

thinking, is coming to an end, one way or the other. Either this will mean, that the Enlightenment will be finally replaced by a reawakening of the kinds of ideas associated with the Golden Renaissance and promoted by Lyndon LaRouche and his international movement today, or it will mean that the world crashes into what might be called “post-Enlightenment chaos.” O’Brien has opted for the latter.

What other inference can one draw, from the fit that he throws in the concluding passages of *The Long Affair*? He frets that Jefferson is already becoming, and will increasingly become, the ideological/historical standard-bearer, for the right-wing racist militia groups that are sprouting up in the United States. He paints a dark picture of a 21st-century United States, in which a “new civil war,” a race war on a massive scale, might occur, with the “militant extremists” being part of a “neo-Jeffersonian racist schism” that will rip apart what he calls the American Civil Religion Official Version (ACROV).

“American civil religion,” he writes, “may . . . be the major force working for the preservation of the Enlightenment. . . . Enlightenment and democracy are unlikely to survive in the rest of the world if they go down in America. . . . The sacred documents of the American civil religion are Enlightenment documents. . . . The Constitution is an *Enlightenment* document” (emphasis in original). Elsewhere, he places the Declaration of Independence in the same category.

Here, the fraud reaches its apogee. As we noted above, the Constitution and Declaration of Independence are, emphatically, anti-Enlightenment documents.

Why does O’Brien persist in promoting his “Big Lie” about the Enlightenment? What is involved here is a threat, rather than academic historical research, or some kind of objective forecast.

O’Brien writes that “the implications of a schism in the American civil religion,” caused by the re-evaluation of Founding Father Jefferson, “are potentially so far-reaching that they defy all prediction. . . . A drama is about to manifest itself.” He feels “awe and foreboding, at the potential consequences in the coming century, for the world as well as for America, of the impending schism in the American civil religion and of the concomitant emergence of Thomas Jefferson—the mystic, implacable Jefferson of the French Revolution—as prophet and patron of the fanatical racist far right in America.”

The message is: Try to extirpate the evil that the Enlightenment has done in the United States, and we will drown you in blood, race riots, and civil strife.

Those who are sane among us, will learn from Jefferson’s errors, to seek ways to bury the Enlightenment once and for all, and replace it with truly human forms of thought. By contrast, the Conor Cruise O’Briens of this world want to drive us all into a Dark Age, as the “alternative” to their doomed Enlightenment paradigm. The handwriting on the wall reads, “Zaire.”

‘Core curriculum’ for schools, but what kind?

by Susan Welsh

The Schools We Need And Why We Don’t Have Them

by E.D. Hirsch, Jr.

Doubleday, New York, 1996

317 pages, hardbound, \$34.95

When Lemuel Gulliver, the hero of Jonathan Swift’s epic, arrived in the Land of the Houyhnhnms, he encountered a strange and most repulsive breed of animal. The creatures had a slight resemblance to human beings, though they walked on all fours, wore no clothing, and had sharp, hook-shaped claws. The males had beards like goats, while the dugs of the females hung between their fore-feet, and often reached almost to the ground as they walked. The creatures, called Yahoos, fed on roots and the flesh of animals found dead, by accident or disease. They were kept on leashes by their masters, the Houyhnhnms, a horse-like species with a language—of sorts—and a modicum of rationality which did not, however, aspire to the level of Reason. Rather like the English aristocracy.

E.D. Hirsch, Jr., in his book on the crisis in American education, gives a powerfully written and well-researched account of how it has come to pass that our schools are turning out students who, in another generation, may be indistinguishable from the Yahoos. His argument that, in order to prevent such a thing from happening, schools should teach every child a core curriculum of basic knowledge, is sound, in principle.

But, what about the professors at Swift’s Grand Academy of Lagado: those highly educated worthies, well instructed in what Hirsch would esteem as the “consensus science” of their day, who spent their lives attempting to extract sunbeams out of cucumbers, or to reconstitute human excrement into the food from which it originally came? What about the ingenious architect who had contrived a new method for building houses, by beginning at the roof and working downwards to foundation?

These targets of Swift’s satire—the Aristotelians, the British Royal Society, the followers of alchemist Isaac Newton—are exactly what we shall end up with more of, if Hirsch’s specific prescribed *solution* to the crisis in American education be followed. For Hirsch is an impassioned defender of the Enlightenment: the philosophical descendants of the

Grand Academy of Lagado.

His “core curriculum” is intended to turn out new Galileos, Newtons, Thomas Jeffersons, and Bertrand Russells. In his justified attack on the influence of Romanticism in American culture, he fails to mention that we are *not* confined to a choice between Romanticism and the Enlightenment, but that there is a third alternative: the Renaissance, and its epistemological descendants, such as Johannes Kepler, Gottfried Leibniz, Carl Gauss, Friedrich Schiller, Bernhard Riemann, and Lyndon LaRouche.

This review is not the place for a full discussion of that third alternative; the reader is referred to many works by LaRouche and associates published in *EIR* and other locations.¹ I limit myself here, first, to giving a brief sketch of some of the points on which Hirsch is devastatingly correct — in opposition to the so-called mainstream of educational philosophy today — and which make his book a valuable contribution, which should be read by every person who is concerned about the decline of American education. Second, I take up a few crucial points on which the book is very, very wrong.

‘Who will reform the reformers?’

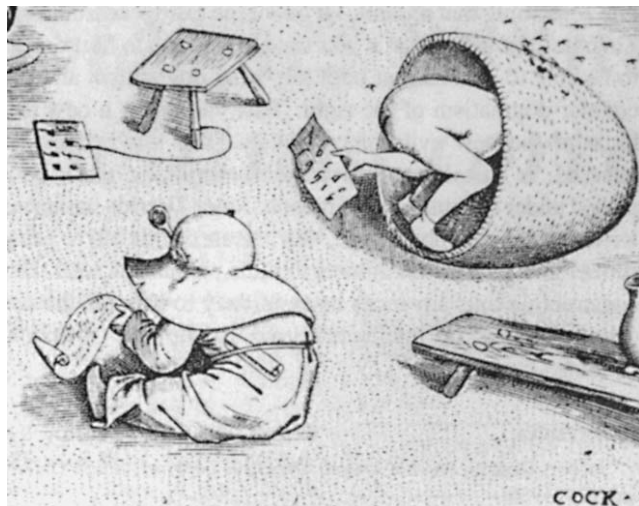
Americans have been “reforming” their schools for longer than anyone can remember. The latest flurry of activity dates back to the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. In the 14 years since then, all sorts of “innovative,” “break-the-mold” reforms have been tried out, while test scores have continued to plummet.

Hirsch proves the case that it is precisely such reforms that are driving us deeper and deeper into failure. They do not represent a *change* in philosophy at all; in fact, the philosophy behind them has been hegemonic in the United States since at least 1918, when the U.S. Bureau of Education published its *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*, marking a shift away from the strong academic orientation of preceding generations, and toward the anti-intellectual attitudes known as Progressivism.

The Progressivist ideology is deeply ingrained in the American psyche; it must now be uprooted, if America’s children are to receive the education they require.

Hirsch attributes the paradigm shift that began in 1918, in large part, to the pervasive influence of William Heard Kilpatrick and the Columbia University Teachers College. Kilpatrick’s philosophy is summarized by his insistence, in his own experimental classrooms, that there was to be “absolutely no set curriculum; that the teacher was to be perfectly free to do what she thought wise; that the children were to be free to think and to act. The children were not to be required to learn reading, to master prescribed arithmetic or spelling:

1. See, for example, Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., “Return to the Machine-Tool Principle,” *EIR*, Feb. 7, 1997; LaRouche, *The Science of Christian Economy and Other Prison Writings* (Washington, D.C.: Schiller Institute, 1991).



“Students,” a detail of a 1557 engraving after Bruegel, entitled “The Ass at School.”

there were to be no examinations. They were not to be marked or graded in terms of a prescribed curriculum. I laid down only one principle: ‘activity leading to further activity without badness.’ ”

In the modern incarnation of this philosophy, it is considered “developmentally inappropriate” for children to be “forced” to master the subject matter of a given domain of knowledge. Instead, they are supposed to be taught “metacognitive skills” and accorded the “self-esteem” to be able to make their way through life. Because of the “new world of technology,” we are told, a “knowledge explosion” has occurred that makes the teaching of “today’s facts” irrelevant. Why learn the multiplication tables, when a calculator can give you the right answer? Hirsch reports his amazement at being asked, at a conference of school principals and administrators, whether he was aware “that it was developmentally inappropriate to expose first graders to the Eiffel Tower—as [Hirsch’s] Core Knowledge materials recommended.” Hirsch writes that he was too astounded to respond effectively: “I didn’t dare mention as relevant the fact that troops of French preschoolers continually visit the Eiffel Tower without harmful psychological effects, because I had already learned that any mention of French children (or those of other nations) would bring the reproach that *we* are not French.”

One of the chief slogans of the reformers, for the better part of this century, has been that we must get rid of “rote learning,” which, they say, stifles a child’s creativity. In fact, as Hirsch points out, very little “rote learning” goes on in American classrooms. Apart from the Pledge of Allegiance, practically nothing is memorized. The very reforms that are being so loudly advocated, are already firmly in place.

Underlying these reforms, Hirsch writes, is the philosophy of European Romanticism, which created the new conception of the child that came to dominate American educa-

tional theory. Eighteenth-century Romantics such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau maintained that human nature is innately good, and should be encouraged to follow its own course. This was in contrast to the Enlightenment view (shared by Hirsch), which took a more skeptical and suspicious view of human nature, demanding protections for the individual against the tyranny of the majority.

(The former view, Hirsch attributes not only to Rousseau and his ilk, but also to Friedrich Schiller and Ludwig van Beethoven, thereby mixing up Romanticism with the Classical heritage of the Renaissance. Schiller and Beethoven were *not* Romantics; Schiller's concept of the "beautiful soul" is not of Man in the state of natural imbecility, but rather Man uplifted by Reason.² Hirsch's characterization of the Enlightenment's pessimistic view of Man's nature is substantially correct, but it was *not* the spirit in which the United States was founded, as he implies. Contrary to "consensus" historiography, the creation of the United States of America was a *Leibnizian*, not a *Lockean*, project.³)

This Romantic ideology, as Hirsch documents, fosters the *anti-intellectualism* of American life, a characteristic that has long been noted by foreign observers, but which, today, has reached previously unimagined depths of banality. This anti-intellectualism is *vigorously encouraged* by the educational establishment itself, in the name of "reform."

What effect does this have, and how does it compare with what takes place in other nations? Take, for example, American preschool programs for disadvantaged children, such as Head Start. Hirsch reports that a study published in 1985 by the Department of Health and Human Services concluded that "in the long run, cognitive and socioemotional test scores of former Head Start students do not remain superior to those of disadvantaged students who did not attend Head Start." In a word, Head Start is a failure. The program seems to benefit children for a while, but it lacks academic coherence, and is rarely accountable for specific academic outcomes. When its graduates then enter an elementary school program that also lacks academic coherence and is also unaccountable for specific academic outcomes, any apparent benefits quickly evaporate, and the gap widens between advantaged and disadvantaged children. In France, on the other hand, which has a large population of immigrants and low-income families, the gap *decreases* with each school grade. Nearly all French children, including those from immigrant families, attend the preschools known as *ecoles maternelles*. The program lasts all day, 12 months a year, is staffed by professionals, and has

well-defined academic goals. Head Start lasts three hours, is staffed by nonprofessionals, and is nonacademic in orientation.

International comparisons

Americans are not happy to hear such comparisons of themselves with other nations. Hirsch reports a common complaint from U.S. educators: "It's all very well to talk about homogeneous countries like France or Korea, but what has that got to do with my school? I've got kids from seventeen nations. Some of their parents don't speak English. I've got kids who are severely learning-disabled, kids who come to school with marks of abuse on their bodies. Please don't talk to me about France or Korea." Yet this view, which Hirsch denounces as "American exceptionalism," is simply not based on reality. American students are *not* always more diverse than students of other nations. "With my own eyes," he writes, "I have seen schools in the suburbs of Paris where the ethnic and social diversity is equal to that of the Bronx and Miami. Currently, in the Paris region, the total percentage of nonnaturalized, non-French students is 23.2 percent of the school population. (The percentages are of course much higher in certain suburbs.)"

The American educational system is characterized by extreme localism, in which each state, county, locality, or even teacher develops their own curriculum. One district superintendent was shocked to find that no principal in his district could tell him what minimal content each child in a grade was expected to learn. This incoherence takes a particularly heavy toll on children who must change schools frequently—and Americans are among the most mobile people in the world. One-sixth of all third graders have attended at least three schools between first and third grade; one-quarter of low-income third graders have done so, and one-third of those with limited English proficiency.

Hirsch recounts that when the American occupation of Japan was coming to an end, after World War II, and Japan was taking control of its own affairs, American authorities recommended that the Japanese school system be placed under American-style local governance. This, they said, would ensure democracy and resistance to centralized thought-control. "The Japanese replied in effect, 'We intend to follow your principles of government, but localism in education is not a protection against anything. It mainly leads to unfairness to students, because it does not provide any means for insuring that all children receive a quality education.'"

The advantages of a core national curriculum, Hirsch argues, are shown by studies of science achievement conducted by the International Association for Evaluation of Educational Achievement. Out of 17 countries tested, there were three that did not have a core curriculum. Of these, England dropped from 9th to 11th in the period from 1970 to 1985; Australia from 3rd to 10th, and the United States from 7th to 15th. Japan and Hungary, which have national core curricula,

2. See Helga Zepp LaRouche, "Poetry and Agapē: Reflections on Schiller and Goethe," in *Friedrich Schiller, Poet of Freedom*, Vol. II (Washington, D.C.: Schiller Institute, 1988).

3. See Philip Valenti, "The Anti-Newtonian Roots of the American Revolution," *EIR*, Dec. 1, 1995; Richard Freeman, "The Confederate Legacy of Thomas Jefferson," *Fidelio*, Spring 1997; Robert Trout, "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness," *Fidelio*, Spring 1997.

traded second and first place.

More revealing, is the research on qualitative features of what goes on in classrooms in these different countries. Hirsch reports on in-depth studies comparing classroom practice in the United States, Japan, and Taiwan. Those who believe Americans to be more “egalitarian” and “independent-minded” are in for a surprise. For example, Chinese and Japanese teachers rely on students to generate ideas and evaluate the correctness of the ideas; American teachers are less likely to give students opportunities to respond at such length. Although a great deal of interaction appears to occur in American classrooms, the teachers generally ask questions that are answerable with a “yes” or a “no” or a short phrase. They seek a correct answer and continue calling on students until one produces it. In other words, what is lacking is Socratic dialogue.

The worst-performing U.S. classrooms are those which are “heavily affective,” with a lot of verbal praise and “self-esteem” talk. By comparison, teachers in Taiwan and Japan rarely use praise as a form of evaluation. They have a low tolerance for errors, and when they occur, they seldom ignore them.

‘Consensus science’

Reviewing some of the kooky theories that pass for “education reform” these days, such as Howard Gardner’s theory of “multiple intelligences,” Hirsch debunks them, appropriately enough, but then goes on to complain that the education community is elevating such “nonconsensus scientific findings” over ideologically troublesome research that *has* achieved “scientific consensus.”

This notion of “consensus science” is where the virus of the Enlightenment enters in—the fatal flaw of this book.

“As consensus in science increases,” writes Hirsch, “so does the likelihood of correctness. Everybody now agrees that the chemical formula for water is H_2O . The fact of that consensus does not guarantee its absolute truth, but it does guarantee its high degree of reliability. If you are engaged in a practical activity like schooling, you need to bank on consensus science because, even in those rare cases where it is slightly wrong, it reflects highly consistent practical success.”

In fact, as Lyndon LaRouche has explained, what makes science science, is not “consensus,” but the process of discovery that goes on when a creative mind confronts a *paradox*, a singularity that *does not fit in with what everybody else believes*. The discoverer achieves a superior conception, an idea which most people will find quite *unacceptable*, even absurd.

What, then, is the job of education? It is to help the students to struggle through such paradoxes themselves, and thereby to relive some of the great discoveries of human history. Does this mean we have no need for the multiplication tables, or for the mastery of other subject matter? Can a person become a creative musician, without knowing how to read music? Not at all. It is a question of how that so-called “factual

knowledge” is apprehended, and how it is utilized by the mind.

Take the example of LaRouche’s own writings and oral presentations, with which *EIR* readers are familiar. Often people (including this reviewer) ask themselves, “How does he know so much about so many different subjects? How can he remember all that?” Even writings produced while he was a political prisoner (1989-94), with scarce recourse to written reports and reference books, are filled with an incredible array of “factual knowledge.”

The key is what LaRouche describes as *Analysis Situs*, borrowing a term from Leibniz. There is no such thing as a “fact,” in and of itself; all human experience is situated in a *context* that gives it intelligibility, but that context must be discovered by the mind. Grappling with the paradoxes confronting it, the mind strives to move from one set of axiomatic beliefs, one hypothesis, which has shown itself to be inadequate, to a higher hypothesis. The person engaged in such a passionate struggle will later remember the “factual knowledge” associated with it, whereas the poor soul who tries to commit to memory various tidbits of information, will not.

It is this process of creative mentation which must be fostered in the schools, and which the modern-day professors of the Enlightenment, along with those of Swift’s Grand Academy of Lagado, have failed to understand.

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- that the Founding Fathers promoted partnership between private industry and central government?

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