

A Liberal Education

by Thomas Henry Huxley

1 What is education? Above all things, what is our ideal of a thoroughly liberal education? – of that education which, if we could begin life again, we would give ourselves – of the education which, if we could mold the fates to our own will, we would give our children? Well, I know not what may be your conceptions upon this matter but I will tell you mine, and I hope I shall find that our views are not very discrepant.

2 Suppose it were perfectly certain that the life and fortune of every one of us would, one day or other, depend upon his winning or losing a game at chess. Don't you think we should all consider it to be a primary duty to learn at least the names and the moves of the pieces; to have a notion of a gambit, and a keen eye for all the means of giving and getting out of check? Do you not think that we should look with a disapprobation amounting to scorn upon the father who allowed his son, or the state which allowed its members, to grow up without knowing a pawn from a knight?

3 Yet, it is a plain and elementary truth that the life, the fortune, and the happiness of every one of us, and more or less, of those who are connected with us, do depend upon our knowing something of the rules of a game infinitely more difficult and complicated than chess. It is a game which has been played for untold ages, every man and woman of us being one of the two players, in a game of his or her own. The chessboard is the world, the pieces are the phenomena of the universe, the rules of the game are what we call the laws of nature. The player on the other side is hidden from

us. We know that his play is always fair, just, and patient. But also we know, to our cost, that he never overlooks a mistake, or makes the smallest allowance for ignorance. To the man who plays well, the highest stakes are paid, with that sort of overflowing generosity in strength. And one who plays ill is checkmated – without haste, but without remorse.

4 My metaphor will remind some of you the famous picture in which Retzsch has depicted Satan playing at chess with man for his soul. Substitute for the mocking fiend in that picture a calm, strong angel who is playing for love, as we say, and would rather lose than win – and I should accept it as an image of human life.

5 Well, what I mean by education is learning the rules of this mighty game. In other words, education is the instruction of the intellect in the laws of nature, under which name I include not merely things and their forces, but men and their ways; and the fashioning of the affections and of the will into an earnest and loving desire to move in harmony with those laws. For me, education means neither more nor less than this. Anything which professes to call itself education must be tried by this standard, and if it fails to stand the test, I will not call it education, whatever may be the force of authority or of numbers upon the other side.

6 It is important to remember that, in strictness, there is no such thing as an uneducated man. Take an extreme case. Suppose that an adult man, in the full vigor of his faculties, could be suddenly born in the world, as Adam is said to have been, and then left to do as he best might. How long would he be left uneducated? Not five minutes. Nature would begin to teach him, through the eye, the ear, the

touch, the properties of objects. Pain and pleasure would be at his elbow telling him to do this and avoid that; and by slow degrees the man would receive an education which, if narrow, would be thorough, real, and adequate to his circumstances, though there would be no extras and very few accomplishments.

7 And if to this solitary man entered a second Adam, or better still, an Eve, a new and greater world, that of social and moral phenomena, would be revealed. Joys and woes, compared with which all others might seem but faint shadows, would spring from the new relations. Happiness and sorrow would take the place of the coarse monitors, pleasure and pain; but conduct would still be shaped by the observation of the natural consequences of actions; or in other words, by the laws of the nature of man.

8 To every one of us the world was once as fresh and new as to Adam. And then, long before we were susceptible of any other mode of instruction, nature took us in hand, and every minute of waking life brought its educational influence, shaping our actions into rough accordance with nature's laws, so that we might not be ended untimely by too gross disobedience. Nor should I speak of this process of education as past for anyone, be he as old as he may. For every man the world is as fresh as it was at the first day, and as full of untold novelties for him who has the eyes to see them. And nature is still continuing her patient education of us in that great university, the universe, of which we are all members – nature having no Test-Acts.

9 Those who take honors in nature's university, who learn the laws which govern men and things

and obey them, are the really great and successful men in this world. The great mass of mankind are the “Poll,” who pick up just enough to get through without much discredit. Those who won’t learn at all are plucked; and then you can’t come up again. Nature’s pluck means extermination.

10 Thus the question of compulsory education is settled so far as nature is concerned. Her bill on that question was framed and passed long ago. But, like all compulsory legislation, that of nature is harsh and wasteful in its operation. Ignorance is visited as sharply as willful disobedience – incapacity meets with the same punishment as crime. Nature’s discipline is not even a word and a blow, and the blow first; but the blow without the word. It is left to you to find out why your ears were boxed.

11 The object of what we commonly call education – that education in which man intervenes and which I shall distinguish as artificial education – is to make good these defects in nature’s methods; to prepare the child to receive nature’s education, neither incapably nor ignorantly, nor with willful disobedience; and to understand the preliminary symptoms of her displeasure, without waiting for the box on the ear. In short, all artificial education ought to be an anticipation of natural education. And a liberal education is an artificial education – which has not only prepared a man to escape the great evils of disobedience to natural laws, but has trained him to appreciate and to seize upon the rewards which nature scatters with as free a hand as her penalties.

12 That man, I think, has had a liberal education who has been so trained in youth that his body is the ready servant of his will, and does with ease and pleasure all the work that, as a mechanism, it

is capable of; whose intellect is a clear, cold, logic engine, with all its parts of equal strength, and in smooth working order; ready, like a steam engine, to be turned to any kind of work, and spin the gossamers as well as forge the anchors of the mind; whose mind is stored with a knowledge of the great and fundamental truths of nature and of the laws of her operations; one who, no stunted ascetic, is full of life and fire, but whose passions are trained to come to heel by a vigorous will, the servant of a tender conscience; who has learned to love all beauty, whether of nature or of art, to hate all vileness, and to respect others as himself.

13 Such a one and no other, I conceive, has had a liberal education; for he is, as completely as a man can be, in harmony with nature. He will make the best of her, and she of him. They will get on together rarely; she as his ever beneficent mother; he as her mouthpiece, her conscious self, her minister and interpreter.

参考译文：

何谓教育？特别是在我们心中，真正的通识教育理想是什么？如若一切能够重来，我们会让自己接受这样的教育吗？如若命运能够掌握在自己手中，我们会让自己的孩子接受这样的教育吗？我不了解你们对此有何看法，但是我想吐露自己的想法，并希望我们的观点不要有太大分歧。

假使真的存在这么一种情况，即我们每个人的生命和财产有一天要由自己在象棋中的输赢决定，那么，你们不认为我们的首要任务是对象棋进行一定的学习吗？比如，至少要学习每个棋子的名称和走法、掌握开局棋法、谙熟各种“将军”及“被将军”和策略等。另外，如果

一个父亲或一个国家放任他的儿子或人民，在长大或成熟后竟不分卒马，那么，你们不认为我们应当对这样的父亲和国家嗤之以鼻吗？

然而，一个基本的事实显而易见，即我们及与我们相关的每个人的生命、财产和幸福，都取决于我们对某个游戏规则的了解程度，这些规则比象棋规则更难、更复杂。这场游戏的参与者，各自进行着对弈。这场游戏中，棋盘就是整个世界，棋子则是宇宙现象，游戏规则便是我们所说的自然法则。游戏中我们虽然看不见对方，但我们知道，对方是秉着公平、公正以及耐心来对弈的。但是，在付出代价之后，我们才知道对方从不放过我们的丝毫过错，对我们的疏漏也不做点滴宽容。游戏中，强者会被慷慨地授予最高奖励，从而使强者愉悦万分，而弱者只有慢慢地被将死，无人同情。

我所做的这番比喻，会让你们想起雷茨施的那幅名画，画中将人生描述为人类与撒旦的一场象棋博弈。将这幅画中阴险的恶魔替换成镇定自若、坚强无比的天使，他只为爱而战，宁愿输的是自己 - 我认为这正是对人类生活的真实描绘。

我所说的教育就是学会这场大型游戏的规则。换句话说，我认为教育就是对自然法则智慧的展现，这种展现不仅仅指各种事物及其蕴含的力量，而且也包括人类和他们的各个方面，以及热切希望和这些自然法则和谐相处的情感与意志的塑造。因此，在我看来，这就是所谓的教育。任何自命为“教育”之物都必须符合这一标准。否则，无论面临多大的权威和势力，我都不会称其为教育。

必须记住一点，严格来说没有哪个人是没有受过教育的。举一个极端的例子吧。假设一个成

人如同亚当一样在他的各种官能最佳时突然降生到这个世界，然后尽其所能去做事。那么，他“未接受教育”的状态会持续多久呢？不到五分钟。因为大自然会随时通过他的眼睛、耳朵、触觉来告诉他周围事物的特征，他所感知到的疼痛和舒适会告诉他什么该做，什么不该做。渐渐地，这个人就受到了教育。尽管这种教育范围比较狭窄，且缺乏与人互动及成就感，这种教育比较真实、彻底和充分。

而且，对于这个孤独而生的亚当来说，如果他遇到了另一个“亚当”，或者如果更幸运的话，遇见了夏娃，那么，一个更大更新、具有社会性质且包罗道德现象的世界就会出现。从这种新的人际关系中引发的欢乐和悲伤都会使世上所有其他事物黯然失色。幸福和悲伤会取代快感和痛感这种粗浅的表达。但是，对行为举止的塑造还要靠观察他人行为的自然结果，或者靠人的自然本性。

世界对我们每个人来说都曾是新鲜的陌生的，就像当初对于亚当一样。并且，早在我们受到其他任何教育影响之前，大自然就支配着我们，对我们的生活无时无刻不进行教育并施加影响，使我们的行为大致遵循自然法则，从而避免我们可能因为过分地逆反自然而被其淘汰。即使一个人年至松鹤、寿比南山，我也不认为这种教育方式对他来说是过时的。对于每个人而言，世界都如最初时一样无比新颖。在那些用眼睛观察世界的人看来，那里充满了奇珍异物，奥妙难言。大自然就好比一所伟大的大学，在这里我们每个人都是学员，大自然总是对我们进行耐心的教导。不过，在大自然这所大学里并没有测试或考查制度。

在那里，能够获得荣誉并学会和服从支配人与事物法则的那些人，会成为这个世界上真正伟大而成功的人。相比之下，大部分人只是鹦鹉学舌，他们所学知识只是保证他们能够通过考

试。而那些不学无术的人则会被淘汰，这样就再也无法挽回。被大自然所淘汰就意味着灭亡。

因此，从大自然角度而言，强制义务教育并不是个难题。关于这个问题的议案早已制定完成并获得通过。但是像其他强制性立法一样，自然的立法是残酷的，一旦违反则需要付出巨大代价。无知就像故意逆反一样要受到严厉的惩罚，无能则如同犯罪一般要付出相同的代价。大自然的惩罚方式甚至不是先予以打击，再以理相劝，而是直接予以无言的打击。你只能自己去找出被打的原因。

我们通常所称的教育（因为这种教育有人为介入，我在此将其称为“人为教育”以示区分），其目的在于弥补自然教育在方法上的缺陷，同时为孩子接受大自然的教育做好准备，使他们不至于无知、无能或逆反，也帮助他们了解自然不悦时的各种迹象，不至于毫无准备地接受未来的惩罚。总而言之，所有人为教育应该是对自然教育的预期。通识教育就是一种人为教育。这种教育方式不仅教导人们避免逆反自然规律这样的罪恶行为，还教导人们利用并感恩于自然的赏赐，因为大自然用她的自由之手散播赏赐，就如同散播各种惩罚一样。

我认为，一个接受过通识教育的人应该是这样的：他年轻时受到的训练可以使其身体服从自己的意志，就像一台机器一样轻松而愉悦地从事一切工作；他的心智好比一台敏锐、冷静而有逻辑性的引擎，每个部分能力相当，有条不紊地运行着；他又如一台蒸汽机，待于效力各种工作，纺织思想之纱，铸就心智之锚；他的大脑中充满着知识，既有关于大自然的重要真理和知识，也有自然界运行的基本规律；他并不是一个不正常的苦行人，他的生活中总是充满生机和热情，但他的激情永远受制于强大的意志力和敏感的良知；他学会去热爱一切美好的事物，不论是自然之美还是艺术之美；他憎恨所有的丑恶，并做到尊人如待己。

我认为，只有这样的人，才有资格称为接受过通识教育，因为他已经和自然互为相融，互利互用，和谐与共。他们将会相处得很好，自然界永远是他的慈母，而他也会成为慈母的喉舌，化身为她的意识，变为她的代理人和传声筒。