual culture, so that Huxley’s advice to supplement reading with the new skills of looking and listening seems prophetic (“Audible Books” [11 June 1934], *Hearst*, 278). Finally non-verbal education has been totally neglected in formal education and physical education is often merely a once a week break from the classroom routine. But why should students **not** learn how to meditate or how to use their body correctly. Learning in a stimulating environment remains the domain of children with special needs and primary school children.

On the whole, educational underachievement in deprived areas, inequality of opportunity via selection and the application of market principles to educational problems are but some aspects which allow for some disturbing parallels to be drawn between the provision of universal education in Britain in the nineteenth century, when parental consumers of education were sovereign, and today’s “parentocracy”. Marketisation, privatisation and choice have failed to provide answers to what most experts perceive to be a crisis in modern formal education in Britain. In light of these findings, it seems as if Huxley’s critiques of universal education still supply some useful reference points for a new approach to schooling, provided parents and the state alike put as high a premium on the emotional well-being of children and their precious curiosity about the world as on league table results.

¹ “Measurable and Unmeasurable” (1927), *Complete Essays*, ed. with commentary by Robert S. Baker and James Sexton (6 vols., Chicago, 2000-2002), II, 147. Hereafter, *CE*.

² Locke’s coinage of the *tabula rasa* is not original but goes back to Aristotle’s conception of the mind as a blank receiver, Pelagius’ *non pleni nascimur, et ut sine virtute, ita et sine vitio procreamur*,” Pelagius, *Pro lib. arb.* 1. <http://www.sant-agostino.it/latino/grazia_cristo/grazia_cristo_2.htm> and even appears in John Earle’s *Microcosmographia* of 1628. George Boas, *The Cult of Childhood* (London, 1966), 43. Yet its prominent position at the end of *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693, 1705), where Locke states his intention to consider the child as a “white paper, or wax, to be moulded and fashioned as one pleases” accords it superior status in educational thought. *The Educational Writings of John Locke*, ed. James L. Axtell (Cambridge, 1968), 325. Hereafter, *Education*.

³ (New York, 2002). Pinker refers, e.g., to modern architecture (Le Corbusier) and urban planning (170 – 171), two of Huxley’s pet hates.

⁴ Occasionally his bias towards nurture was tempered by an acknowledgment of individual “Makes and Tempers” of human minds (*Education*, 206). See also “God has stamp’t certain Characters upon Men’s Minds, which, like their Shapes, may perhaps be a little mended; but can hardly be totally alter’d, and transform’d into the contrary” (*Education*, 159). Axtell in his edition of Locke’s writings points out that there are further occasions where Locke gets caught up in the nature-nurture dichotomy, see, e.g. §§ 66, 108, 139, 216.

⁵ Aldous Huxley, “On Grace” [January 1931], *CE*, III, 119.

⁶ William Godwin actually had surprisingly similar arguments to Huxley’s with regard to the varieties of intelligence and his refutation of Helvétius. In *Essay II of Thoughts on Man* Godwin clearly states that he believes in a common human nature while at the same time acknowledging that “every human creature is endowed with talents, which, if rightly directed, would shew him apt, adroit, intelligent and acute, in the walk for which his organisation especially fitted him” *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, Vol. 6, ed. Mark Philip (London, 1993), 53. Like Huxley, he deplores how “the practices and modes of civilised life prompt us to take the inexhaustible varieties of man, as he is given into our guardianship by the bountiful hand of nature, and train him in one uniform exercise, as the raw recruit is treated when he is brought under the direction of his drill-sergeant” (53).

⁷ G. H. Bantock, *Studies in the History of Educational Theory*. Vol. 1: Artifice and Nature, 1350 - 1765 (London, 1980), 226.

⁸ It alone can “induce that equality of outcome which was the logical result of subjecting beings of a similar original nature to an identity of influence” (Bantock, 258).

⁹ See Cyril Burt, *How the Mind Works* (London, 1933), in which he defined intelligence as an inborn and unspecified ability that can be accurately measured. See also Percy Nunn, *Education: Its Data and First Principles* (London, 1920). Standard IQ testing (such as the later tests devised by H. Eysenck [e.g. *Know Your Own IQ*, 1962]) derives from the collaborative work of Alfred Binet and his student Theodore Simon. An early description of the Binet-Simon scale for testing the intelligence of ‘subnormals’ was published in *L’Année Psychologique*, 12 (1905), 191 – 244. See also C. Spearman, ““General intelligence,” objectively determined and measured.” *American Journal of Psychology*, 15 (1904), 201-293.

¹⁰ Peter Gordon and John White, *Philosophers as Educational Reformers: The Influence of Idealism on British Educational Thought and Practice* (London, 1979), 178, 213.

¹¹ John Stevenson, *British Society 1914 – 45* (London, 1984), 263. Cf. Hadow Report (1926), Spens Report (1938), Norwood Report (1943).

¹² See A. H. Halsey, A. F. Heath and J. M. Ridge, *Origins and Destinations: Family, Class, and Education in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 1980), 6 – 7.

¹³ Peter Gordon, Richard Aldrich and Dennis Dean, *Education and Policy in England in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1991), 114.

¹⁴ For a detailed outline of the Dalton Plan at A. J. Lynch’s West Green Elementary School, Tottenham see “Education” (1927) *CE*, II, 209 – 11. Also

Lesley Fox Lee, "The Dalton Plan and the loyal, capable intelligent citizen." *History of Education*, 29.2 (March 2000), 129 – 138. A. J. Lynch was a member of the Labour Party's Advisory Committee for Education.

¹⁵ (New York, 1990), 251.

¹⁶ *The Essential Dewey*, Vol. 1: Pragmatism, Education, Democracy, eds. Larry A. Hickman and Thomas M. Alexander (Bloomington, 1998), 268. Hereafter, *Dewey*.

¹⁷ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* [1859], ed. with an introduction by Gertrude Himmelfarb (London, 1988), 177.

¹⁸ Cf. Basil Bernstein, "Education cannot compensate for society," *New Society*, No. 387 (26 February, 1970), 344 – 347.

¹⁹ *Literature, Education, and Romanticism* (Cambridge, 1994), 89. However, Ross McKibbin points out that the Board of Education recommended an anti-Imperial bias for teaching history after World War I. *Classes and Cultures, England 1918 – 1951* (Oxford, 1998), 218.

²⁰ *Education and Democracy: Principles and Practices* (London, 1995), 101.

²¹ See e.g. Antonio Gramsci, "The Intellectuals". Hegemony presupposes that account be taken of the interests and tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised, and that a certain compromise equilibrium should be formed, based on compromise and consent. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/gramsci/editions/spn/problems/intellectuals.htm>> (International Publishers, 1971).

²² *Power and Ideology in Education*, eds. J. Karabel, and A. H. Halsey (New York, 1977), 493.

²³ Amanda Coffey, *Education and Social Change* (Buckingham, 2001), 68 – 83.

²⁴ Cf. Dewey in "Democracy and Education" (1916) where he argues that educational aims are often seen as being dependent on the needs of society in preparation for a remote future and disconnected from the experience of the child and can impact negatively on the intellectual freedom of the student (*Dewey*, 255).

²⁵ Huxley refers to 'Taylorism', the principles of scientific management. Ross McKibbin claims that Britain was the only European economy where 'Taylorism' had been adopted on any significant scale. *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain 1880 – 1950* (Oxford, 1990), 158.

²⁶ In some areas elementary instruction in literacy and numeracy was an essential means of social mobility. Miners, John Hurt reports, were keen for their children to acquire literacy skills because that would enable them to work on the surface. Furthermore, railway companies only employed workers who could read and write. *Elementary Schooling and the Working Classes, 1860 – 1918* (London, 1979), 32 – 33.

²⁷ Also, in Julia Wrigley's eyes, the diffusion of "useful knowledge" at mechanics' institutes brought little practical advantages to the workmen who attended lectures on science and technology. "Technical Education and Industry in the Nineteenth Century," *The Decline of the British Economy*, eds. Bernard Elbaum and William Lazonick (Oxford, 1986), 164 – 165, 168.

²⁸ Green, 288. Martin Wiener is arguably the most influential commentator who prescribes to the view of “entrepreneurial failure”, and his thesis firmly puts education at the centre of his critique. Cf. *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850 – 1980* (Cambridge, 1981).

²⁹ *The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780 – 1880* (London, 1969), 258.

³⁰ The tradition of liberal education does not preclude certain vocational aspects, such as statesmanship or, on a smaller scale, the enlightened governance of the estate. Christopher Winch, *Education, Work and Social Capital: Towards a New Conception of Vocational Education* (London, 2000), 35 – 36. Locke’s educational theories are similarly based on the education of the gentleman as manager of his estate.

³¹ See esp. *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain, Vol. 2: Economic Maturity, 1860 – 1939*, eds. R. Floud and Paul Johnson (Cambridge, 2004). For an overview of revisionist literature against Wiener’s thesis see David Edgerton’s annotated bibliography, *Science, Technology and the British Industrial ‘Decline,’ 1870 – 1970* (Cambridge, 1996).

³² This in opposition to some critics who fear that the fashionable academicisation of scientific subjects today makes them useless in the workplace.

³³ Specialists and technocrats are dangerous barbarians whose education is based on passive acceptance of positivist knowledge, not on independent enquiry (*Science, Liberty, and Peace* [1946], *CE*, V, 256).

³⁴ Huxley’s belief that literature can indeed be a valuable educational tool springs from his affinity with his ancestor Matthew Arnold. Arnold regarded poetry as a criticism of life and therefore a vital contribution to our understanding of reality (“The Study of Poetry” [1880], *Democratic Education*, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor, 1962), 171.

³⁵ “Integrate Education” [1959], *The Human Situation*. Lectures at Santa Barbara, 1959, ed. Piero Ferrucci (London, 1978), 3 – 10.

³⁶ Nadezhda Krupskaya, Lenin’s wife, was one of the founders of the Soviet system of public education. See also Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (1896-1934), Russia’s eminent psychologist and pedagogue. Huxley comments on the fact that in Russia attempts were made to redress this over-specialisation by balancing intellectual and manual skills and to unite specialised and general knowledge in “Thinking With One’s Hands” [11 February 1933], *Aldous Huxley’s Hearst Essays*, ed. James Sexton (New York, 1994), 339 – 340. Hereafter, *Hearst*. See also “Cultured People” [03 May 1934], *Hearst*, 266. But he fears that this old ‘Hebrew’ ideal of education is no longer adequate (“Education” [1937], *CE*, IV, 282 – 284).

³⁷ The repository of perennial wisdom and knowledge has, by the 1930s, become a “literary torrent” of knowledge: “Culture is in danger of being buried under the avalanche of books” and the mind is in danger of being paralysed (“Too Many Books” [22 April 1932], *Hearst*, 88 – 89).

³⁸ *The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society* (Bloomington, 1987), 264.

³⁹ Cf. Hannah More's *Cheap Repository Tracts* [1795] or Maria Edgeworth's *Popular Tales* [1804]. Socialists preferred technical reading material which appealed to the autodidactic culture of the artisan elite; cf. Owen's *New Views of Society* [1813 – 1816] (Richardson, 214, 226).

⁴⁰ Cramped housing and inadequate lighting was not conducive to the disinterested study of literature or newspapers in the evenings. David Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture: England 1750 – 1914* (Cambridge, 1989), 212 – 213. In the path of self-improvement also lay the unavailability of cheap books and the leisure time to read them (Richardson, 263).

⁴¹ Jonathan Rose's examination of working-class culture claims, in the tradition of Hoggart, that workers were not merely passive consumers of popular literature. Their eclectic reading based on the random availability of books was in fact marked by a distinctive literary sophistication. *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, 2001), 375.

⁴² David F. Mitch, *The Rise of Popular Literacy in Victorian England: The Influence of Private Choice and Public Policy* (Philadelphia, 1992), 54 and Vincent, 217 – 223. Broadshets catered for illiterate audiences as well as varying standards of literacy by including pictures and ballads as well as written reports. But broadshets also featured reprints of canonical literature, heralding the cheap editions of classical libraries in later decades (Vincent, 203 – 204, 208).

⁴³ Harvey J. Graff, "Literacy, Jobs, and Industrialization the Nineteenth Century," *Literacy and Social Development in the West: A Reader*, ed. H. J. Graff (Cambridge, 1981), 332 – 333, 337, 245).

⁴⁴ Before 1914 not many workers had the money, time or energy to pursue recreational activities. A decrease in working hours, the introduction of half-day Saturdays and the provision of cheap railway travel facilitated a new leisure culture (Gordon, [1991], 142). After 1920 the average working week came down from 54 to 48 hours (Andrew Davies, "Cinema and Broadcasting," *Twentieth-Century Britain: Economic, Social and Cultural Change*, ed. Paul Johnson (London and New York, 1994), 264.

⁴⁵ Documentaries and newsreels tapped into the didactic potential of film (Gordon, [1991], 148). In 1924 an Education Department was set up by the BBC under J. C. Stobart to examine the educational possibilities of broadcasting. In 1924 10% of British households held a licence, 48 % by 1933 and 71% by 1939 (Davies, 267).

⁴⁶ In "The Outlook for American Culture: Some Reflections in a Machine Age" Huxley describes how the educational contributions of machinery *could* lead to a rich universal culture. Huxley thinks that the spoken word of a sound recording has historically a greater impact than the written word and also reaches those who have no pleasure in reading or who cannot read ("Censorship and Spoken Literature" [October 1955], *CE*, V, 323 – 324). His support for an oral culture grew out of his interest in mysticism, which was steeped in the oral tradition ("Can We Be Well-Educated?" [December 1956], *CE*, VI, 205). In *Beyond the Mexique Bay* [1934] Huxley accounts for the crisis in popular culture by the migration of rural people to the cities, which meant that new paradigms of culture replaced oral and localised patterns and political propaganda and commercial advertising replaced traditional myths (*CE*, III, 502, 578).

- ⁴⁷ *The Literary Mind* (New York, 1996), 159.
- ⁴⁸ *Language and Reality: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Language*, eds. M. Devitt and Kim Sterelny (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), 236.
- ⁴⁹ *Vedanta for Modern Man*, ed. Christopher Isherwood (London, 1952), 43.
- ⁵⁰ Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power*, 3rd ed. (London, 1991), 1.
- ⁵¹ <http://www.george-orwell.org/Politics_and_the_English_Language/0.html>. See also George Steiner, "The Hollow Miracle," *Language and Silence: Essays 1958 – 1966*, 2nd ed. (London, 1985, rpt. 1990), 117 – 132.
- ⁵² "Marxism and the Philosophy of Language" [1929], *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov*, ed. Pam Morris (London, 1994), 35. Hereafter, *Bakhtin*.
- ⁵³ See e.g. T. S. Eliot, "Modern Education and the Classics [1932]," *Selected Essays* (London, 1999), 507 – 516.
- ⁵⁴ "Drugs That Shape Men's Minds" [1958], *Moksha, Writings on Psychedelics and the Visionary Experience 1931 – 1963*, ed. M. Horowitz and C. Palmer. (London, 1980), 152 – 153. Hereafter, *Moksha*.
- ⁵⁵ Child-centred approaches and the progressive writings on infant education by Maria Montessori, John Dewey and Friedrich Froebel were very influential at the beginning of the twentieth-century, but the enthusiasm for it was not shared by the president of the Board of Education Lord Eustace Percy, who was a strict opponent of Dewey and his followers (Gordon, [1991], 59, 160). After World War II, disapproval of the progressive approach by the Black Paper critics (Gordon, [1991], 85) and the preferred emphasis on vocational training meant that education, especially at secondary level, would rarely pick up on progressive theories of education, even though subsequent reports, like the Plowden Report in 1967, continued to pay lip service to a curriculum centred on activity and experience at primary level (Gordon, [1991], 59).
- ⁵⁶ Kevin Manton, *Socialism and Education in Britain, 1883 – 1902* (London, 2001), 146.
- ⁵⁷ He quotes the eminent educationalist I. L. Kandel who established how western educational systems were historically indoctrinating, propagandising, nationalistic and discriminatory. *The Universal Right to Education: Justification, Definition, and Guidelines* (Mahwah, N. J. and London, 2000), 17.
- ⁵⁸ Michael Sanderson, *Education and Economic Decline in Britain, 1870 to the 1990s* (Cambridge, 1999), 105. He is clearly not alone in his opinion that "we need to see the education of the people less as a kind of humane charity and social service and recognise it more as 'fundamental and essential for the promotion of economic growth'." (Sanderson, 107; quotes Szeter).
- ⁵⁹ Quoted in Fairclough, 236.