

# The False Principle of Our Education

or, Humanism and Realism

Max Stirner

Because our time is struggling toward the word with which it may express its spirit, many names come to the fore and all make claim to being the right name. On all sides our present time reveals the most chaotic partisan tumult and the eagles of the moment gather around the decaying legacy of the past. There is everywhere a great abundance of political, social, ecclesiastical, scientific, artistic, moral and other corpses, and until they are all consumed, the air will not be clean and the breath of living beings will be oppressed.

Without our assistance, time will not bring the right word to light; we must all work together on it. If, however, so much depends upon us, we may reasonably ask what they have made of us and what they propose to make of us; we ask about the education through which they seek to enable us to become the creators of that word. Do they conscientiously cultivate our predisposition to become *creators* or do they treat us only as creatures whose nature simply permits training? The question is as important as one of our social questions can ever be, indeed, it is the most important one because those questions rest on this ultimate basis. Be something excellent and you will bring about something excellent: be “each one perfect in himself,” then your society, your social life, will also be perfect.

Therefore we are concerned above all with what they make of us in the time of our plasticity; the school question is a life question. They can now be seen quite clearly; this area has been fought over for years with an ardour and a frankness which far surpasses that in the realm of politics because there it does not knock up against the obstructions of arbitrary power.

A venerable veteran, Professor Theodor Heinsius,<sup>1</sup> who, like the late Professor Krug<sup>2</sup> retained his strength and zeal into old age, has recently sought to provoke interest for this cause by a little essay. He calls it a “*Concordat* between school and life or mediation of humanism and realism from a nationalistic point of view.” Two parties struggle for victory and each wants to recommend his principle of

---

<sup>1</sup>Otto Friedrich Theodor Heinsius (1770–1849), philologist, professor, and later director of the Couvent-Gris in Berlin, author of several highly regarded grammars and dictionaries, histories of German literature. The book cited by Stirner is *Konkordat zwischen Schule und Leben, oder Vermittelung des Humanismus und Realismus, aus nationalistiche Standpunkt betrachtet*, published by Schultze in Berlin in 1842. Also useful is his *Zeitgemäße Pädagogik der Schule: historisch und kritisch aufgefaßt für das gesammte Schulpublikum*, published in Berlin in 1844.

<sup>2</sup>Wilhelm-Traugott Krug (1770–1842), famous German liberal philosopher and literary figure, successor to Immanuel Kant to the chair of logic and metaphysics at Königsberg in 1805, and from 1809 to 1834 professor of philosophy at Leipzig. Krug suspended his academic career to fight against Napoleon in 1813, and was subsequently president of the Tugendbund. He was author of more than a score of works, several of them in series of two to five volumes.

education as the best and truest for our needs: the humanists and the realists. Not wanting to incur the displeasure of either, Heinsius speaks in his booklet with that mildness and conciliation which means to give both their due and thereby does the greatest injustice to the cause itself since it can only be served by a sharp decisiveness. As things stand, this sin against the spirit of the cause remains the inseparable legacy of all faint-hearted mediators. “Concordats” offer only a cowardly expedient.

Only frank like a man: for or against!  
And the watchword: slave or free!  
Even gods descended from Olympus,  
And fought on the battlements of their ally.

Before arriving at his own proposals, Heinsius draws up a short sketch of the course of history since the Reformation. The period between the Reformation and the Revolution is which I will assert here without support since I plan to show it in greater detail at another opportunity that of the relationship between adults and minors, between the reigning and the serving, the powerful and the powerless, in short, the period of subjection. Apart from any other basis which might justify a superiority, *education*, as a power, raised him who possessed it over the weak, who lacked it, and the educated man counted in his circle, however large or small it was, as the mighty, the powerful, the imposing one: for he was an *authority*. Not everyone could be called to this command and authority; therefore, education was not for every one and universal education contradicted that principle. Education creates superiority and makes one a master: thus in that age of the master, it was a *means to power*. But the Revolution broke through the master-servant economy and the axiom came forth: everyone is *his own master*. Connected with this was the necessary conclusion that education, which indeed produces the master, must henceforth become *universal* and the task of finding true universal education now presented itself. The drive toward a universal education accessible to everyone must advance to struggle against the obstinately maintained exclusive education, and in the area also the Revolution must draw the sword against the domination of the period of the Reformation. The idea of universal education collided with the idea of *exclusive* education, and the strife and struggle moves through phases and under sundry names into the present. For the contradictions of the opposing enemy camps, Heinsius chose the names humanism and realism, and, inaccurate as they are, we will retain them as the most commonly used.

Until the Enlightenment began to spread its light in the Eighteenth Century, so called *higher education* lay without protest in the hands of the humanists and was based almost solely on the understanding of the old classics. *Another education* went along at the same time which likewise sought its example in antiquity and mainly ended up with a considerable knowledge of the Bible. That in both cases they selected the best education of the world of antiquity for their exclusive subject matter proves sufficiently how little of dignity our own life offered, and how far we still were from being able to create the forms of beauty out of our own originality and the content of truth out of our own reason. First we had to *learn* form and content; we were apprentices. And as the world of antiquity through classics and the Bible rule over us as a *mistress*, so was which can be historically proven being a lord and being a servant really the essence of all our activity, and only from this characteristic of the era does it become plain why they aspire so openly toward a “higher education” and were so intent upon distinguishing themselves by that means before the common people. With education, its possessor became a master of the uneducated. A popular education would have opposed this because the people were supposed to remain in the laity opposite the *learned gentlemen*, were only supposed to gaze

in astonishment at the strange splendor and venerate it. Thus *Romanism* continued in learning and its supporters are Latin and Greek. Furthermore, it was inevitable that this education remained through-out a *formal* education, as much on this account because of the antiquity long dead and buried, only the forms, as it were, the schemes of literature and art were preserved, as for the particular reason that domination over people will simply be acquired and asserted through formal superiority; it requires only a certain degree of intellectual agility to gain superiority over the less agile people. So called higher education was therefore an *elegant* education, a *sensus omnis elegantiae*, an education of taste and a sense of forms which finally threatened to sink completely into a grammatical education and perfumed the German language itself with the smell of Latium so much that even today one has an opportunity to admire the most beautiful Latin sentence structures, for example, in the just published *History of the Brandenburg-Prussian States. A Book for Everyone*.<sup>3</sup>

In the meantime, a spirit of opposition gradually arose out of the Enlightenment against this formalism and the demand for an all-encompassing, a truly human education allied itself with the recognition of the secure and universal rights of man. The lack of solid instruction which would interact with life was illuminated by the manner in which the Humanists had proceeded up to that time and generated the demand for a practical finishing education. Henceforth, all knowledge was to be life, knowledge being lived; for only the reality of knowledge is its perfection. If bringing the material of life into the school succeeded in offering thereby something useful to everyone, and for that very reason to win everyone over for this preparation for life and to turn them towards school, then one would not envy the learned *gentlemen* anymore for their *singular* knowledge and the people would no longer remain of the laity. To eliminate the priesthood of the scholars and the laity of the people is the endeavor of realism and therefore it must surpass humanism. Appropriating the classical forms of antiquity began to be restrained and with it the *sovereign-authority* lost its nimbus. The time struggled against the traditional *respect* for scholarship as it generally rebels against any respect.

The *essential* advantage of scholars, *universal education*, should be beneficial to everyone. However, one asks, what is universal education other than the capacity, trivially expressed, “to be able to talk about everything,” or more seriously expressed, the capacity to master any material? School was seen to be left behind by life since it not only withdrew from the people but even neglected universal education with its students in favor of exclusive education, and it failed to urge mastery in school of a great deal of material which is thrust upon us by life. School, one thought, indeed has to outline our reconciliation with everything life offers and to care for it so that none of the things with which we must some day concern ourselves will be completely alien to us and beyond our power to master. Therefore familiarity with the things and situations of the present was sought most vigorously and a pedagogy was brought into fashion which must find application to everyone because it satisfied the common need of everyone to find themselves in their world and time. The basic principles of human rights in this way gained life and reality in educational spheres: *equality*, because that education embraced everyone, and *freedom*, because one became conversant with one’s needs and consequently independent and autonomous.

However, to grasp the past as humanism teaches and to seize the present, which is the aim of realism, leads both only to power over the *transitory*. Only the spirit which understands *itself* is *eternal*. Therefore, equality and freedom received only a subordinate existence. One could indeed

---

<sup>3</sup>*Geschichte des brandenburgisch-preussischen Staates. Ein Buch für Jedermann* was published in 1842. The author, A. Zimmermann, is a very elusive figure, and virtually nothing is known of him even today. At one time he was confused erroneously with Wilhelm Zimmermann (1807–1878), a prolific writer of popularly written histories, many of which appeared in the decades of the 1840s and 1850s.

become equal to others and emancipated from their authority; from the *equality with oneself*, from the equalization and reconciliation of our transient and eternal man, from the transfiguration of our naturalness to spirituality, in short, from the unity and supreme power of our ego, which is enough for itself since it leaves nothing alien standing outside of itself : Hardly any idea of it was to be recognized in that principle. And *freedom* appeared indeed as independence from authorities, however, it lacked self-determination and still produced none of the acts of a man who is *free-in-himself*, self-revelations of an *inconsiderate*<sup>4</sup> man, that is, of one of those minds saved from the fluctuating of contemplation. The *formally* educated man certainly was not to stand out above the mirror of the ocean of universal education anymore, and he transformed himself from a “highly educated man” into a “one-sided educated man” (as such he naturally maintains his uncontested worth, since all universal education is intended to radiate into the most varied single-mindednesses of special education); but the man educated in the sense of realism did not surpass the equality with others and the freedom from others, neither did he come out ahead of the so-called *practical man*. Certainly the empty elegance of the humanist, of the dandy, could not help but decline; but the victor glistened with the verdigris of materiality and was nothing better than a tasteless materialist.<sup>5</sup> *Dandyism* and *materialism* struggle for the prize of the dear boys and girls and often seductively exchange armor in that the Dandy appears in coarse cynicism and the materialist appears in white linen. To be sure, the living wood of the materialist clubs will smash the dry staff of the marrowless Dandy; but living, or dead, wood remains wood, and if the flame of the spirit is to burn, the wood must go up in fire.

Why, in the meantime, must realism also, if (not denying it the capacity) it assimilates the good aspects of humanism, nevertheless perish?

Certainly it can assimilate the inalienable and true of humanism, formal education, and this assimilation is made ever easier through the scientific method which has become possible and through the sensible treatment of all objects of instruction (I draw attention by way of example only to Becker’s<sup>6</sup> rendering of German Grammar) and can through this refinement push its opponent from its strong position. Since realism as well as humanism proceeds from the idea that the aim of education is to produce *versatility* for man and since both agree, for example, that one must be accustomed to every *turn* of idiomatic expression, must mathematically enjoin the *turn* of the proof, etc., so that one has to struggle towards mastery in handling the material, towards its mastery: thus it will certainly not fail that even realism will finally recognize the *formation of taste* as the final goal and put the act of *forming* in first place, as is already partly the case. For in education, all of the material given has value only in so far as children learn *to do* something with it, to *use* it. Certainly only the practical and the useful should be stressed, as the realists desire; but the benefit is really only to be sought in forming, in generalizing, in presenting, and one will not be able to reject this humanistic claim. The humanists are right in that it depends above all on formal education — they are wrong, in that they do not find this in the mastery of every subject; the realists demand the right thing in that every subject must be begun in school, they demand the wrong thing then when they do not want to look upon

---

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Ger. *rücksichtslosen*, used in a special sense here, as the opposite of contemplative, not boorish or thoughtless.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Ger. *Industrieller*. From the context there is no evidence that Stirner’s critique is being directed to what we would call industrialists or manufacturers today. Perhaps the closest we can come to his thinking here would be the term of Albert Jay Nock, “economism”, as a description of a life devoted almost exclusively to the production and consumption of goods for the sake of producing and consuming, instead of for their discriminating enjoyment.

<sup>6</sup>Karl Ferdinand Becker (1775–1849), famous German grammarian, student of the logic of German speech, innovator in fields of syntax and style. His *Deutsche Grammatik* was published in 1829, his *Organismus der deutschen Sprache* was in a second edition in 1841.

formal education as the principal goal. If it exercises real self-abnegation and does not give itself over to materialistic enticements, realism can come to this victory over its adversary and at the same time come to a reconciliation with him. Why do we nevertheless now show enmity to it?

Does it then really throw off the husk of the old principle and does it stand on the ramparts of the time? In that respect everything must be judged, whether it admits the idea which time has achieved as its most valuable or whether it takes a stationary place behind it. That indelible fear which causes the realists to shrink back in horror from abstractions and speculations must surprise and I will therefore now set down here a few selections from Heinsius who yields nothing to the unbending realists upon this point and saves me quotations from them which would be easy to cite. On page 9 it says:

“In the higher institutions of learning one hears about philosophical systems of the Greeks, of Aristotle and Plato, also, no doubt, of the moderns, of Kant, that he has put away the ideas of God, freedom, immortality, as unprovable; of Fichte, that he has set moral world order in place of the personal God; of Schelling,<sup>7</sup> Hegel, Herbart,<sup>8</sup> Krause,<sup>9</sup> and whomsoever may be called discoverers and heralds of supernatural wisdom. What, they say, should we, should the German nation set about to do with idealistic enthusiasms which belongs to neither the empirical and positive sciences nor to practical life and which do not benefit the state which, with an obscure perception which only confuses the spirit of the time, leads to disbelief and atheism, divides the minds, chases the students themselves away from the professorial chairs of the apostles, and even obscures our national tongue in that it transforms the clearest conceptions of common sense into mystical enigmas? Is that the wisdom that should educate our youth to be moral, good people, thinking, reasonable beings, true citizens, useful and able workers in their professions, loving spouses and provident fathers for the establishment of domestic well-being?”

And on page 45:

“Let us look at philosophy and theology, which, as sciences of thinking and faith are put in first place for the welfare of the world; what have they become through their mutual friction since Leibniz broke the path to them? The dualism, materialism, idealism, supernaturalism, rationalism, mysticism, and whatever all the abtruse-isms of exaggerated speculations and feelings may be called: what kind of blessings have they brought the state, the church, the arts, the national culture? Thought and knowledge have certainly expanded in their sphere; however, has the former become clearer and the latter more certain? Religion, as a dogma, is purer, but subjective belief is more confused, weakened, lacking supporters, shaken by criticism and interpretation, or transformed into fanaticism and a hypocritical appearance of holiness, and the church? oh, its life is schism or death. It it not so?”

---

<sup>7</sup>Friedrich Wilhelm Josef von Schelling (1775–1854), a major figure in German philosophy, but also a philologist of substance.

<sup>8</sup>Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776–1841), German philosopher and critic of philosophers and philosophy, a disciple of Wolf and Kant and later a critic of Kant and Hegel. At one time a professor at Jena and later at Königsberg and Göttingen, his books, which included several works on pedagogy and educational theory, were well known in Germany.

<sup>9</sup>Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781–1832), prolific writer in the field of philosophy, and especially on the subject of theories of learning. He was the author of nearly twenty-five books and many smaller pieces, a number of which were published posthumously.

For what reason then do the realists show themselves so unfriendly toward philosophy? Because they misunderstand their own calling and with all their might want to remain restricted instead of becoming unrestricted! Why do they hate abstractions? Because they themselves are abstract since they abstract from the perfection of themselves, from the elevation to redeeming truth!

Do we want to put pedagogy into the hands of the philosophers? Nothing less than that! They would behave themselves awkwardly enough. It shall be entrusted only to those who are more than philosophers, who in that respect are infinitely more even than humanists or realists. The latter are on the right scent in that even the resurrection will follow their decline: they abstract from philosophy in order to reach their heaven full of purpose without it, they leap over it, and fall in the abyss of their own emptiness; they are, like the eternal Jew, *immortal*, not *eternal*.

Only the philosophers can die and find in death their true self; with them the period of reformation, the era of knowledge dies. *Yes, so it is that knowledge itself must die in order to blossom forth again in death as will*; the freedom of thought, belief, and conscience, these wonderful flowers of three centuries will sink back into the lap of mother earth so that a new freedom, the freedom of will, will be nourished with its most noble juices. Knowledge and its freedom were the ideal of that time which has finally been reached on the heights of philosophy: here the hero will build himself a pyre and will rescue his eternal part in Mount Olympus. With philosophy, our past closes and the philosophers are the Raphaels of the era of thought with which the old principle perfects itself in a bright splendor of colors and through rejuvenation is changed from transient to eternal. Henceforth, whoever wants to preserve knowledge will lose it; he, however, who gives it up will gain it. [*Compare with Matt. 10;39 and Luke 17;33*] The philosophers alone are called to this giving-up and to this gain: they stand in front of the flaming fire and, like the dying hero, must burn their mortal body if the immortal spirit is to be free.

As much as possible it must be more intelligibly stated. Therein indeed lies the ever recurring mistake of our day, that knowledge is not brought to completion and perspicuity, that it remains a material and formal, a positive thing, without rising to the absolute, that it loads us down like a burden. Like the ancients, one must wish for forgetfulness, must drink from the blessed Lethe: otherwise one does not come to ones senses. Everything great must know how to die and transfigure itself through its death; only the miserable accumulates like the frozen-limbed supreme court,<sup>10</sup> heaps documents upon documents, and plays for the millenia in delicate porcelain figures, like the immortal childishness of the Chinese. Proper knowledge perfects itself when it stops being knowledge and becomes a simple human drive once again, the will. So, for example, he who has deliberated for many years about his “calling as a human being,” will sink all care and pilgrimage of seeking in one moment in the Lethe of a simple feeling, of a drive which from that hour in which he has found the former gradually leads him. The “calling of man” which he was tracking down on a thousand paths and byways of research bursts as soon as it has been recognized into the flame of ethical will and inflames the breast of the person who is not distracted any longer with seeking but has again become fresh and *natural*.

Up, bathe, pupil unweariedly,  
Your earthly breast in the redness of dawn.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup>A reference to the old supreme court of the Second German Empire, which by Stirner's time had been, for all practical purposes defunct for more than a century, but which continued its formal existence through lacking any means for enforcing its verdicts.

<sup>11</sup>From Goethe's *Faust*, a quotation which has been exceedingly familiar to generations of German students.

That is the end and at the same time the immortality, the eternity of knowledge: knowledge, which has become once again simple and direct, sets and reveals *itself* anew as will in a new form and in every action. *The will is not fundamentally right, as the practical ones would like very much to assure us; one may not pass over the desire for knowledge in order to stand immediately in the will, but knowledge perfects itself to will when it desensualizes itself and creates itself as a spirit “which builds its own body.”* Therefore adhere to any education which does not terminate in this death and this ascension of knowledge to heaven, the frailty of this earthly life, formality and materiality, dandyism, and materialism. A knowledge which does not refine and concentrate itself so that it is carried away by will, or, in other words, a knowledge which only burdens me as a belonging and possession, instead of having gone along with me completely so that the free-moving ego, not encumbered by any dragging possessions, passes through the world with a fresh spirit, such a knowledge then, which has not become *personal*, furnishes a poor preparation for life. One does not want to let it come to the abstraction in which the true consecration of all concrete knowledge is first imparted: *for through it, the material will really be killed and transformed into spirit; however, to man is given the actual and last liberation. Only in abstraction is freedom:* the free man is only he who has won over the bestowal and has taken together again into the unity of his ego that which has been questioningly enticed from himself.

If it is the drive of our time, after *freedom of thought* is won, to pursue it to that perfection through which it changes to *freedom of the will* in order to realize the latter as the principle of a new era, then the final goal of education can no longer be *knowledge*, but the will born out of knowledge, and the spoken expression of that for which it has to strive is: the personal or *free man*. Truth itself consists in nothing other than man’s revelation of himself, and thereto belongs the discovery of himself, the liberation from all that is alien, the uttermost abstraction or release from all authority, the re-won naturalness. Such thoroughly true men are not supplied by school; if they are nevertheless there, they are there in spite of school. This indeed makes us masters of things at the most, also, masters of our nature; it does not make us into free natures. No knowledge, however thorough and extensive, no brilliance and perspicuity, no dialectic sophistication, will preserve us from the commonness of thought and will. It is truly not the merit of the school if we do not come out selfish. Each sort of corresponding pride and every wind of covetousness, eagerness for office, mechanical and servile officiousness, hypocrisy, etc., is bound as much with extensive knowledge as with elegant, classical education, and since this whole instruction exercises no influence of any sort on our ethical behavior, it thus frequently falls to the fate of being forgotten in the same measure as it is not *used*: one shakes off the dust of the school.

And all of this because education is sought only in its formal or material aspects, at the most, in both; not in truth, in the education of the *true* man. The realists do indeed make progress when they demand that the student should find and understand that which he learns: Diesterweg,<sup>12</sup> for example, knows how to talk a great deal about the “Principle of experience”; but the object is not the truth, even here, but rather some sort of positive thing (as which religion must also be considered), to which the student is led to bring into agreement and coherence with the sum of his other positive knowledge without raising it at all above the crude state of experience and contemplation, and without any incentive to

---

<sup>12</sup>Friedrich Adolf Wilhelm Diesterweg (1790–1863), formidable German philologist and educational critic, director of the teachers college in Berlin in 1832. He staged a fierce attack on control of education by State and Church, and as a supporter of a program for centering education around the child he was widely referred to as an emulator and continuator of the Swiss educational reformer Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827). Diesterweg, the editor of two educational journals of considerable importance, was forced to retire in 1850 after years of bitter attacks. As in the case of Professor Krug, he was highly regarded in France.

work further with the *mind* which he has gained by contemplation and out of it to produce, that is, to be speculative, which from a practical standpoint implies as much as to be moral and to behave morally. On the contrary, to educate rational people, that should be sufficient; it is not really intended for *sensible* people; to understand things and conditions, there the matter is ended, to *understand oneself* does not seem to be everyman's concern. Thus sense is promoted for the positive whether it be according to its formal side or at the same time according to its material side, and teaches: to reconcile oneself to the positive. In the pedagogical as in certain other spheres freedom is not allowed to erupt, the power of the *opposition* is not allowed to put a word in edgewise: they want *submissiveness*. Only a formal and material training is being aimed at and only scholars come out of the menageries of the humanists, only "useful citizens" out of those of the realists, both of whom are indeed nothing but *subservient* people.

Our good background of recalcitrancy gets strongly suppressed and with it the development of knowledge to free will. The result of school life then is philistinism. Just as we found our way into and permeated everything with which we were confronted during our childhood, so we discover and conduct ourselves in later years, resign ourselves to the times, become its servants and so-called good citizens. Where then will a spirit of opposition be strengthened in place of the subservience which has been cultivated until now, where will a creative person be educated instead of a learning one, where does the teacher turn into a fellow worker, where does he recognize knowledge as turning into will, where does the free man count as a goal and not the merely educated one? Unfortunately, only in a few places yet. The insight must become more universal, not so that education, civilization, the highest task of man is decided, but rather self-application. Will education be neglected for that reason? Just as little as we are disposed to suffer loss of freedom of thought while we change it into freedom of will and glorify it. If man puts his honor first in relying upon himself, knowing himself and applying himself, thus in self-reliance, self-assertion, and freedom, he then strives to rid himself of the ignorance which makes out of the strange impenetrable object a barrier and hindrance to his self-knowledge. If one awakens in men the idea of freedom then the free men will incessantly go on to free themselves; if, on the contrary, one only *educates* them, then they will at all times accommodate themselves to circumstances in the *most highly educated and elegant manner* and degenerate into subservient cringing souls. What are our gifted and educated subjects for the most part? Scornful, smiling slave-owners and themselves slaves.

The realists may glory in their advantage that they do not simply educate scholars, but rational and useful citizens: indeed, their basic principle: "one teaches everything in relation to practical life," could even be valid as the motto of our time if they only would not interpret the true practice in a common sense. The true practice is not that of making one's way through life, and knowledge is worth more than that one might use it up and thereby secure one's practical goals. Moreover, the highest practice is that a free man reveal himself, and knowledge that knows to die is the freedom which offers life. "The practical life!" With that, one thinks one has said a great deal, and, still, even the animals lead a thoroughly practical life and as soon as the mother has finished her theoretical weaning period, they either seek their food in field and forest as they please or they are harnessed up with a yoke for service. Scheitlin<sup>13</sup> with his science of animal souls would take the comparison even much further, into religion, as is clear from his *Science of Animal Souls*, a book which for just that reason is very instructive because it places the *animal* so close to civilized man and *civilized man* so close to the animal. That intention "to educate for practical life" only brings forth *people of principles* who act and

---

<sup>13</sup> *Versuch einer vollständigen Thierseelenkunde* by Peter Scheitlin was published in Stuttgart and Tübingen in 1840.



think according to *maxims*, but no *principled* men; *legal* minds, not *free* ones. Quite another thing are people whose totality of thought and action swings in continuous movement and rejuvenation and quite another thing are such people who are *true* to their convictions: the convictions themselves remain unshaken, do not pulse as continually renewed arterial blood through the heart, but freeze, as it were, as solid bodies and even if won and not hammered into the head are certainly something positive and what is more, count as something holy.

A realistic education, therefore, may well produce strong, diligent and healthy individuals, unshakable men, true hearts; and that is indeed a priceless gain for our fair sex; but the *eternal* characters in whom constance only consists in the unremitting floods of their hourly self-creation and who are therefore eternal because they form themselves each moment, because they set the temporal concerns of their actual appearance out of the never-withering or aging freshness and creative activity of their eternal spirit they do not result from that education. The so-called sound character is even in the best instance only a rigid one. If it is to be a perfect one then it must become at the same time a *suffering one*, quivering and trembling in the blessed *passion* of an unceasing rejuvenation and rebirth.

Thus the radii of all education run together into one center which is called *personality*. Knowledge, as scholarly and profound or as wide and comprehensible as it may be, remains indeed only a possession and belonging so long as it has not vanished in the invisible point of the ego, from there to break forth all-powerfully as will, as supersensual and incomprehensible spirit. Knowledge experiences this transformation then, when it ceases clinging only to objects, when it has become knowledge itself or, in case this seems clearer, when it has become knowledge of the idea, a self-awareness of the mind. Then it turns itself, so to speak, into the drive, the instinct of the mind, into a *subconscious knowledge* which everyone can at least imagine if he compares it with how so many and comprehensive experiences of his own self become sublimated into the simple feeling which one calls *tact*: everything of diffuse knowledge which is pulled out of those experiences is concentrated into *immediate* knowledge whereby he determines his actions in an instant. Knowledge, however, must penetrate through to this immateriality while it sacrifices its mortal parts and, as immortal becomes will.

The difficulty in our education up till now lies, for the most part, in the fact that knowledge did not refine itself into will, to application of itself, to pure practice. The realists felt the need and supplied it, though in a most miserable way, by cultivating idea-less and fettered "practical men." Most college students are living examples of this sad turn of events. Trained in the most excellent manner, they go on training; drilled, they continue drilling. Every education, however, must be *personal* and stemming from knowledge, it must continuously keep the essence of knowledge in mind, namely this, that it must never be a possession, but rather the ego itself. In a word, it is not knowledge that should be taught, rather, the individual should come to self-development; pedagogy should not proceed any further towards civilizing, but toward the development of free men, sovereign characters; and therefore, the will which up to this time has been so strongly suppressed, may no longer be weakened. Do they not indeed weaken the will to knowledge, then why weaken the will to will? After all, we do not hinder man's quest for knowledge; why should we intimidate his free will? If we nurture the former, we should nurture the latter as well.

Childlike obstinacy and intractability have as much right as childlike curiosity. The latter is being stimulated; so one shall also call forth the natural strength of the will, *opposition*. If a child does not learn self-awareness, then he plainly does not learn that which is most important. They do not suppress his pride or his frankness. My own freedom is safe from his wild spirits. If pride turns into spite, then the child approaches me with violence; I do not have to endure this since I am just as free as the child. Must I however defend myself against him by using the convenient rampart of authority?

No, I oppose him with the strength of my own freedom; thus the spite of the child will break up by itself. Whoever is a complete person does not need to be an authority. And if frankness breaks out into insolence, then this loses its vigor in the tender strength of a true wife in her motherliness or in the firmness of the husband; he is very weak who must call to authority for help and he does wrong if he thinks to improve the impudent as soon as he makes him fearful. To promote fear and respect; those are things that belong with the period of the dead rococo.

What do we complain about then when we take a look at the shortcomings of our school education of today? About the fact that our schools still stand on the old principle, that of *will-less knowledge*. The new principle is that of the will as glorification of knowledge. Therefore no “Concordat between school and life,” but rather school is to be life and there, as outside of it, the self-revelation of the individual is to be the task. The universal education of school is to be an education for freedom, not for subservience: to be free, that is true *life*. The insight into the lifelessness of humanism should have forced realism to this knowledge. Meanwhile, one became aware in humanistic education only of the lack of any capacity for so-called practical (bourgeois not personal) life and turned in opposition against that simply formal education to a material education, in the belief that by communicating that material which is useful in social intercourse one would not only surpass formalism, but would even satisfy the highest requirement. But even practical education still stands far behind the personal and free, and gives the former the skill to fight through life, thus the latter provides the strength to strike the spark of life out of oneself; if the former prepares to find oneself at home in a given world, so the latter teaches to be at home with oneself. We are not yet everything when we move as useful members of society; we are much more able to perfect this only if we are free people, self-creating (creating ourselves) people.

Now if the idea and impulse of modern times is *free will*, then pedagogy must hover in front as the beginning and the aim of the education of the *free personality*. Humanists, like realists, still limit themselves to knowledge, and at most, they look to free thought and make us into *free thinkers* by theoretical liberation. Through knowledge, however, we become only *internally* free, (a freedom moreover, that is never again to be given up); outwardly, with all freedom of conscience and freedom of thought, we can remain slaves and remain in subjection. And indeed, *external* freedom is for knowledge just that which the inner and true, the moral freedom, is for the will.

In this universal education, therefore, because the lowest and highest meet together in it, we come upon the true equality of all for the first time, the *equality of free people*: only freedom is equality.

One can, if one wants a name, place the *moralists* above the humanists and realists since their final goal is moral education. Then, to be sure, the protest comes immediately that again they will want to educate us to adhere to positive laws of morality and basically, that this has already taken place up to the present time. Because it has already happened up to now, therefore I am not of that opinion, and that I want the strength of opposition to be awakened and the self-will not to be broken, but rather to be transformed, that could clarify the difference sufficiently. In order still to differentiate the claim which is set forth here from the best efforts of the realists, such a one, for example, as is expressed in the recently published program of Diesterweg on page 36: “In the lack of education for character lies the weakness of our schools, like the weakness of our overall education. We do not inculcate any convictions,” I rather say, we need from now on a personal education (not the impressing of convictions). If one wants to call again those who follow this principle -ists, then, in my opinion, one may call them *personalists*.

Therefore, to go back to Heinsius once again, the “vigorous desire of the nation, that the school might be more closely allied with life” will only be fulfilled if one finds real life in full personality,

independence and freedom, since whoever strives toward this goal relinquishes nothing of the good of humanism nor of realism, but rather raises them both infinitely higher and ennobles them. Even the *national* point of view which Heinsius takes still cannot be praised as the right one, since that is only the *personal* one. Only the free and personal man is a good citizen (realist), and even with the lack of particular (scholarly, artistic, etc) culture, a tasteful judge (humanist).

If my conclusion is to express in a few words which goal our time has to steer toward, then the necessary decline of non-voluntary learning and rise of the self-assured will which perfects itself in the glorious sunlight of the free person may be expressed somewhat as follows: *knowledge* must die and rise again as *will* and create itself anew each day as a free *person*.

The Anarchist Library  
Anti-Copyright



Max Stirner  
The False Principle of Our Education  
or, Humanism and Realism

Retrieved on February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2009 from [www.nonserviam.com](http://www.nonserviam.com)  
The assistance of Hans G. Helms in the resolution of difficult and obscure passages and terminology  
in this translation is gratefully acknowledged. (Translator's note)

[theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)