

= Education and Democracy : The Meaning of Alexander Meiklejohn =

Education and Democracy : The Meaning of Alexander Meiklejohn , 1872 ? 1964 is the first full biography of Alexander Meiklejohn written by Adam R. Nelson and published by the University of Wisconsin Press in 2001 . The title is not a complete biography but draws from five archives to show Meiklejohn through his own words . A popular figure in the early 20th century who has since faded , Meiklejohn was a philosopher and university president who championed unified knowledge , idealism , and Great Books curricula . The book is split into five sections based on the locations in which Meiklejohn lived : his undergrad , faculty , and administrative years at Brown University , his presidency of Amherst College , his time with the University of Wisconsin Experimental College , and his experience with adult education and free speech advocacy at Berkeley . Nelson portrays Meiklejohn as " contradictory , paradoxical , and quixotic " as he grapples with how to encourage students to pursue freedom and how a teacher can teach this while respecting student freedom .

Reviewers noted the clarity of Nelson 's intellectual contextualization of Meiklejohn 's work , but wanted additional information about what Meiklejohn thought about comparable programs , educational precedents , and luminaries in the field . Other reviewers marked the book 's balance , completeness , and importance in resurfacing Meiklejohn as a major figure in the history of American education .

= = Publication = =

Education and Democracy : The Meaning of Alexander Meiklejohn , 1872 ? 1964 is a biography of Alexander Meiklejohn written by Adam R. Nelson and published by the University of Wisconsin Press in 2001 . In lieu of writing a definitive account of Meiklejohn 's life , Nelson portrayed Meiklejohn through the subject 's own language to let him " speak for himself " . Nelson draws on five archives detailed in copious quotations and a 65 @-@ page notes and annotated bibliography appendix . While Meiklejohn was popular in the early 20th century and best known for his stance on academic freedom , he had become a marginal figure by the time this book was published . The book was the first full biography written on Meiklejohn , preceded only by dissertations and a 1981 " short ' biographical study ' " that introduced Meiklejohn 's written work . Nelson 's title is a response to John Dewey 's Democracy and Education . It intends to show the contrast of Meiklejohn 's idealism opposite Dewey 's pragmatism .

= = Summary = =

The work is split into five parts based on the places in which Meiklejohn lived : his undergraduate education at Brown University , his later administrative work there , his presidency of Amherst College , his University of Wisconsin Experimental College , and his work with adult education and other actions in Berkeley . At the core of Meiklejohn 's effort to create systems that promote democratic citizenship , Nelson argues , is " the paradox of Socratic teaching " : how a teacher can make a student want freedom and how a teacher can teach this while respecting the student 's freedom in practice .

Meiklejohn was born in Great Britain and raised in Rhode Island . He attended Brown and Cornell University , and later returned to the former as a popular ethics professor and its consequent dean of admissions . In place of the popular elective system and science curriculum , he championed a Kantian style of education with unified knowledge , moral development , and pursuit of ideals , and a style of democratic governance where students would lead and reason through their own education . Meiklejohn saw democracy as something imparted and reconsidered by passing generations , and that it was borne in " strong discussions around agreed terms " . His suggested curriculum for a unified knowledge included one or two years of ancient Greek classics and added years of enlightenment or modern American classics .

Meiklejohn became Amherst College 's president in 1912 . Meiklejohn developed a legacy of autocratic treatment of faculty , drastic overspending , and that of a college hermetically detached

from demands of the outside world . He was ousted after lying about faculty appointments , whereupon he opened the Experimental College at the University of Wisconsin , a two @-@ year Great Books program with readings from ancient Greece and modern America . There , too , he treated the program as unaccountable to outside influence , and did not produce reports of their work or build rapport with the outside Wisconsin community . The program quickly closed for reasons attributed to Meiklejohn 's obstinance and not programatic design . Meiklejohn then opened a Great Books adult education program in San Francisco where students similarly self @-@ governed and led their own education . As funding dissipated at the outset of World War II , the students chose to shutter the school before " compromising " their ideals . Meiklejohn became an advocate of free speech as an absolute right differentiated from physical action . His stances on this and democracy influenced the United States Supreme Court and the aims of UNESCO .

Nelson portrays Meiklejohn as " contradictory , paradoxical , and quixotic " . Despite believing in free thought and the primacy of student choice in determining their own education , he held incontrovertible stances . Nelson compares Meiklejohn to fellow educator Woodrow Wilson : " idealists who occasionally allowed the enthusiasm of their vision to impede the integrity of their leadership " . Meiklejohn 's students often defied his wishes , overturning a ban of professional baseball student players at Brown , enlisting in the army at Amherst , and choosing anarchy over student government at Wisconsin . Meiklejohn was an idealist who shunned the pragmatism of figures like John Dewey . Meiklejohn 's idealism required charismatic and " demanding " tutors for any student who agreed to the minimum of open @-@ minded participation in seminar .

= = Reception = =

The biography is considered the first on Meiklejohn . Reviewers noted the clarity of Nelson 's intellectual contextualization of Meiklejohn 's work , but wanted additional information about what Meiklejohn thought about comparable programs , educational precedents , and luminaries in the field . Other reviewers marked the book 's balance , completeness , and importance in resurfacing Meiklejohn as a major figure in the history of American education .

Dominique Marshall (Labour / Le Travail) compared Nelson 's clear presentation of Meiklejohn 's philosophy to Meiklejohn 's own accessible practice of philosophy . Marshall described Nelson 's intellectual and political contextualization surrounding the eras of Meiklejohn 's life as having " surprising variety " . Mary Ann Dzuback (The Journal of American History) thought that the book was not riveting , as par for the genre , but that the work was " thoughtful and compelling " . She affirmed Meiklejohn 's importance for his experiments and attempts to make educational programs capable of producing a democratic society . Dzuback praised Nelson 's use of student quotes and his analysis of Meiklejohn 's written work , but wanted for more context , such as how Meiklejohn compared with other educational figures in higher education , how other contemporary Great Books programs impacted his thought , and where he stood in the overall history of American education . Marshall too remained curious about Meiklejohn 's views on the family 's role in civic education . Jinting Wu (Education Review) complained of too much intellectual context in areas and of unresolved contradictions in Meiklejohn 's metaphysical claims .

Scot Guenter (American Studies) considered the biography " particularly timely " for the post @-@ September 11 relevance of Meiklejohn 's democratic experiments in the face of the privatization of higher education , and of Meiklejohn 's courage towards free speech . He wrote that Meiklejohn 's views on curriculum would arouse " needed " reflection in college instructors , and that the book 's audience should include university administration and those interested in civil liberties as well as historians and philosophers of education . Guenter appreciated how Nelson presented the shortcomings of Meiklejohn 's ego and spendthrift lifestyle . Robert Sherman , writing for the History of Education Quarterly and reflecting on the depth of the appendices , struggled to consider " how such a work could be more complete " . He wrote through Louis Menand that Meiklejohn 's " certitude [led] to violence " and that by letting him speak for himself , Nelson made the French philosopher Charles Renouvier 's point that only individuals are certain and that there is no greater certainty . Guenter added that the biography read best in the parts where Nelson was clearly

inspired by Meiklejohn 's zeal and idealism , particularly the " What Does the First Amendment Mean ? " chapter , which Guenter considered essential reading .