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We must constantly remind ourselves that the true ends of education are wisdom and virtue. Self control and personal restraint are virtues that need to be nurtured in our modern culture.

THOUGHTS ON EDUCATION AND CULTURE: AN INTERVIEW WITH RUSSELL AND ANNETTE KIRK

Part I—The Purposes of Education

GDH: Dr. Kirk, over the last forty years you have been, as well as a critic of popular education, a widely listened to exponent of what should be done to improve schooling. In this last decade of the twentieth century, what would you recommend that must be done to bring about authentic educational reform?

RK: The first necessity is to restore the original purposes of education, which as Plato said, are wisdom and virtue. We have forgotten all about those and instead we list fifty or a hundred minor objectives and forget the principal ends, or aims.

The question immediately arises as to through which disciplines one approaches these. The primary discipline of education is literature, humane letters, books which have suffered badly in our time from the ravages of television. Since great literature is ethical, it is through humane letters that the building of character is carried on in schools. This has been forgotten in the typical textbook or reader nowadays. Virtue too is closely related to the literary discipline.

The second most important discipline, I think, for the teaching of wisdom and virtue is history, which is now frequently neglected. Through history we acquire an understanding of the continuity of human existence. We learn from the errors as well as the triumphs of the past. We come to feel that we are a part of a great continuity. Both of these disciplines are badly neglected in our time for a variety of causes. In part from the assumption that everything old is archaic and that we should be concerned, apparently, with things of the hour. That way lies the destruction of the intellectual disciplines and indeed of character. We aim only for measurable results and are surprised that somehow the mind and the imagination are not satisfied.

To put things very briefly, the primary means of reform is to return to certain long established disciplines, but many people are unwilling or unable to make that effort.

GDH: In 1970 you wrote that what was needed was sort of a cultural restoration sustained by affirmative courage. You said this in relation to what T.S. Eliot referred to as " . . . the permanent things."

RK: Human nature is a constant. So much in modern life seems momentary and ephemeral. We need to be reminded again and again that there is an enduring human nature, about which you learn, in part, through formal instruction. Eliot means by " . . . the permanent things," such things as family, orderly government, politics, great architecture, great music, great literature; these are the things about which schooling ought to be concerned. Often, I think, the lack of imaginative development in schools leads us to neglect the permanent things. The modern mind tends to become mechanistic and materialistic and assumes that the end of life is simply sensual pleasure. When that conviction becomes wide enough spread the society and the family begins to disintegrate.

Now there are permanent truths. Not all things are relative to the moment. It was assumed until our own time that the primary function of education was to impart these truths. Nowadays we find many who say with Pontius Pilot, "What is truth?" and will not stay for an answer. This is the denial of the permanent things in any walk of life.

GDH: Would you suggest that the "permanent things" of which you speak, and of which Eliot wrote, can be taught in our modern public schools, considering the pluralism of today's society?

RK: There are difficulties there but not insuperable difficulties. It was taken for granted in the early years of our republic that such a thing was possible. I think it was assumed by Horace Mann, who had more than anyone else to do with the widespread founding of public schools, that such a thing could be done: imparting veneration, respect for the past, and well established moral principles. There are various ways of doing it. For instance, there came to Grand Rapids some years ago, a teacher, a Japanese who had taught in the West Indies. After the Second World War he made his way to this country and became an American, earned his teacher's certificate and became a teacher in the social sciences. His pupils came from the slum district of Grand Rapids and from broken homes, neighborhoods of vi-

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olence. These boys and girls were seeking some general principles, apparently, by which to live. They would ask him, "Teacher, is it all right to beat up another boy if the gang is on your side?" or "Is it all right to take what you want from the dime store?" He saw the need for imparting ethical principles through the social science program, the content of which had consisted of vague abstractions and of visits to the municipal sewage works and perhaps to City Hall. He thoroughly reorganized that program, under the influence, I think, of C.S. Lewis' book *The Abolition of Man* and the Tao. He commenced his series of studies of moral and ethical principles by examining moral and ethical principles as described by great and good men and women of the past - prophets, sages, saints and ethical teachers of many civilizations. For example they took up the commandment, "Honor thy father and thy mother and live long on the land," and then he would give parallel teachings from Mohammed and so on, establishing here a universal recognition of a moral truth. He would ask, "Well, boys and girls, what do you think of this? Does it seem right that all these great and wise men and women agreed on these principles? How are we going to apply this to our lives?" Of course he became very popular teaching principles that way. However the school board was threatened with a suit of law by a women in the community, not by an avowed atheist however, not a Madalyn Murray O'Hair, but by a woman who belonged to a particular Christian denomination and who feared that what the teacher was teaching would interfere in some way with the creed of her sect. The school board, I am glad to say, in this case did not yield, but continued the teacher in this program and the woman did not sue. And, I expect that if it had been brought to court in that case the school board and teacher would have won.

This is not doctrinal instruction in any sense but rather the teaching of a kind of universal moral law. In many other ways it is possible, or at least more possible that in was ten years ago, to devise programs in public schools of ethical instruction that will arouse the moral imagination without being attached to particular doctrinal bodies of belief. And in general the courts are more likely to permit references to The Permanent Things and indeed to religion.

I have been a witness, allegedly expert, in various church/state trials, and in general the tendency of courts has been to recognize the first clause of the First Amendment as a protection for religion, not against religion.

GDH: Mrs. Kirk, from the perspective of the National Commission on Education, on which you served as it developed its much heralded *Nation at Risk* report in 1983, how much support would you see The Permanent Things having from the national educational establishment?

AK: Well first of all, to get educators to agree that wisdom and virtue are the final ends of education is quite an accomplishment in itself. That includes both parochial schools and public schools. Obviously it is a little easier in the parochial schools. I just mention that because when I did bring that up at the United States Catholic Conference Committee on Education an old bishop said, "Yes, I remember the days when we used to speak of education in those terms." Instead today in parochial schools, particularly in Catholic schools, they are more likely to speak of education as having the end of social justice as opposed to any kind of a Christian transformation of character or even in wisdom and virtue. There is more of an emphasis on social goals than on specifically Christian goals.

But, as far as public schools are concerned, within the last ten years this subject has become much more popular. It became quite polarized until about three or four years ago. Even in our little villages here in Michigan the ACLU was taking people to court every year over some Bible reading or some left-over prayer in the school or some teacher who was teaching creationism. That seems to have faded somewhat just recently. And I think that the reason for that is a general feeling that things are falling apart at the seams; that something is needed as a cohesive force in society and that ultimately it has to be some conviction about something, a moral conviction. Paul Vitz recently did a study that pointed to a lack of any moral teaching, especially Christian moral teaching, in textbooks. His study showed that the role of Christianity in our national history was completely ignored in these textbooks. He showed this very conclusively. It was a very strong study. It was commissioned by the Department of Education, and it really make its mark. It was picked up by the popular press, the magazines, and many people became alarmed when they realized how little their children were absorbing in the public schools in terms of just an objective study of what Christianity had done to help this country develop its laws and literature and culture. Now it is a little easier to make your case in the public school because people realize that with lawlessness out of control it is very important to teach right and wrong. Relativism has run its course. People now realize that we have to do something about character education.

And we have to teach teachers how to teach character and ethical principles. In that regard, there is a new Center at Boston University for the Advancement of Ethics and Character. Kevin Ryan is the director of that Center and they are specifically trying to teach teachers how to implement throughout the curriculum literature in order to teach good character to students in elementary and high school. It is an effort to do this through the teaching of literature.

There are, as you know, many areas of thought in this field. Two of the more prominent ones being Values Clarification and Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development. They both have been shown to be not very effective in terms of outcomes relating to character formation in students. In both cases they are rather complex and emphasize the dialectic rather that the active response. The result is that they are both becoming rather passe and character education is coming back into vogue. Kohlberg's "old bag of virtues" is reappearing on the scene in the public schools.

GDH: To what extent would you connect the decline of wisdom and virtue as the primary purposes of education to instrumentalism of John Dewey?

RK: Dewey was what he called a "religious humanist," which is what today we call a "secular humanist." The term secular humanist originated apparently with Christopher Dawson, the British historian. Irving Babbitt, the great American critic preferred the term *humanitarian* for the same kind of mind and character. That is *humanitarian* meaning that there is no transcendent divine power and that all virtues are of man's own making. At any rate, Dewey was strongly opposed to any traditional, established religion or any body of dogma. There was no transcendent power in the universe. Those views he looked upon as unscientific and he endeavored to promulgate *humanitarian* thinking in his works and teaching and enjoyed a large success. His success was, in part, because he addressed a topic which no one had seriously examined in America before. Thus, the Teacher's College at Columbia became, in those days, the agency for disseminating throughout the country doctrines of secular humanism. Other teacher's colleges and schools of education, impressed by this, almost as in a fit of absence from the mind, surrendered the old respect for tradition and authority and the belief in the realm of being that is not merely immediate and sensual. These gave way before the doctrines of secular humanism which are still dominant

in nearly all teacher's colleges and which many educationists are trying to instill in the rising generation of teachers. And for that reason, of course, Dewey's influence was large.

That, of course, was not the only cause of our present attitude. In general, of course, since the middle of the nineteenth century there has been a tendency for the natural sciences to assume the role formerly occupied by the philosopher and sage. Mechanism and materialism have become dominant in the popular culture and the schools have gone along with this drift rather than oppose it. And as the state assumed a larger and larger role in public education religious instruction became difficult because of conflicts of creeds and dogmas as well as the conscious desire of the secular humanists to push any kind of religion or veneration out of the curriculum. You find this in many quarters, even Chester Finn, who has been involved in educational argument for the past twenty years, regrets that there are still persons who think that religion ought to be included in education. Though he is a strong critic of much of the present educational establishment he is still a secular humanist and wants to promote those views through the federal government's policies as it assumes a larger and larger role.

The chief place where religious instruction has been preserved at elementary and secondary levels has been the independent schools of a Christian or Jewish character which educate a very small proportion, however, of the general population. The fact that there has been such a striking growth in these independent schools over the past fifteen years or so indicates that there is a felt need for such instruction. It has helped prepare the way for such things as tax credits or tax vouchers, which encourage parents to send their children to schools of their own choosing, most of which would be religious schools.

GDH: Your emphasis on the importance of teaching wisdom and virtue in relation to certain transcendent understandings, goes back to a statement that you made twenty years ago to the effect that our present cultural crisis is traceable to " . . . the pragmatism of James, the naturalism of Dewey, and the sentimentality of the socialists, all [of which] are the result of the presumptions of people who have forgotten the truth of dualism." Would you care to comment on that in terms of the public school and its curriculum?

RK: First of all the term dualism implies that there is a realm of being other than the material realm which we see around ourselves. There is in the universe life and awareness which is beyond ordinary human experience. With that transcendent power we try, in our feeble way, to "get in touch." Dualism also implies that there are powers of good and powers of evil and that we must be always on our guard against the evil that lurks in all human nature. All of us must learn to restrain ourselves or we fall apart. This what is called the Doctrine of Original sin. "In Adam's Fall, We Sinned All." Thus all human beings suffer from the Seven Deadly Sins: lust, violence, gluttony, avarice, and the rest. Much of the function of education is to learn to restrain oneself and to be aware that there is a power that ordains that restraint.

Now, the doctrines of William James concerning pragmatism interpreted these doctrines in a twisted sense. They assume that research, practical experience, that which works—that is the only guide for mankind. Certain actions seem to have good results and by this experience we should guide ourselves. That in itself, of course, leads education away from tradition and authority toward a short-range judgement of the means to success. Then, add to this, the militant secular humanism, or *humanitarianism,* of the Deweyan school which teaches that present life is the be all and the end all and advocates an egalitarianism which is socialist in its political character, and which proposes that we should as far as possible abolish individual distinctions and create an educational system which serves the community or, more exactly, the state. This fundamentally transforms the end of education; it is no longer the improvement of the intellect of the individual human being, the person, but rather the aim becomes service to society in some vague sense. That results in the ignoring of the old body of schooling which took it for granted that one studies humane literature to learn how to conduct oneself in life and history enough to understand the great continuity in life, of our very being. Dewey is said to have argued that no one should read any book written before 1900. The past is worthless. Those who adhere to the Deweyan school will lead the march forward into the glorious future of egalitarianism. These doctrines have always had a popular appeal. They appeal perhaps to the old American feeling sardonically expressed by Mark Twain when he said "One man is as good as another, or, maybe a little better." That, when applied to schools translates into a reluctance to encourage achievement, indeed a willingness to encourage contentment with mediocrity. Thus, these abstract doctrines have been popularized and done widespread mischief.

GDH: You have emphasized the need to educate for restraint and self-control. How would you evaluate the efforts of schools to introduce programs that directly address the contemporary problems of drug and alcohol abuse and irresponsible sexual activity?

RK: Such contemporary problems are the result of a world without norms. Exhortation of the young is not usually very effective. Giving a classroom lecture against promiscuity accomplishes little except to interest children in the possibility of promiscuity. To lecture against drink and tell how much harm it does is an ineffectual restraint on the appetites.

Moral teaching has to be done, ordinarily, by parable, allegory, and fable in the higher sense of those words. That is, we read fiction or great works of philosophy as a means to develop wisdom. And the beauty of the language and the aptness of the illustrations has a strong affect. Imaginative literature of that kind has been dropped altogether from the curriculum of many schools. And thus, if the imagination is denied, still the imagination is there and perhaps the teenager will seek the imagination brought by the narcotic trance, which isn't really the imagination but is what T.S. Eliot called the "diabolical imagination" as contrasted to the moral imagination.

When I was a boy I read all of the Arthurian tales and my gang and I equipped ourselves with cardboard armor, helmets, and swords and battled each other mightily, not doing any permanent harm. We had at least an idea of the chivalric ideals of the table round. It is different nowadays, there is no reading of the Arthurian legends in most schools. There is, however, the vicious effect of television, of bad movies, and so the modern street gang works for the destruction of all ideals except for the triumph of the ego.

We learn from great literature and from historical studies and philosophy the necessary need for the restraint of passions, while the tendency in many schools is to realize the *self:* "find yourself and fulfill your personality." This is nonsense. As if there is any "fulfillment of the self" separated somehow from religion, duty, and tradition. With no instruction the ego becomes ravenous, destroying; ones life becomes one of aggrandizement and power over others. A system of education which assumes that there is no such thing as Original Sin, that all desires are innocent, and what is needed is simply the attainment of those desires, leads

first to personal anarchy and then to the public anarchy of which we see so many terrible examples around us.

GDH: You would not then, view the books of Judy Blume as being the imaginative or cultural equivalent of the Arthurian legend.

AK: Judy Blume is really quite insidious. Her works are very popular, and they are very funny in perhaps the same way as "Saturday Night Live." It is very funny, but once you have started to look at it and think about it you see what it does to our culture and to our children's imaginations. Everything in the end is cynical. Television today is often in that mold: children are very bright and adults are very stupid. It is funny, and it does get a laugh; in fact I find myself feeling guilty sometimes laughing at it. Some children today are trying to be like the Simpsons, and those children whom they see on television and in the movies who are arrogant, cynical, sensual and violent. It is true that television has influenced our entire generation. But not only television—the videos and the movies. And I can see this with our own girls, and I have talked to them about it at length. Putting so much of this violence into their heads makes them insensitive. It desensitizes children to see people being hit as a matter of course. They sit there eating popcorn and watch people being hurt and suffering from terrible violence: it's almost like they were desensitized to real violence. It is frightening because their imaginations are being warped.

MH: One of the problems that we are looking at is teachers. So many teachers today, even those who might like to teach character through the classics and other good literature, have themselves not had any exposure to it. There is no easily available curriculum for this. How would you suggest that a teacher would start in developing the moral imagination?

RK: There are several books of this sort, some quite good. Again, other attempts are highly unsatisfactory. A large volume of literature recommended for children was published about three years ago by a writer for The New York Times. It is interesting what was omitted. Lewis Carrol's *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Looking Glass* were not included. They were apparently fantasy of the sort that was not relevant. They wanted late twentieth century literature of the Judy Blume type, and that was the sort that predominated. There was a fear of anything that might hit upon a realm of being that is not material. They wanted realistic stories about slums and rock and roll singers and so on.

MH: Years ago you wrote about the use of legends and fairy tales with very young children. As the children grow older they can be provided with more advanced legends to consider.

AK: Yes, and it must be clearly understood that the imaginative void will be filled with something and if that is not the moral imagination it will be the diabolic or perverted imagination.

RK: Curiously enough, the education of the young through folktale and fantasy has survived better in the Soviet Union than anywhere else in the world, largely because of the influence of the great Herneage Tchaikovski, who is greatly beloved by all Russians because they have read his fairy tales from an early age. He lived to a great age and became the richest man in Russia, and though he refused to join the Communist Party he was never interfered with. His influence was too great: it would have been like trying to imprison Santa Claus. They went on using his fairy tales throughout his life and beyond. In other words, there are some forms of materialism that are much stronger in America than in Russia.

While in America most bookshops have decayed into the typical franchise chain book shop where there is almost nothing worth reading, children's bookshops and children's book departments in bookshops are in vigorous and healthy condition. There are a lot of good books there, both old and new; there are good new children's books coming all the time. Obviously there is a public for them. Parents, although they cease to read themselves, preferring to sit and watch television, still think it virtuous for children to read and continue to buy books for them. So, in that sense, the private reading is compensating in some degree for the loss of such literature in the school, although obviously it cannot wholly compensate for it.

At the beginning of this century the one fairy tale, a very long one, which was found in virtually every school reader was Ruskin's *King of the Golden River.* It dealt with charitable duty and moral development. This was taught in practically every school. It is now nowhere mentioned nor is any tale of that sort told. And, while a great fantasist of our time is Ray Bradbury, and while his tales are included in school anthologies, they include only those which are primarily horrible and seem to show no meaning in the universe. His tales without this character are carefully omitted. Still, we live in a time when children's fiction still has a large influence. The books most widely read by children nowadays are C.S. Lewis' *The Narnia Chronicles.* The books most widely read by boys a little older than that are Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings.* And by girls the books, *Young Unicorns* and *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle are very popular. And the author most popular with high school students in Ray Bradbury. All of these help the healthy moral imaginations. So we needn't despair! The taste for good literature is still there among the children who are actually reading.

Part II—A Nation at Risk

GDH: Mrs. Kirk, you served on the National Commission on Education which produced **The Nation at Risk** report in 1983. Could you give us some insight as to how the report was developed, how it was received, and what effect it has had.

AK: The Nation at Risk was essentially a catalyst for work that had already been done in research areas and it served as a point at which people started to agree that something was wrong. People had been talking about this, but they were polarized into liberal and conservative camps. This was the first time that all these people of good will, be they conservative or liberal, came together to agree that something was wrong. They would part again on what to do about it, and on how it got that way. Many people criticized the Report because they thought that we did not blame anybody. We did not say who was at fault, we didn't even speak about the utilitarians or Dewey or that sort of thing. In fact what we said was that the trend, which is currently a declining trend in education, stems more from "weakness of purpose, confusion of vision, underuse of talent, and lack of leadership." That was the conclusion of the Report. As to how education got this way we did not go into detail.

Now, I was concerned, especially with the weakness of purpose because I did not think that we had an idea of what education was all about. So my constant cry during the year and a half that we met was to continually ask the commissioners: "What are we about? What are we trying to do? Where should we be going?" I was much more concerned with the philosophical aspect of this than any of the other members who were much more concerned with what we were going to do on a very practical level; how we were going to pay for it; what the unions would say about imposing a

core curriculum and of those more practical aspects of the report. These questions obviously had to be addressed but I felt that unless we could agree on a vision for education we really wouldn't be accomplishing very much. It was amazing that we came together to even agree that there should be these recommendations. And we should remember that they were recommendations and not decrees by the federal government.

Then each state took the report and decided what it was from the report they wanted to implement. Some states decided that they wanted to implement all of it, some in part, some had stronger unions and didn't implement very much. It was a struggle in all states, but every state in the union did reply which, I think, means that it made its mark. Now, why did they reply to this report when they often already knew that these things were wrong, and didn't do anything about it? I think that the reason was because we put it together in a statement that was jargon free. It was readable, it had some dramatic flair to it, and it said very specifically what could be done. We gave them a plan. The report told people where we were, it told them that this is the problem at the moment. I think that it was a very clear and concise report.

Now a few of us on the Commission were particularly eager to have the report be jargon free. At one point the staff, which was really pretty decent, came up with a 100-page initial draft of the report. In it were such things as "we must rationalize the generic curriculum." That was the kind of jargon that they were used to. So, when I picked up on that phrase, and asked them what they meant, they used more gobbledygook trying to explain. Everyone laughed and it became apparent that we needed to take out phrases like that. Soon it became evident that the staff, because of having dealt so long in this kind of educational jargon, couldn't communicate with ordinary people. The Commission itself then took up the actual writing of the report. Each of us wrote different sections. It was then put together by David Gardner, our very able chairman, who took one member of the staff with him one weekend to Utah where they wove together all of the parts of the report that each of us had tried to contribute. Now, I am not sure that every single member wrote something, but every member had some aspect of the report to which they wanted to contribute.

I helped, along with Minnesota Governor Albert Quie and Yvonne Larson, to write the section of the report that dealt with parents. David Gardner polished it beautifully. That was the last section which was "A Word to Parents and Students." It was the part of the report that was read at the White House the day that President Reagan presented it to the press. We had been talking for some months about "excellence" in education, and we defined that in the Report. I became very nervous about the fact that nowhere had we noted that in order to achieve excellence in education it was necessary that students not cheat. I kept bringing up the idea that excellence in education also included a developed notion of honesty. And so this line was included in the final version: "Finally, help your children understand that excellence in education cannot be achieved without intellectual and moral integrity coupled with hard work and commitment."

And then I was able to get the word "virtue" in the report by saying "Children will look to their parents and teachers as models of such virtues." I also wanted to establish the fact here that there is still an expectation, even in this decadent time, that parents will be, to some extent, good models for their children. At the same time, the concept of the teacher being a model sort of faded in the 1960s, when teachers no longer wanted to be models; they wanted to be just like everyone else and they became simply facilitators. That word became very popular in the 1960s and 1970s. They did not want the model "trip" put on them, where they had to be models of virtue. At that time there were quite a few teachers who were involved in drug use and other kinds of illegitimate activities. They would walk into the classroom, put their feet up on the desk and want to be considered a "common Joe." They wanted to "relate" to their students and be considered friends. They did not want to be up on a pedestal. Therefore their concept of the teacher as a model of virtue was completely lost. Inserting this into the report was actually quite radical. It was much debated in some of the journals after we issued the Report. Some of the teachers resented the idea that they were supposed to be teaching their children any kind of virtue. They said, "We have enough to do, we don't want to teach them virtue too!" Of course the concept that we had was that teachers, by the very nature of their own character should be virtuous individuals so that the modeling would just be that. It didn't mean that they had to be didactic about it. Teachers teach by what they are rather than just by what they say.

The other reason that I was particularly anxious to help out and push this part of the report about parents being the first teachers of their children, and that they have a right and responsibility to participate in their children's education was that I would have liked to see something about tuition tax-credits or vouches in the final report. That was an impossibility because there was not enough support among the members. No member was willing to dissent from the Report on that particular issue. They all had their own ideas and agendas, and no one was strong enough on that point to dissent. I would have been the one ordinarily who would have dissented, being perhaps the most conservative member of the Commission, but I realized that it was a policy that was not, at that time, going to be passed by Congress. The time was not yet, in fact only now is the time, with Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander, who is going to be pushing for vouchers and tax-credits. But I was anxious to include in the report the premise that the parent has the responsibility for the education of the child as opposed to the state. I felt it was important to get that philosophical premise included so that later on, when Congress would consider the question of how parents would choose the education of their children, they would look back at that premise included in the Report and realize that the recognition of parental responsibility had already been made.

The reaction was wonderful, much more overwhelming than we had anticipated. We later analyzed that and realized the reason was that there was a moment in time when people were ready to receive this Report. They knew that something was wrong, they didn't know how to articulate it. We articulated it in this jargon-free document. It was only 36 pages; we know that today Americans have a very short attention span. We decided that it would be short, pithy, even punchy. In a sense it was, because it said in the very beginning that " . . . if an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war." That was a very forceful statement and was the kind of thing that the media pick up. Because there were so many quotable statements in the document the media picked it up and news of it was everywhere. Charles Karalt's "Sunday Morning" came here to Mecosta and spent two days interviewing me. They followed us around, they went into the public school because I was considered the parent representative. I was the only one on the Commission with children at all levels of schooling. At that time I had one in kindergarten, one in grade school, one in junior high school

and one in high school. The report was discussed on a lot of programs like that one. It had an effect on every legislature. So, I think that the long-term effect has been very good. It started a deeper dialogue about education.

Part III—The Present Social Crisis

What can be done, and we have seen this since 1983, is only superficial until you get the parents involved in the school, and that can only really happen when parents have the power of the purse. So, until we actually have a voucher system in this country we can only repair some of the previous damage and do some superficial reform. Until that very concrete thing happens, where parents actually have to pay attention and make decisions as to what schools their children are going to, you can't have thorough reform. The one government program that everyone seems to agree did work to some extent, was Head Start. That was the only government program that required parents to actively participate. It was a program dealing with small children where, obviously there had to be, because of the age of the children involved, parental participation. The parents couldn't just drop them off, they had to be involved. The parents were in the classroom, and they had certain things that they had to do with the children at home. And that is the program that everyone seems to agree, across the board, has made some impact. I do not see why, if you are going to have a public school system, you cannot require that parents participate in the education of their children by at least making them come and pick up the report cards once a year. I would go further and say that you should have them come to school at the beginning of the year to explain the program and show them how they should help their children with their homework and such, but at least you should get them to come at the end of the school year.

In special education each of the children must have an Individual Education Plan and a progress report. Even then it is sometimes difficult to get parents to come. I don't see how, if you don't have at least one adult other that the teacher interested in a child you can hope to make any progress.

MH: One of the problems that we see in special education is that many of the difficulties that the children have are the direct result of the neglect, lack of interest, and actually malign behavior of the parents to begin with. It is another aspect of the decline in the civilized values of wisdom and virtue of which we spoke earlier.

AK: That is right, and I don't know how society is going to deal with this. It is unfair to those children whose parents do come and participate, so, when they talk about equality in education, I don't see how that can ever be a reality. There are different levels of ability as well as differences in care and in the influences to which the child has been exposed.

GDH: In terms of public policy, how would a person who holds to your traditionalist and conservative philosophy develop an educational policy that would answer the problems that arise out of parental failure?

AK: This is probably why all of the character education programs are springing up. People realize that you must have some kind of ethical training, and if you don't you are putting at risk students whose parents do give it to them. In education you need a positive environment, a moral ethos, and if you do not have it, if it is not created by the kind of wholesome character that the students have or by the sense of stable community that they have in relation to each other, you really can't make much progress. That is one intangible aspect of education that is a necessity.

GDH: Are not these uninvolved and unconcerned parents part of what you have referred to, Dr. Kirk, as the unattached urban proletariat, whose only contribution to society is their progeny? What do we do with that progeny that will help make it at least productive enough to maintain itself?

RK: With each generation, as the proletarian conditions continue, the problem becomes more acute because such convictions and morals as the first generation on welfare begin with diminish with the passage of time. No one really has shown a way out except to work with such people on the spot and save them against their will. Here and there you find in these circumstances that something can be done. So far as there being any healthy influences at work among the modern American urban proletariat they are the churches. We can see what Catholic grade schools can do in places like New York and Detroit and Chicago. One journalist from The New York Times wrote about visiting a Catholic grade school in the South Bronx. All the children were black. Around the school there was complete burned-out devastation, but the school stood there intact. The journalists who entered were greeted by a hostess. A very small black girl came up, introduced herself politely, kissed them all, and lead them around the school which seemed in perfect order. It was still functioning amidst this almost complete anarchy and ruin. In that sense the only kind of education that is going to work is that done in the spirit of reverence and religious principle. Because of that, religious schools have an advantage in the work of redemption that the public schools do not enjoy in the present circumstances.

AK: But that is an example of what can be done if you have the cooperation of the parents. It is also a reason why the public schools have become dumping grounds, where some parents leave their children from 7:00 in the morning to 7:00 at night because they can't take care of them. Some parents can, but choose not to. Others just aren't home and that's why the school becomes the focal point for all of their after-school activities as well. In some instances you are lucky if the school is the focal point and not the gang on the corner. One of our Commission members was a black principal of an inner city school who said that he had a list of 27 things that he had to do every year that had nothing to do with education: take the census, be sure that all of the kids had their shots, federal forms and so on. The reading and writing and academic work was way down on the list of things that he had to attend to; so the schools are taking on many non-educational functions and society is agreeing to this by default in many cases. There seems to be no other agency to take care of these problems. Many of these people won't even go to the churches, so the schools are the only institutions that can be counted on to conduct health surveys and other things to help society. How you can have equitable education when you have such diverse populations being served, I don't know.

MH: One of the problems is that we are dealing with a society where the traditionally shared values are no longer accepted by large groups of people. We have families where even the work ethic is derided, it is laughed at, and there is no reason that they see why they should work; where the idea of honesty is not taught, where they teach their children to lie and take their children out to steal.

AK: If all parents had vouchers they would have to make some choices, otherwise the child would not go to school at all. Ultimately there has to be one adult somewhere who is in charge of the child. The problem is that the schools, or the teachers, have had to pick this up. What we are really talking about is this class that Russell calls the "detached urban proletariat." They stand in opposition to almost all of

the values of the society. You can't even count on them to cooperate to get their children to school.

GDH: Dr. Kirk, you have written extensively in recent months about this proletariat. I know that you believe that the recent intensification of our cultural crisis is at least partly the result of this group. Would you discuss your thoughts on this subject?

RK: Let us define our terms. The words "proletariat" and "proletarian" come down to us from Roman times. In the Roman signification of the term, a proletarian is a man who gives nothing to the commonwealth but his progeny. Such a being pays no taxes, subsists at public expense, fulfills no civic duties, performs no work worth mentioning, and knows not the meaning of piety. As a mass, the collective proletarians, the proletariat, are formidable; they demand entitlements—principally, in antique times, bread and circuses and in our own day much larger entitlements, which are granted to them lest they turn collectively violent. To the state, I repeat, the proletarian contributes only his offspring—who in their turn, ordinarily, become proletarians. Idle, ignorant, and often criminal, the proletariat can ruin a great city—and a nation. What Arnold Toynbee calls "the internal proletariat" so dragged down the Roman civilization; the barbarian invaders, the "external proletariat," burst through the fragile shell of a culture already bled to death.

GDH: What, in fact, can a society do about this proletariat that resists being brought into a more productive mode?

RK: There is no historical precedent for a remedy, unless it is what happened to the Roman proletariat. It withered only when the Republic withered. When the corn ships ceased to come from Egypt there was great malnutrition in Rome. The population of Rome, which had been two million, decreased to five thousand. It was the running sore of the Empire. In city after city there was destruction. And so it is that unless we find some means of amelioration we face a similar prospect of social catastrophe. Detroit is already a disaster area; so I understand, is Newark. They get steadily worse. Increased violence, poverty, decay. In Detroit there is only one neighborhood which is still tolerable. They presently have a vast stewing, steaming slum in which everyone is in danger, and which consumes public funds which are drawn from outside the city. No one has yet found a very practical remedy.

AK: In Michigan we have a new governor who is trying to tighten up all of the governmental operations. He has decreed, through the legislature of course, that the men and women on general assistance will have their grants cut. These are able bodied men and women who are collecting funds and who do not have families. This has caused an uproar in the state, but it has been sanctioned by the legislature and by the people in general. Some are claiming that terrible things will happen to these people, that they will be out on the street and starving; so far it hasn't happened. It will be an interesting experiment to see what does happen when people are denied support when they aren't working even though they are able to work.

RK: No effort at all is required to become a proletarian: one needs merely to submit to the dehumanizing and deculturizing currents of the hour, and worship the idols of the crowd. Much effort is required to conserve the legacy of order, freedom, and justice, of learning and art and imagination that ought to be ours. Some malign spirits, in the name of equality, would have us all be proletarians together: the doctrine of equal misery. The conservative impulse, au contraire, is to rescue as many men and women as possible from that submerged lot in life, without object and without cheer, which is the proletarian condition.