

GIFTED EDUCATION PRESS

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NEWSLETTER VOLUME THREE, NUMBER TWO APRIL-JUNE 1989

Since we began publishing books eight years ago, we have emphasized the importance of teaching the Humanities to the gifted. We have backed-up this position by searching for and publishing authors who could write about philosophy, literature and drama for teachers of the gifted and their students. Moreover, we have strongly supported their work by disseminating their books to school districts and libraries across the nation. Today, there is a forceful movement by students and certain professors at Stanford University to water-down and eventually eliminate Humanities instruction based upon the great thinkers of Western civilization. If this movement succeeds, it will have disastrous consequences for both the college and public school curriculum nationwide. We are pleased to present a discussion of this matter by Dr. Herbert London, Dean of the Gallatin Division at New York University. He has been one of the leading critics of Stanford University's modifications of its Humanities curriculum. Dr. London created the Gallatin Division in 1972 and has been its Dean since then. This division emphasizes the study of "great books" and classic texts. He is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute and editor of the Academic Questions journal. In order to begin an useful dialogue, send us your comments on and critiques of this article.

This issue of our newsletter includes Dr. Alexis de Bie's discussion of the work of a great Italian Humanist psychologist, Roberto Assagioli. Since Assagioli had many insights into the minds and personalities of gifted children, we think it is important to learn about his ideas from his most knowledgeable American student. Dr. de Bie is one of the co-founders of the World Council for Gifted and chairman of The Psychosynthesis Foundation of Florida.

The third article is a speech presented by the Dean of American physicists, Dr. John A. Wheeler, Professor Emeritus at Princeton University and the University of Texas. It was originally given in the spring of 1979 at the dedication of the Einstein Memorial Statue and subsequently published by the National Academy of Sciences. Because of Wheeler's association with Albert Einstein, his speech authentically reflects the spirit and humanity of this great genius. Since it is the tenth anniversary of the completion of this wonderful memorial, we dedicate this newsletter to the memory of Einstein, who should be a model to all gifted children worldwide.

Michael Walters reviews the autobiography of a great American philosopher, Sidney Hook. As emphasized by Walters, gifted students should study Hook's life and works in order to learn about an individual who has fought for Democracy and freedom with his intellect during his 87 years.>> Maurice D. Fisher, Publisher

THE STANFORD UNIVERSITY CULTURES COURSE IN PERSPECTIVE
BY HERBERT LONDON, DEAN, GALLATIN DIVISION
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

Now that Stanford University has had one semester experimenting with its revised "cultures" curriculum, which was formerly a Western Civilization course, several observations are in order. After two years of vigorous debate prompted by minority student complaints, Stanford's Faculty Senate voted to replace a Western Culture course with a new requirement entitled, "Cultures, Ideas and Values."

According to the new proposal, students will continue to study ideas derived largely from European ancient, medieval and classical cultures, but are also required to study works from at least one non-European culture. As a consequence, there are several subtle changes in the curriculum such as a course title change and several substitutions such as the Koran for the Odyssey. On the face of it these alterations appear trifling.

However, there is, alas, a fundamental political shift represented in this curriculum change that is not immediately obvious. While professors are now obliged to draw unlikely and occasionally tortured connections between such figures as Vergil and Frantz Fanon, there is a specific demand to yield to fashionable opinion by including the works of women, minority groups and voices of the Third World. According to Alejandro Sweet-Cordero, a member of the Chicano student organization who demonstrated for the curriculum change, "Western culture did not try to understand the diversity of experiences of different people."

Clearly, "non-traditional" scholars may have valuable insights. That is undeniable. But in substituting non-Western voices for those in European Cultures so that a political agenda can be satisfied, students of all races and backgrounds are losing an important dimension of their literature and the tradition that undergirds their thought.

Stanford administrators defensively point out that Western culture has not been discarded, only broadened. But this claim is most assuredly disingenuous. In the experimental "Europe and the Americas" course, students read, I Rigoberta Manchu, a life history told by a Guatemalan Indian woman. In this portion of the curriculum, Navajo and Mayan literature is woven into the work of Melville, Marx, Freud, Augustine and contemporary feminists. One instructor noted that Augustine's Confessions taught with Son

of Old Man Hat, the life history of a Navajo man, made "both books...better."

It has been argued by advocates of the revised program that minority students are better served than under the old, traditional curriculum. "How," asks one instructor, "could a Chicano student be expected to find her identity in Plato and Aristotle?" Presumably, Plato does not speak to Chicanos and a multi-cultural world translates into Spanish authors for Spanish students and black thinkers for black students.

Where this will lead is hard to fathom. Will women and blacks insist on displays of their own sculpture now that Stanford University has purchased and displayed Rodin's "The Thinker"? Will the names of leading Greek philosophers engraved on the library facade have to include feminists and blacks in order to appease radical opinion? Will multi-cultural awareness mean that every African tribal dialect will be incorporated into language study?

Ultimately what is at stake in this reform movement goes beyond mere modification of the curriculum. The distinguished literature of our civilization, that literature which asks the salient questions of life, has been so deconstructed by political concerns that it is denounced as an expression of a white, male, European bias -- the ultimate put-down.

Yet Shakespeare, Aristotle, Dante, Homer, Milton speak not to gender, class, race or ethnicity; they speak to the ages, to all people. They transcend their time to reveal universals. To trivialize their work by relying on Derridian context, as if their words are less important than their gender, is to vitiate greatness and to depreciate the culture on which this civilization rests.

Stanford University will survive the curriculum reform. For many it does not even seem significant. But in its way this alteration in emphasis shortchanges the very students it is designed to assist. By substituting the fashionable for the great, many students will be incapable of distinguishing the notable from the merely interesting. And in arguing that only black authors can speak to blacks and women to women, literature is Balkanized in ways that undermine its essentially human voice. In the last analysis, this reform does not broaden cultural understanding; it perverts, segments and separates people from one another on the basis of the most superficial characteristics.>> RELATED ARTICLES (THE EDITOR) -- (1) Bennett, William J. (1988, May 4). On Study of the West at Stanford. Education Week. (2) Hook, Sidney. (1988, May). The Color of Culture. Chronicles of Culture. (3) Krieger,

Lloyd M. (1989, Feb. 22). Changed Views on Stanford's Culture Debate. The Christian Science Monitor. (4) McArthur, Benjamin. (1989, Feb.) The War of the Great Books. American Heritage.*****

THE CARE AND FOSTERING OF THE GIFTED AND SUPER-GIFTED: AN UPDATE
ON ROBERTO ASSAGIOLI'S THOUGHTS -- 29 YEARS LATER

BY ALEXIS I. Du PONT De BIE, CHAIRMAN, THE PSYCHOSYNTHESIS
FOUNDATION OF FLORIDA, PALM BEACH, FLORIDA

In 1986 Belle Wallace, the Editor of the Gifted Education International journal, wisely included a reprint of Assagioli's monograph (The Education of Gifted and Super-Gifted Children) in the Volume 5, No. 1 issue of this periodical. It was originally published in 1960 by the Psychosynthesis Research Foundation then headquartered in Wilmington, Delaware, whose existence was due to this author's mother. Dr. Assagioli was a close family friend who became my mentor in the study of Humanistic Psychology. The standard definition of his approach to psychological well-being is: "...based on the notion of unifying one's personality expression with a deeper source of purpose and direction called the Transpersonal Self. Psychosynthesis, more than most therapies, is concerned with values, inspiration, meaning and service." (Corsini, 1987, p. 941)

Almost three decades later, I thought it would be appropriate to review Assagioli's monograph -- in light of the progress that has been made in educating the able learner -- to see whether its inclusion in the Gifted Education International journal was merited and helps today's educators to better understand the nature of giftedness.

Across the nation, there are currently many attempts to stem the mediocrity which has placed our school systems and our children "at risk" of becoming educational failures. In regard to using early education programs to help alleviate this problem, David Elkind (1987) has said: "No authority in the field of child psychology, pediatrics, or child psychiatry advocates the formal instruction, in any domain, of infants and young children...The boom in early childhood education is, it very much appears, becoming a boom in miseducation." (pp. 8-9)

Assagioli saw this problem of educating young children arising in the 1960's. Although he was trained in psychoanalytic theory and practice, this Italian psychiatrist went beyond this theory because he realized educators needed to deal with the child's psyche in a more sensitive and aware manner. He said (1960, p. 2) in the discussion of this problem: "In other cases adults,

recognizing and appreciating the special gift, often endeavor to force its cultivation. Their aim is to produce an infant prodigy as a musician, a precocious mathematician or scientist, without taking into consideration the injurious consequences of such lopsided development. This sometimes means an actual exploitation, either by the family -- due to vanity, ambition or financial greed -- or by the community....In order to counteract this trend, a well-rounded, harmonious and integrated education is necessary, as the best educators have recognized. Such education is doubly required in the case of gifted young people."

Another factor in the education of the able learner which I believe to be of paramount importance is that of intuition. The teaching of spontaneous problem solving, imaginative thinking and the intuitive resolution of difficult questions is excellent mental grist for the able learner's mind. In their clear-cut discussion of this problem (1986), Sisk and Shallcross have stated: "In many ways in our Western Civilization, we have been overinfluenced by science and analytical thinking. Intuitive power, like creative potential, have been neglected and not properly encouraged and nurtured...." (p. 32)

Again, Assagioli (1960) was eminently aware of this facet of the education of the gifted individual individual. Thus in his opinion: "Imagination is of great importance in human life and has more influence than is generally recognized; therefore, it should receive particular attention. The training could include exercises of visualization, creative imagination, etc., so that the young people will gradually learn how to control and rightly use this precious function..." (p. 7)

Now we come to a more delicate question, that of teaching aesthetics to the able learner. The question of how to do it is a sensitive one, because society today is in such a cantankerous mood.

Everyone today seems to have their own unique philosophy of life, politics and religion. Extreme fear of the State or Big Brother has caused "me-ism" and "I'm right, therefore you are wrong" to be in vogue. Clearly this situation is not conducive to helping gifted students formulate the precepts and boundaries that make living our lives worthwhile. James LoGiudice, Supervisor of Programs for the Gifted and Talented in the Bucks County Pennsylvania Public Schools, has written extensively on this subject. In his book, Teaching Philosophy to Gifted Students: A Secondary Level Course of Study for Teachers and Administrators (1985), he expresses the following opinion in the Introduction:

"Philosophy should be the underpinning and connecting point of much of what gifted students learn at the secondary level. Students, especially able ones, are confronted everywhere they turn in school with courses and teachers emphasizing information and knowledge....[W]hat is needed is a learning approach or specific course where the gifted are offered, pushed even, to make sense out of the facts and large chunks of content they are mastering. What better ways are there to help students see relationships between their day-to-day learning and the need for wise understanding than through the study of philosophy? Here, bright students can meet first-hand other thoughtful people (philosophers through the centuries) who are also concerned with profound, complicated issues that transcend time, place, and school subject boundaries...." (pp. 1-2)

In another work on curriculum for the gifted, LoGiudice teamed up with Michael E. Walters of the New York City Public Schools to write The Philosophy of Ethics Applied to Everyday Life (1987). And their view on the importance of teaching this topic to the gifted is clearly stated in Chapter I: "The study of Ethics is particularly important in the present time because students are faced with life versus death moral choices related to taking or not taking drugs and to acquiring sexually transmitted diseases. These problems not only place gifted students in a position of making important choices, but of also determining their very existence....The study of Ethics by high school gifted students also provides them with a thoughtful means of examining society's underlying, larger questions....Ethical studies can motivate gifted students to analyze current social issues and values in a structured and disciplined manner, if the teacher carefully relates these studies to their social concerns and environment." (p. 1)

Not surprisingly, Assagioli takes a similar stand on this most important educational issue. He says (1960): "Super-gifted children show at a very early age an interest in philosophical, moral and spiritual subjects. They often possess real intuition and spiritual illumination....These children -- as well as all others who at any age put similar questions -- have a right to receive adequate answers. Their questions must be taken seriously; one can see such opportunities to instill into them a spiritual conception of life, make them feel the greatness and beauty of the universe and the admirable order that characterizes it...one must observe and encourage all spontaneous manifestations of a spiritual nature, such as higher aspirations, intuitions and illuminations, that might arise in them...." (p. 8)

As this writer examines the vast and seemingly endless array

of books, manuals, monographs and general texts which are relevant to educating the able learner in the 1980's, what does he see? There is progress, and what Assagioli envisioned twenty-nine years ago is more valid than ever. It is very heartening to realize that the mentor with whom this author spent so many worthwhile hours has not lost his relevance for the education of the gifted and super-gifted. It is important that these students become leaders who can successfully guide us into the 21st century in all fields of endeavor. To help them accomplish this goal, educators of the gifted must show care and compassion for the fabric of their students' psyches as well as their intellects.>>

REFERENCES -- (1) Assagioli, Roberto. The Education of Gifted and Super-Gifted Children. New York: Psychosynthesis Research Foundation, 1960. (2) Assagioli, Roberto. Psychosynthesis: A Collection of Basic Writings. New York: Viking Penguin, 1965. (3) Assagioli, Roberto. The Act of Will. New York: Penguin, 1973. (4) Corsini, Raymond J. (Editor) The Concise Encyclopedia of Psychology. John Wiley & Sons, 1987. (5) Elkind, David. Miseducation: Preschoolers at Risk. New York: Knopf, 1987. (6) LoGiudice, James. Teaching Philosophy To Gifted Students: A Secondary Level Course of Study for Teachers and Administrators. Manassas, VA: Gifted Education Press, 1985. (7) LoGiudice, James & Walters, Michael E. The Philosophy of Ethics Applied to Everyday Life: A Course of Study for Gifted Students at the Secondary and Post-Secondary Levels. Manassas, VA: Gifted Education Press, 1987. (8) Sisk, Dorothy A. & Shallcross, Doris I. Leadership: Making Things Happen. Buffalo, NY: Bearly Limited, 1986.>>

REMARKS BY PROFESSOR JOHN A. WHEELER UPON DEDICATING THE EINSTEIN MEMORIAL AT THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, WASHINGTON, D.C.

(This statue of Einstein by Robert Berks was dedicated by Dr. Wheeler in 1979 when he was Director of the Center for Theoretical Physics, University of Texas. He is presently a Professor Emeritus of Physics at Princeton University and the University of Texas.)

In a time of trouble Abraham Lincoln signed a charter of this National Academy of Sciences, thus bringing together the fellowship of science to help keep watch for all on what lies ahead of peril and promise. The successor members of this Academy, through the vote of their duly elected Council on the 26th of February, 1978, and again in early 1979, approved the placement of a memorial to a great scientist on this site. Knowing what was intended, the Congress of the United States passed title to the Academy for the corner of the property needful for the purpose. Hundreds upon

hundreds of individuals outside the Academy and inside have voted for the memorial with their pocketbooks. Many companions in the work of science, including, industry, business, foundations and not-for-profit research organizations, made aware of the special significance of this monument by a distinguished and effective committee, have contributed to this enterprise generously and decisively.

Statues have been placed, in Washington, of figures in other walks of life; and statues, in Europe, of many a great scientist; but no statue of a scientist ever erected in this country was meant to have more meaning, and has more meaning than this.

How can one best symbolize that science reaches after the eternal? How else than in a monument to the man who united space and time into spacetime? How else than in remembrance of the man who taught us -- against his own inclination, and against the teaching of his greatest hero, Spinoza -- that the universe does not go on from everlasting to everlasting, but begins with a big bang?

How can one most clearly say that science reaches beyond all national boundaries, and belongs to all mankind? How else than by commemorating one who was born in Germany, studied in Italy and Switzerland, taught in Prague and Berlin, and lived twenty-two years in America, one who by belonging to five countries belonged to no one people -- and to all people?

How can one most strongly testify that science throws its shoulder -- and its heart -- behind the wheel of the world's work? How better than by remembering the contributions of the man whose concepts are the heart of electronic devices in homes and factories all over the world, and the guiding principle of power for all those who are low on coal and oil?

How can one most movingly say that science -- and the application of science to the needs of society -- is a work for the young in heart, those greatest of all "Friends of the Future?" Not by a pompous figure on a pedestal. No, a figure over which children can crawl; a figure around which young people can sit and think long, long thoughts; the figure of one who said, "The ideals which have lighted my way, and time after time have given me new courage to face life cheerfully have been Kindness, Beauty and Truth." We thank our sculptor, Mr. Berks, for this act of grace.



Professor Einstein,
Of all the questions with which the great thinkers have occupied
themselves
In all the lands and all centuries,
None has ever claimed greater primacy
Than the origin of the universe.

No contributions to this issue
Ever made by any man any time
Have ever proved themselves
Richer in illuminating power
Than those you made.
Remind us of the guiding power of a great theme in every area of
science.

You showed us that an ordinary human
Speaking clear sentences in childhood
As the first step to thinking clearly,
Reading great men in youth
As the first step to being great,
Taught by one's first job
Day after day for seven years
To distill simplicity out of complexity,
Taking a star to guide one's course
Can achieve beyond imagination.

Remind us by your example
That the young person
Inspired by heroes and guided by a star
Is the hope of science -- and of the world.>>

(This speech and poem are reprinted from pp. 1-3 of Letters to
Members, National Academy of Sciences, Vol. 9, No. 3, June 1979.
The above picture of Einstein's statue is from a photograph taken
by the publisher in February 1989.)>>

GIFTED EDUCATION PRESS NEWSLETTER
VOLUME THREE, NUMBER 2

MANASSAS, VIRGINIA
APRIL-JUNE 1989

REVIEW OF OUT OF STEP: AN UNQUIET LIFE IN THE 20TH CENTURY BY
SIDNEY HOOK (HARPER AND ROW, 1987; PAPERBACK EDITION -- CARROLL &
GRAFF, 1988) REVIEWER: MICHAEL E. WALTERS, NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC
SCHOOLS

Not to know is bad; not to wish to know is worse. African Proverb

Know or listen to those who know. Balthasar Gracian, Spanish Writer
of Proverbs

When one reads this autobiography of Sidney Hook, that wonderful
slim but powerful book Profiles in Courage (1956) by John F.
Kennedy returns to memory. Sidney Hook's life is a continuum of
vignettes whose motif is moral courage and intellectual integrity.
Gifted education has as one of its mandates, leadership training
because the gifted child of today will potentially be the political
leader and advisor to the power structure of the future. One of
the hallmarks of the gifted child's sensibility is his
individuality -- which may lead to a desire to be a "minority of
one." A major function of educators of the gifted should be to
refine this independence of spirit and thought. Sidney Hook has
demonstrated the independent thought of a moral statesman by being
described by his critics as simultaneously "ahead" and "behind" the
times. This labelling describes a person who is precisely what the
"times" require, an intellectual and moral gadfly.

Russell Jacoby in his recent book (The Last Intellectuals,
1987, reviewed in the Gifted Education Press Newsletter, January
1988, Volume 2, No. 1) laments the lack of what he describes as
"public intellectuals." These are individuals who conduct written
and oral discourse with the general public on socially relevant and
compelling issues. Sidney Hook is indeed representative of that
cultural role of being a public intellectual. His autobiography is
a compendium of intellectual ideas. The reader experiences the
major and crucial intellectual conflicts of this century in Hook's
book, especially those that emphasize the battle between conscience
and membership in the totalitarian herd. Moreover, he clearly
demonstrates how ideas are tools for ethical actions and moral
behavior. It is important for educators of the gifted to impart to
their students the concept that ideas are tools for ethical action
and moral behavior; therefore ideas must be taken seriously and
carefully analyzed.

Sidney Hook's sensibility follows the tradition of the Greek
philosophers such as Socrates and Democritus. Socrates advocated
that every concept of the city-state, however revered, be analyzed

and criticized. Democritus was opposed to using knowledge merely for political opportunism, either one's own or for a political regime. He said, "I would rather discover a single causal connection than win the throne of Persia." Another significant contribution of Sidney Hook's intellectual odyssey was his insistence upon making "fine distinctions." For example, he was dedicated to the principle that an imperfect democracy is preferable to a perfectly functioning totalitarian system. Also, he believed that the slogans of a regime or political ideology are less important than their overt activities. For Hook, the Utopian future espoused by many regimes does not justify the political terror of the present. In this regard, he belongs to the community of thinkers that include George Orwell and Eric Hoffer.

Sidney Hook served for several decades as chairman of New York University's Philosophy Department (1934 to 1948) and chairman of its Graduate Division of Philosophy and Psychology (1949 to 1972). He is currently a senior research fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. In his positions at New York University he attempted to join the insights of epistemology to the emerging discipline of psychology. He believed that the intellectual's clarity of thought is best demonstrated by respecting pluralism and tolerance. The chief intellectual error/characteristic of the fanatical adherent of totalitarian thought, whether of the Right or the Left, is its lack of precise definitions. Poorly defined and analyzed political abstractions were used to marshall the tyrannical rule of the most vicious despots of the 20th century, e.g., Hitler and Stalin.

Today the world is again threatened by totalitarian fanatics. The religious ruler of a certain nation (who really functions as its political power) has urged the assassination of a writer of a book which he misinterprets as maligning his religion. And mobs of "true believers" that have not read this book take to the streets with malignant holy fervor. The gifted student needs to be aware of and understand the dynamics of the totalitarian mentality in order to preserve our democratic spirit.

Sidney Hook's triumph over the poverty of growing up in the tenements of New York City was the result of his zeal for learning and the educational opportunities provided to him. Here is a life that clearly demonstrates how the combined power of education and motivation can be used to achieve the highest levels of intellectual success. However, his early public school experience was unsuitable for such a gifted individual. In this regard, he said: "To most of us boredom was worse than discipline....The bright were bored stiff, and the dull ones could not help feeling

more stupid in the presence of quick and eager learners, And it seemed to me the bright students suffered more than the dull....So there was little to relieve the intellectual boredom -- occasionally a spelling bee or an improvised story -- that I would often go to bed praying that the school would burn down before morning. Life in the classroom -- perhaps it would be more accurate to say the absence of life -- accounted for it."

Sidney Hook is dedicated to American patriotism. But it is a patriotism that is based upon democratic principles. The differentiated curriculum should have as one of its main priorities the development of this positive concept of American patriotism. Today there is a danger that the negative reactions to the mistakes involving the Vietnam War will lead to intellectual disarmament, moral bankruptcy, and create conditions for the domination of the human spirit by totalitarian terror.

The autobiography of Sidney hook is an antidote for this failure of nerve. He helps the reader to understand how the lessons of Nazism and Stalinism can be seen in contemporary perspective. The memory of history is an important ingredient for the survival of the democratic ideal and reality. The gifted student should be a key player on the chessboard of contemporary history.>>

Own only what you can always carry with you: Know languages, know countries, know people. Let your memory be your travel bag.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn *****

Sidney Hook said in his autobiography: "I am particularly desirous of being read by the young men and women of our time who are inspired by some of the same ideals -- ideals I still share -- that led me to expend so much time and effort in the struggle to defend and extend freedom...." In the spirit of a man who began his career as a public school teacher, we present the following list of books by Professor Hook for use by gifted students of political philosophy and history, and by their teachers. Although most of these books are unfortunately out-of-print, teachers should try to locate them through the interlibrary loan system:

(1) Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx. NY: John Day, 1933. (2) The Hero in History. NY: John Day, 1943. (3) The Quest for Being. NY: St. Martin's, 1961. (4) The Paradoxes of Freedom. Berkeley, CA: The Univ. of Calif. Press, 1962. (5) Education and Modern Man. New York: Knopf, 1963. (6) John Dewey: An Intellectual Portrait. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1971. (7) Education and the Taming of Power. Peru, IL: Open Court, 1973. (8) Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life. NY: Basic Books, 1974.>>
