

EDUCATION IN A FREE SOCIETY.
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Reviewed by ART DIAMOND, JR.

The Indianapolis-based Liberty Fund is one of the lesser known organizations working for a libertarian society. Its low profile is due largely to the Fund's underlying philosophy: it is just as important to seek new truths as it is to communicate the truths that are already understood. One way that the Fund has sought to implement this principle is by bringing together libertarian and conservative intellectuals in order to engage in thoughtful Socratic discussions on topics concerned with the institutions underlying the free society. For example, a recent conference considered the importance of gold in a free-enterprise economy. An earlier seminar, held in 1971, has resulted in the publication by the Fund of a book entitled *Education in a Free Society*.

The book consists of a summary of the seminar's proceedings, a position paper by B. A. Rogge and Pierre Goodrich, additional papers by Gottfried Dietze, Russell Kirk, Henry G. Manne and Stephen Tonsor, and finally an article by Dorothy Sayers on "The Lost Tools of Learning." The essays can be roughly divided into two groups—those committed primarily to the free market in education (the libertarian position) and those committed primarily to the preservation of the university as an essentially medieval institution even at the price of intervention in free market processes (the conservative position). In addition to advocating the conservative position the essays of Dietze, Kirk and Tonsor seem somewhat outdated in their emphasis on physical violence to person and property as the most important threat to good education. In these quieter times, the essays that will prove most valuable to libertarians are "Education in a Free Society" by Rogge and Goodrich, and "The Political Economy of Modern Universities" by Henry Manne.

ROGGE AND GOODRICH

Rogge and Goodrich's paper displays the seldom found virtue of making explicit several of the authors' most important assumptions and definitions. For example, they emphasize that they do not desire to remake Man (a task that they believe is futile because of Man's irremediably imperfect nature) but rather to restructure

certain human institutions in order to allow imperfect Man to achieve as much as he or she is able. The institution with which they concern themselves in their paper is higher education.

The section of the paper on "The Purposes of Education" is valuable largely because in it the authors recognize the danger involved in any attempt to define the purposes of education. That danger lies in assuming that there is only one set of valid purposes. For Rogge and Goodrich the purposes to be served are not those certified as valid by some education "expert" but rather the purposes brought to the educational marketplace by those who believe that they have some interests to be served there. Thus while the defender of the market does not take a position on *what* purposes should be served, he does have an answer to the question of *whose* purposes should be served. The answer is that whoever pays the bill has a right to determine the purposes for which his money will be spent. Parents may decide to delegate some of the purpose-determining responsibility to their financially dependent children, but the extent of that delegation must, according to the authors, be determined by the parents, not by the children or the state.

In their consideration of "The Economics of Education" the authors persuasively argue against wide-spread, below-cost pricing of educational services. Their case involves a reasoned rejection of the "equal opportunity" argument, an analysis of the harmful effects of below-cost pricing on the process of weeding out inefficient educational organizations, and the observation that for students "willingness to pay the price is one measure of strength of motive; when the price is zero, the motive is often its equal."

In the final section of their paper Rogge and Goodrich outline the characteristics that would be possessed by "The Ideal College." Unlike some of the other contributors to this book, they make it clear that if there were not sufficient consumer support for their ideal they would not advocate coercive means to maintain its existence. Their ideal would be a liberal arts college staffed mainly by limited-government libertarians whose salary and length of employment would be determined by their ability to attract students to their seminars and lectures. The educational process would involve extensive reading followed by Socratic discussions of the material and finally by lectures. No diplomas or degrees would be awarded since "the college would exist to serve students truly seeking knowledge, not those seeking only a degree or other meaningless relics from the current system."

MANNE

The other paper written from a clearly libertarian perspective is Henry Manne's "The Political Economy of Modern Universities." Manne's objective in the paper is to consider the past origins, current effects and future alternatives of nonprofit educational organization. Manne notes that the early nonprofit colleges in America were founded largely with the object of inculcating or reinforcing religious and moral precepts in their students. The nonprofit form of organization was appropriate since the interests being served were not so much those of the students as they were those of the contributors who "purchased" their own utility in the form of religious training for their and others' children."

In the late 1800's with the expansion of state universities and the increased demand for advanced vocational training, the ends of donors were no longer seen as the prime rationale of the University. However, even though education had become "consumer-oriented" in theory, in practice the anachronistic nonprofit mode of organization prevented it from identifying and meeting the needs of the students. According to Manne the result has been to leave the University without effective direction. The real power has moved from the Board of Trustees to the Faculty whose internecine battles create an environment where those who survive are characterized by "a low level of innovation and, by indirection, strong aversion to risk." According to Manne: "There is no reason to believe that people with these characteristics will not reflect them in their doctrinal views. In other words, it would be highly surprising for a large population that has established its suitability for a bureaucratic, nonprofit-oriented, political environment to advocate market solutions to any problem."

Manne's main alternative to the present situation consists of giving ownership in the University to the Faculty (who are the de facto owners already) and ending all government subsidies. This would eliminate below-cost financing and make educational institutions more competitive in meeting the needs of students. Education would thus, at last, become *truly* consumer-oriented.

Predictably, the seminar participants' discussion of the papers seems to have produced no new ideas, but perhaps it did succeed in clarifying the positions of the participants and in isolating disagreements. One of the most revealing exchanges occurred over the hypothetical question of what would be done if the free market should fail to provide "adequate" support for education. The clash revealed the pri-

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mary commitment of the participants—separating those for whom freedom is a primary value from those for whom it is of secondary importance. The individual whose primary commitment is to certain concrete results (e.g., an “adequate” educational system) can, at most, give only tentative and conditional support to the free market. If such an individual is conscientious he will always be re-evaluating the evidence on whether the free market can and will deliver the desired results. If he concludes that it will not consistency forces him to propose, albeit reluctantly, an intervention into the market in the manner of Milton Friedman’s negative income tax. Thus only the individual whose *primary* commitment is to freedom can safely guarantee himself and others that he will never advocate state intervention.

Education in a Free Society should be of value to all those concerned with restoring freedom to the most important unfree institution in our society. In the concluding essay of this volume Dorothy Sayers correctly suggests that all of us are qualified to discuss education if only because we have suffered through 12 or more years of it. From that experience most of us would no doubt agree with Rogge and Goodrich’s conclusion that: “tax-supported education tends to make of our schools and colleges a collection of nonstudents under the tutelage of non-teachers and the administration of the incompetent.”

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