

## Jacques Maritain and an Education for Human Capacity

“Education is by nature a function of philosophy, of metaphysics. Every educator worships a deity—for Spencer it is Nature; for Comte, Humanity; for Rousseau, Liberty; for Freud, Sex; for Durkheim and Dewey, Society; for Wundt, Culture; for Emerson, the Individual. Or perhaps everything is reduced to a question of adaptation to the child or of letting nature take its course, which is tantamount to denying education. In truth, if the modern world is so concerned with education, it is not because of the fact that it has made any extraordinary discoveries in that field; it is, as Chesterton says, because modern man has lost his bearings; he knows neither where he is nor where he is going. Without doubt, this is why he is so concerned about others.”—“Philosophy and Education” (1930)

“The richest and most beautiful of cultures is nothing if moral development does not keep pace with the scientific and artistic development, if man is not conscious of the reasons he has for living, and the reasons he has for dying; this is the great tradition of our pioneers and the founders of your Republic, and that is why your land is so dear to all who cherish human liberty.”—“The Education of Women” (1941)

### A General Overview of Maritain’s Philosophy of Education

Jacques Maritain’s 1943 Terry Lectures delivered at Yale University were not his first writings on education nor his last. They were at the center of his argument that education is concerned primarily with the development and cultivation of human personhood, and all of its other goals for citizenship, technical skill, or scholarship were secondary expressions of this more central, general purpose.

#### **[A Structure of Nature and Grace]**

Maritain placed this pursuit within a structure of nature and grace. Education for human potential, according to Maritain, is ultimately oriented towards a completeness in God, but also by way of analogy has a more limited set of ends that address the moral, rational, imaginative, and spiritual lives of human beings. This means that the educator is ideally working with the Holy Spirit to help turn each person towards his or her supernatural end, even while developing the various means necessary to help strengthen the penultimate common good in society.

Maritain held that education, thus, has a telos towards wisdom, and the humanities can help develop human capacities for truth and beauty. By the humanities, while Maritain did have in mind the study of philosophy, history, literature, and religion, he thought that all the arts and sciences were aspects of human accomplishment and thus worthy of being studied. He was concerned that the natural and social sciences were often muddled by false philosophies, but he thought that the attentiveness to reality that science brought was good training for a respect for the nature of reality. He held that there is a necessary hierarchy of cultivated goods, beginning with charity (love), followed by wisdom, by speculative understanding, then by the pragmatic arts. He thought that the study of the histories of the various intellectual disciplines was one way to help more systematically engage these areas. He also thought the mechanical arts and manual labor should be an aspect of education.

#### **[A Correct Anthropology]**

All of this presupposes a certain anthropology of human abilities which can be cultivated by instruction (though this can include modeling, activity, and experiment), and Maritain argued that education should seek a gradual cultivation of the intellectual virtues, which taught someone to think and to reach free judgments as to a variety of matters. He also held that there is a rightful

pedagogical goal of imparting a certain knowledge of which all persons are capable, and this must respect each person's decision to engage learning. Teachers, by their approach to learning and their passion for truth, should model a kind of wisdom that prepares students for the work of wise and humane living.

### **[The Study of the Humanities]**

A study of the humanities also includes a wide engagement with the traditions of the West and the East, though the Greco-Roman and Jewish heritages have pride of place, for the Western conversation is far more central to European and American cultural history. Maritain also thought much education in the Jewish intellectual tradition was mediated in Christian circles by liturgy and the reading of the Bible. By 1957 or so, Maritain became convinced by several essays of Christopher Dawson's that Christian education also needed to include more attention to Christian texts and culture than the secular system would allow.

Taken together, these factors made education a key component in the work of culture and civilization. Maritain acknowledged that the scope of institutional instruction was far wider than it had been in earlier history, for the modern world seeks to educate more than just an upper-class destined for service in government or the Church. He also supported the cultivation of democratic values, and in the 1940s and 50s held a fairly optimistic hope that a humanistic education could be somewhat compatible alongside the Church, though he did foresee potential problems on the horizon.

Truth and freedom are closely tied together because an education in the humanities is not for the life of a hedonistic aesthete. As he put in his essay "Thomist Views on Education": "Without trust in truth, there is no human effectiveness." Contemplation of the truth and the leisure that is needed to accomplish this are for a greater end, namely, the conformity of the mind with the real. He saw philosophy of education as focusing on an area delineated differently than moral philosophy or a theology of education, though it may learn from these. Educational philosophy can thus be placed within the degrees of knowledge.

### **[A Moral Education]**

The moral cultivation that happens in school should be subordinated early on to the family and later to the larger society, though the society must not seek to supplant the rights of the family or the Church in regard to moral education. This kind of education in school in the early years should be cultivated by the examples found in classic texts, and they should be handled with sensitivity for their values. (By way of contrast, those philosophies and attitudes that scoff at goodness should be exposed and critiqued.) Higher level education also assists in the work of moral philosophy. The modern world has weakened or lost the sense of Being (that is ontological value), the sense of Sin (wounded in our consciences and pragmatic judgments), and sense of Love (as seen in our malformed wills and misdirected desires). These are repaired together, though the presence of the natural law can only do so imperfectly without grace. Christian education also benefits from daily mass, religious orders, and moral theological instruction.

## *Education at the Crossroads*

### Part I (The Aims of Education)

- The formation of the human person, who is the historical animal of culture
- The necessity of tradition to human development

Page 7, “What is Man?”

1. “An animal endowed with reason, whose supreme dignity is the intellect”;
2. “A free individual in a personal relationship with God, whose supreme righteousness consists in voluntarily obeying the law of God”;
3. “A sinful and wounded creature called to divine life and the freedom of grace, whose supreme perfection consist of love.”

Page 10, “The aim of education”

1. “To guide man in the evolving dynamism through which he shapes himself as a human person—armed with knowledge, strength of judgment, and moral virtues—”
2. “while at the same time conveying to him the spiritual heritage of the nation and civilization . . . preserving the century-old achievements of generations.”

### **7 Misconceptions in Education**

	<b>The Correct Conception</b>	<b>Impact of the Misconception</b>
<b>A Disregard of Ends</b>	Education is a practical art with the end of wisdom.	An overstress on testing for means; a loss of unity of purpose
<b>False Ideas of the Human End</b>	The Judeo-Greco-Christian view of human personality, including the training of internal freedom with the pursuit of truth as its primary goal.	A loss of the mystery of the person with an overemphasis on the behavioral and a too exclusive stress on job training
<b>Pragmatism</b>	Human knowledge is for insight into the reality of things, and as such, is subject to verification, and it has ends in the fulfillment of human desires, including the life of community, as well as personal vocation.	A stimulus view of the student that tends towards skepticism and relativism
<b>Sociologism</b>	A focus on the reading and discussion of classic books need not ignore the use of the experimental and those learning methods that emulate concrete social concerns, but it must cultivate the joy and friendship of learning.	A reduction to social conditioning that has no final end or purpose for education and ends in boredom with no sense of the adventure of learning
<b>Intellectualism</b>	A democratic ideal should continue to respect the spiritual energies of all human beings in order to cultivate sound judgment in persons at all levels of society.	Overspecialization in either scientific-technical study or in classic rhetorical display undercuts vital aspects of human existence and meaning.

<b>Voluntarism</b>	A training that helps students to will the good because they have grasped the true and beautiful.	Totalitarian training of the will to dominance and technique at the cost of human dignity and character.
<b>That All Can Be Learned</b>	While wisdom and practical knowledge per se can not be taught in a course, they can be cultivated in education: the study of moral and cultural ideals serves as a premoral preparation of sensibilities and desires for the right ends.	Vocationalism, especially in college, dilutes the key purposes of education.

## Part II (The Dynamics of Education)

*The Dynamic Factors:* the student's personality to be developed out of his or her individuality by an appeal to self-sacrifice and a drive towards the interior perfection found in love. The teacher's art is like that of a physician who assists the natural ability of the student.

### 5 Dispositions of the Student to Cultivate

<b>To Truth</b>	the fundamental love of discovery of that which is true
<b>To Justice</b>	the love of the good, of justice, and of heroic action
<b>To Existence</b>	an openness to and gladness in the goodness of existence
<b>To Work</b>	a faithful responsibility to work well done
<b>To Others</b>	the natural sense of cooperation which leads to society

### 4 Rules to Guide the Teacher's Work

	<b>The quality to pursue</b>	<b>The danger if mishandled</b>
<b>Liberation of Capacities</b>	Encouragement and building awareness of natural capacities	A repression of the bad tendencies without illumination of the good
<b>Cultivation of Inwardness</b>	Recognizing and strengthening interior intellectual and creative intuition and rationality	A false intellectual world of egoism or obsession with subconscious surrealism or a crushed spirit driven by fear
<b>Fostering Internal Unity</b>	The bringing together of mechanical skill, experience, and abstraction with the pursuit of wisdom	A disjointed set of pursuits and skills with no sense of how and why they belong together and assist one another
<b>Mastery of Reason for Freedom</b>	An active engagement with the richest truths that repay continual investigation and that encourage delight in texts	A cultivation of only certain skills with a loss of any way to discriminate among opinions and thus no sense of truth and reality

## Part III (The Humanities and Liberal Education)

Maritain's curriculum proposal gives certain years a key emphasis, but things actually build cumulatively, so the first 3 years of upper study include foreign language study, geography, national history and science, and his next four years include mathematics, literature, and fine arts.

6-9yrs	Initial Elementary	Work of Imagination	
10-12yrs	Complementary Elementary		Language study begins at 10yrs.
13-15yrs	High School	Ascending Reason	Yr 1: Languages (Elem. Astronomy & Geology) Yr 2: Grammar (Botany) Yr 3: History & Expression/Rhetoric (Zoology)
16-19yrs	College		Yr 4: Mathematics & Poetry (Logic, History of Civilizations) Yr 5: Natural Sciences & Fine Arts (History of Sciences) Yr 6: Philosophy (Psychology, Physics & Natr'l Sciences) Yr 7: Ethical & Political Philosophy
20-22yrs	M.A.	Advanced Study	Ord. 1: Useful Arts & Applied Sciences Ord. 2: Practical Sciences (Arts & Ethics) Ord. 3: Speculative Sciences & Liberal Arts Ord. 4: Cumulative Disciplines (Philosophy of Nature, Metaphysics, Epistemology, Ethical, Social, and Political Philosophy, Philosophy of History and Culture, Theology, History of Religions)
23-26yrs	Ph.D.		Institutes of Advanced Study and Schools of Religious Life (Courses of study in Theology are handled differently in secular and non-denominational schools.)

#### Part IV (The Trials of [1940s] Education)

1. New Integral Humanism: a personalist and communal civilization
  - A balance of freedom and responsibilities
  - An education for holy leisure
2. Moral Teaching and the Political Community
  - The need for education to be independent from the state, except in extreme circumstances
  - Moral instruction as a desperate public need in the face of skeptical philosophies and systems
  - An ethics of civilization and of love and grace
  - A reaffirmation of the value of family life and love
  - Education's role in supporting the common good
  - Need to defend democratic ideals and principles
3. The Crisis of Civilization and the Education for Death
  - The poison of Nazi education
  - The emergency need of a "peace patrol" for dangerous ideas
  - Need for a new Christian evangelization and revival of conscience
  - Proposals for cultural exchange projects
  - The American need for "heroic friendship" with Europe
  - A deeper mutual understanding than that of travel
  - The danger of education for technical skills and a mentality of force
  - The dangers of Kantian and Deweyan pragmatic models, as well as biological scientism