

E.F. Schumacher
Small is
Beautiful
Economics as if
People Mattered

Chapter 6

The Greatest Resource - Education

A Lonergan Institute Seminar

St Anselm's Abbey



Root of the Crisis of Modernity: Education

- “All history - as well as all current experience - points to the fact that it is man, not nature, who provides the primary resource: that the key factor of all economic development comes out of the mind of man. Suddenly, there is an outburst of daring, initiative, invention, constructive activity, not in one field alone, but in many fields all at once. No-one may be able to say where it came from in the first place: but we can see how it maintains and even strengthens itself: through various kinds of schools, in other words, through education. In a very real sense, therefore, we can say that education is the most vital of all resources.”
- “If western civilization is in a state of permanent crisis, it is not far-fetched to suggest that there may be something wrong with its education.”



The One Room School: Early American History

Science without Wisdom Equals Danger

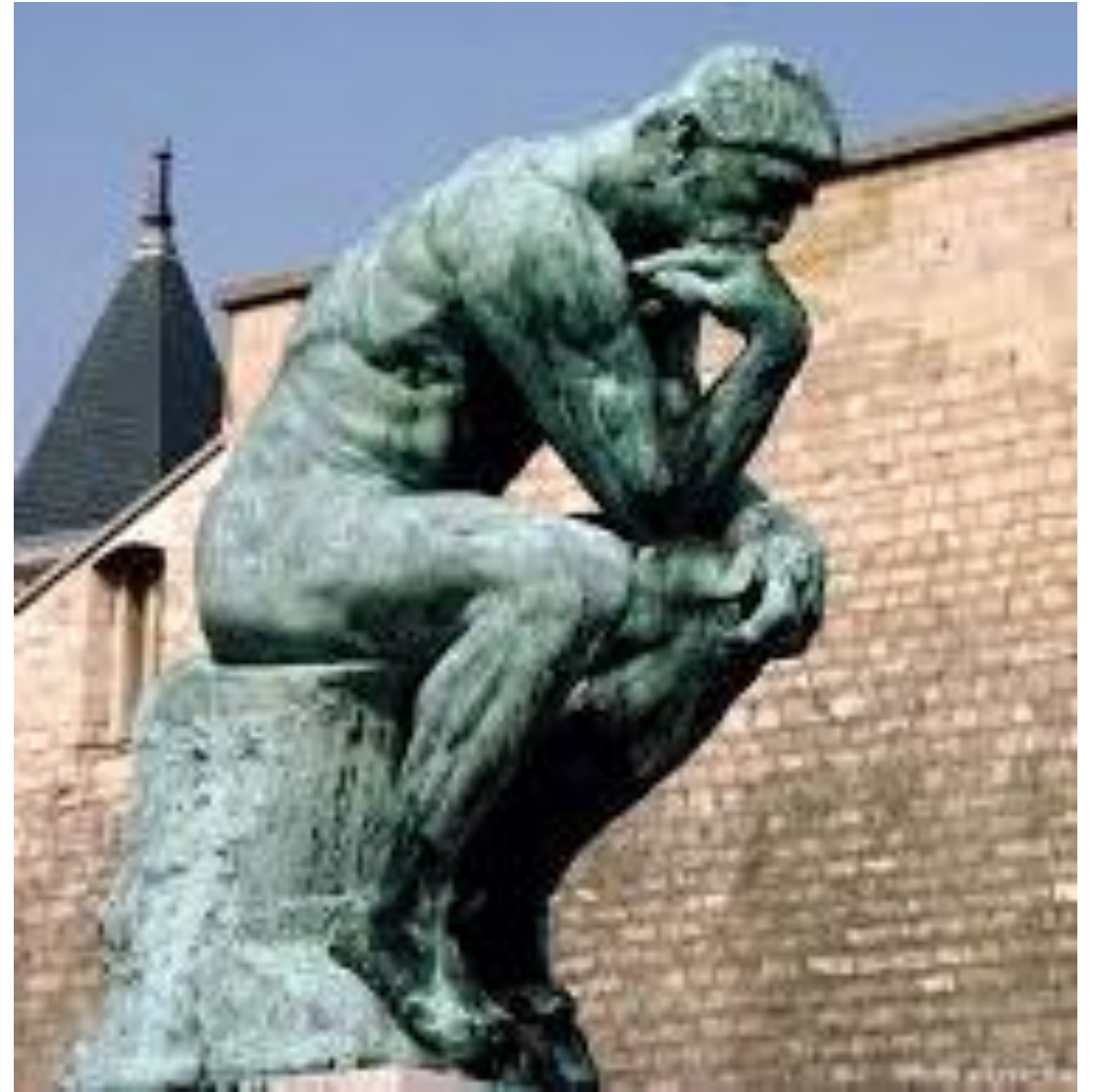
- “Science and engineering produce 'know-how'; but 'know-how' is nothing by itself; it is a means without an end, a mere potentiality, an unfinished sentence. 'Know-how' is no more a culture than a piano is music. Can education help us to finish the sentence, to turn the potentiality into a reality to the benefit of man?”
- “At present, there can be little doubt that the whole of mankind is in mortal danger, not because we are short of scientific and technological know how, but because we tend to use it destructively, without wisdom. More education can help us only if it produces more wisdom.”



Minerva: Roman Goddess of Wisdom

Focus on the Foundation of Our Thoughts

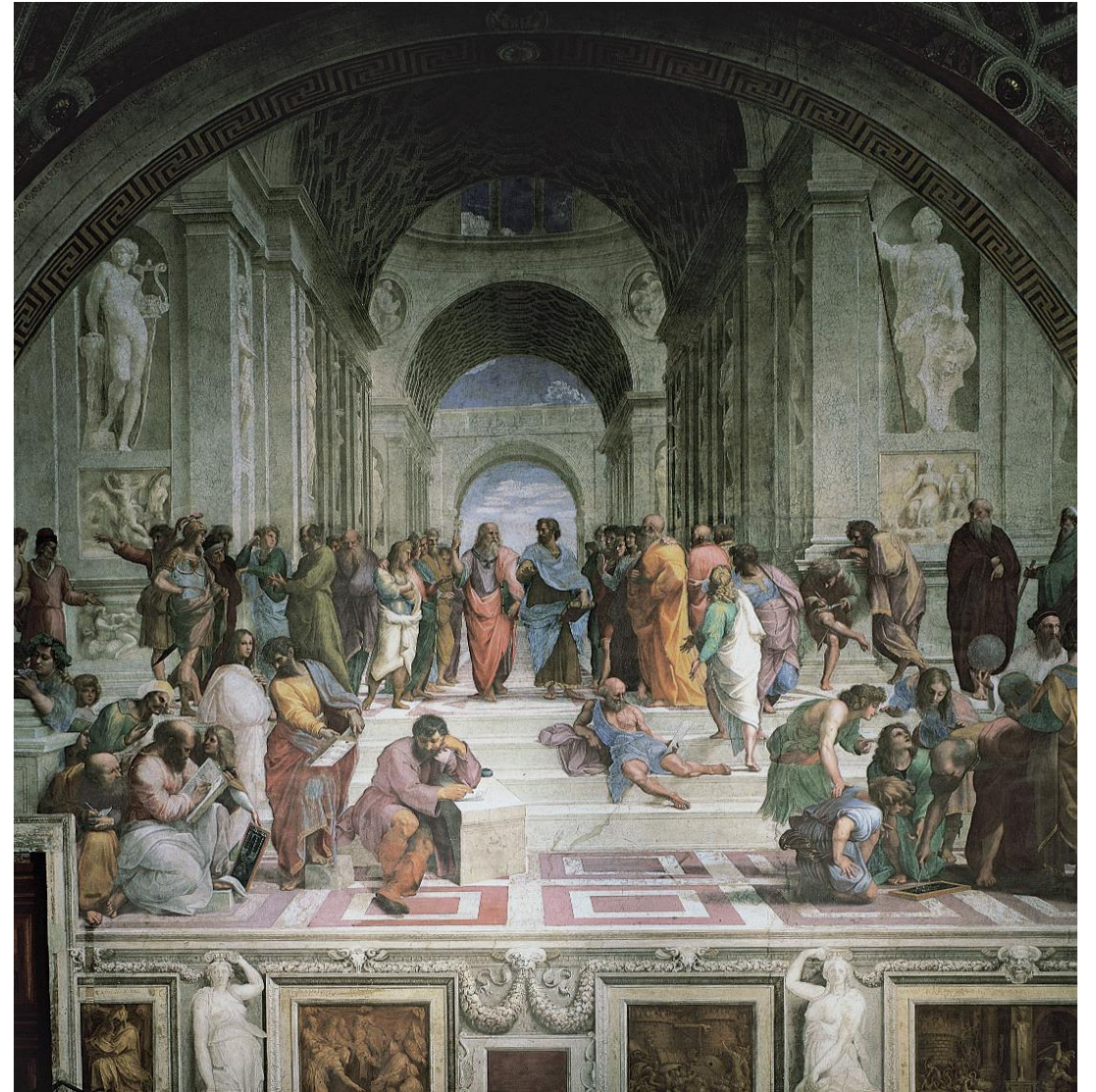
- “All philosophers - and others - have always paid a great deal of attention to ideas seen as the result of thought and observation; but in modern times all too little attention has been paid to the study of the ideas which form the very instruments by which thought and observation proceed.”
- “I say, therefore, that we think with or through ideas and that what we call thinking is generally the application of pre-existing ideas to a given situation or set of facts. When we think about, say, the political situation we apply to that situation our political ideas, systematically, and attempt to make that situation 'intelligible' to ourselves by means of these ideas. Similarly everywhere else. Some of the ideas are ideas of value, that is to say, we evaluate the situation in the light of our value-ideas.”



Rodin: The Thinker

Education: Training or Philosophy?

- "When people ask for education, they normally mean something more than mere training, something more than mere knowledge of facts, and something more than a mere diversion. Maybe they cannot themselves formulate precisely what they are looking for; but I think what they are really looking for is ideas that would make the world, and their own lives, intelligible to them."
- 'Philosophy as the Greeks conceived it,' writes Professor Kuhn, 'is one single effort of the human mind to interpret the system of signs and so to relate man to the world as a comprehensive order within which a place is assigned to him.'



The Academy in Ancient Greece

The Dissolution of Our World View

- “The classical Christian culture of the late Middle Ages supplied man with a very complete and astonishingly coherent interpretation of signs, i.e. a system of vital ideas giving a most detailed picture of man, the universe, and man's place in the universe. This system, however, has been shattered and fragmented, and the result is bewilderment and estrangement, never more dramatically put than by Kierkegaard in the middle of last century:
 - *“One sticks one's finger into the soil to tell by the smell in what land one is: I stick my finger into existence - it smells of nothing. Where am I? Who am I? How came I here? What is this thing called the world? What does this world mean? Who is it that has lured me into this thing and now leaves me there?... How did I come into the world? Why was I not consulted but was thrust into the ranks as though I had been bought of a kidnapper, a dealer in souls? How did I obtain an interest in this big enterprise they call reality? Why should I have an interest in it? Is it not a voluntary concern? And if I am compelled to take part in it, where is the director?Whither shall I turn with my complaint?”*



The Persistence of Memory

The Root Causes of Modern Estrangement

- "Estrangement breeds loneliness and despair, the 'encounter with nothingness', cynicism, empty gestures of defiance, as we can see in the greater part of existentialist philosophy and general literature today. Or it suddenly turns - as I have mentioned before - into the ardent adoption of a fanatical teaching which, by a monstrous simplification of reality, pretends to answer all questions. So, what is the cause of estrangement?"
- "Science cannot produce ideas by which we could live. Even the greatest ideas of science are nothing more than working hypotheses. useful for purposes of special research but completely inapplicable to the conduct of our lives or the interpretation of the world."



Polish Landscape by David Sultan

Discussion: Is modern education, featuring the substitution of the Judeo-Christian world view with a rational-technocratic-scientific value paradigm, the root cause of our modern identity crisis (loneliness, despair, depression, drug use, estrangement)? If so, what does this new worldview look like to you?

Six Main Ideas Guide the Modern Mind



Smithsonian Exhibit on Evolution

1. "There is the idea of evolution - that higher forms continually develop out of lower forms, as a kind of natural and automatic process. The last hundred years or so have seen the systematic application of this idea to all aspects of reality without exception."

Six Main Ideas Guide the Modern Mind



Wildlife Photo

2. "There is the idea of competition, natural selection, and the survival of the fittest, which purports to explain the natural and automatic process of evolution and development."

Six Main Ideas Guide the Modern Mind

3. "There is the idea that all the higher manifestations of human life, such as religion, philosophy, art, etc. - what Marx calls 'the phantasmagorias in the brains of men' - are nothing but 'necessary supplements of the material life process', a super-structure erected to disguise and promote economic interests, the whole of human history being the history of class struggles."



Propaganda Poster in the Soviet Union

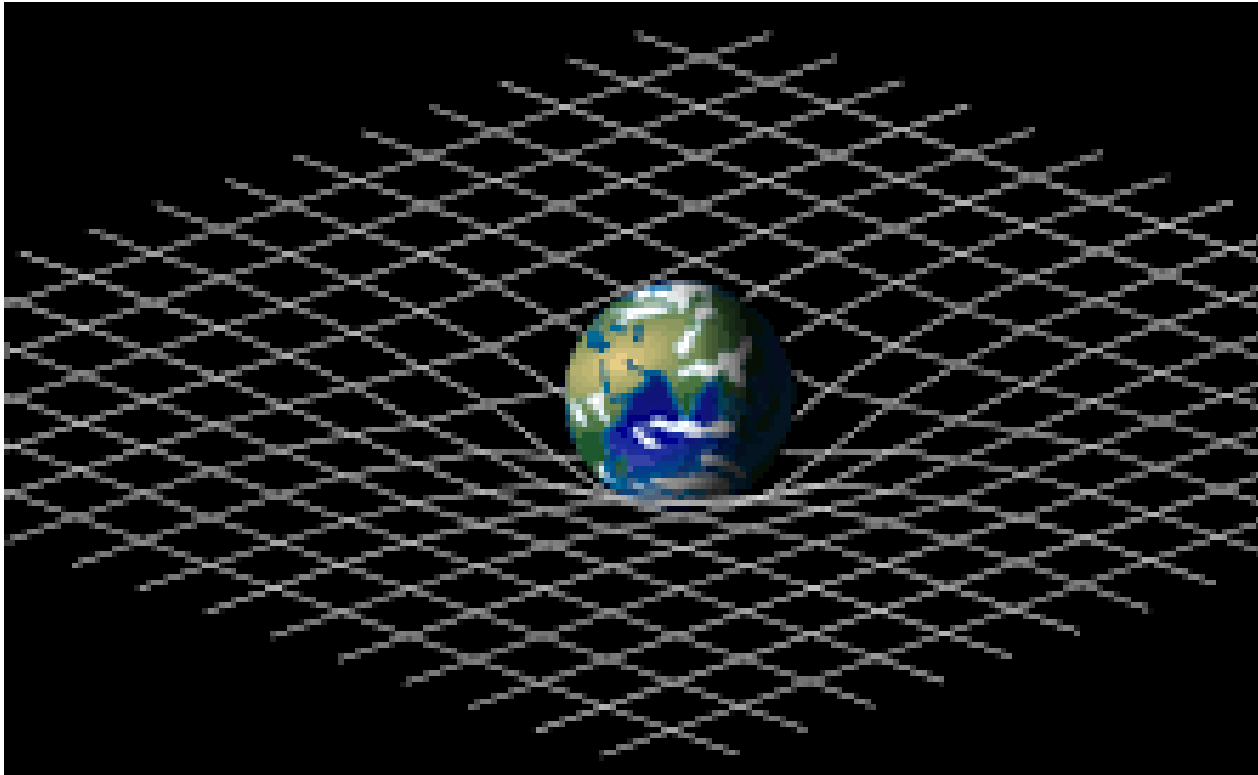
Six Main Ideas Guide the Modern Mind

4. "In competition, one might think, with the Marxist interpretation of all higher manifestations of human life, there is, fourthly, the Freudian interpretation which reduces them to the dark stirrings of a subconscious mind and explains them mainly as the results of unfulfilled incest-wishes during child-hood and early adolescence."



Dali and Surrealism

Six Main Ideas Guide the Modern Mind



The Theory of Relativity: Space Time Continuum

5. "There is the general idea of relativism, denying all absolutes, dissolving all norms and standards, leading to the total undermining of the idea of truth in pragmatism, and affecting even mathematics, which has been defined by Bertrand Russell as 'the subject in which we never know what we are talking about, or whether what we say is true'."

Six Main Ideas Guide the Modern Mind

6. "Finally there is the triumphant idea of positivism, that valid knowledge can be attained only through the methods of the natural sciences and hence that no knowledge is genuine unless it is based on generally observable facts. Positivism, in other words, is solely interested in 'know-how' and denies the possibility of objective knowledge about meaning and purpose of any kind."

Positivism
the study of society that relies on scientific evidence, such as experiments, to reveal a true nature of how society operates



What Does It Mean?

- “What do these six 'large' ideas have in common, besides their nonempirical, metaphysical nature? They all assert that what had previously been taken to be something of a higher order is really 'nothing but' a more subtle manifestation of the 'lower' - unless, indeed, the very distinction between higher and lower is denied.”
- “Thus man, like the rest of the universe, is really nothing but an accidental collocation of atoms. The difference between a man and a stone is little more than a deceptive appearance. Man's highest cultural achievements are nothing but disguised economic greed or the outflow of sexual frustrations.”
- “The leading ideas of the nineteenth century, which claimed to do away with metaphysics, are themselves a bad, vicious, life-destroying type of metaphysics. We are suffering from them as from a fatal disease. It is not true that knowledge is sorrow. But poisonous errors bring unlimited sorrow in the third and fourth generation. The errors are not in science but in the philosophy put forward in the name of science.”

Metaphysics

What is Metaphysics?

- ✓ **It encompasses everything that exists, as well as the nature of existence itself.**
- ✓ **It says whether the world is real, or merely an illusion. It is a fundamental view of the world around us.**



Intelligibility and Grades of Significance

- “While the nineteenth-century ideas deny or obliterate the hierarchy of levels in the universe, the notion of an hierarchical order is an indispensable instrument of understanding. Without the recognition of 'Levels of Being' or 'Grades of Significance' we cannot make the world intelligible to ourselves nor have we the slightest possibility to define our own position, the position of man, in the scheme of the universe. It is only when we can see the world as a ladder, and when we can see man's position on the ladder, that we can recognize a meaningful task for man's life on earth.”
- “The resulting confusion is indescribable. What is the Leitbird, as the Germans say, the guiding image, in accordance with which young people could try to form and educate themselves? There is none, or rather there is such a muddle and mess of images that no sensible guidance issues from them. The intellectuals, whose function it would be to get these things sorted out, spend their time proclaiming that everything is relative - or something to the same effect, Or they deal with ethical matters in terms of the most unabashed cynicism.”



Jacob's Ladder in the Old Testament by William Blake

Concluding Thoughts and Arguments

- “The problems of education are merely reflections of the deepest problems of our age. They cannot be solved by organization, administration, or the expenditure of money, even though the importance of all these is not denied. We are suffering from a metaphysical disease, and the cure must therefore be meta-physical. Education which fails to clarify our central convictions is mere training or indulgence. For it is our central convictions that are in disorder, and, as long as the present anti-metaphysical temper persists, the disorder will grow worse.”



Kandinsky on the Spiritual Element of Art

Discussion: What are our final thoughts? Are we suffering from a metaphysical disease that will only grow worse if we do not find a way to change? If so, how do we create that change?



THE END



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