

## PLATO AND RUSSELL: ON EDUCATION (AN APPRAISAL)

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**Abstract.** The difference between animals and human beings is that the former are ruled by instinct and they learn mostly through experience, they cannot be taught but they can be tamed to perform certain acts but the latter are born as vicegerent of God on earth or if anyone who does not accept this religious view the one would accept that human beings are born and form society so to live in a society human beings have to learn the ways, methods and etiquettes along-with moral obligations and duties as well as to earn his livelihood. This process might be conscious or unconscious, formal or informal but it is understood fact that human beings need certain types of training and education. That is why philosophers and thinkers have always tried to present theories of education for the benefit of humanity. Here the two philosophers views (Plato from ancient times and Bertrand Russell from the present times) regarding education are being presented to provide the reader a brief introduction, development, history, objective and theories of education.

**Key Words:** Education, Aims, Methods, Indoctrination, Sophists, Socrates, Child psychology, Virtues, Character Building.

“Education”<sup>1</sup> the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction especially at school or university”<sup>2</sup> or “A body of knowledge acquired while being educated”.<sup>3</sup>

These two definitions of education describe a vague explanation of a lengthy learning process which starts from “The Cradle to the grave”,<sup>4</sup> so we need more clarification of the definition e.g. “the process of initial clarification, as of a phenomenon, text, or argument, that normally takes place prior to logical analysis”<sup>5</sup>.

The word Education has two aspects viz. narrow and broad. According to the former it means the “special influences organized and devised by teachers in schools”,<sup>6</sup> to impart ideas, information, knowledge and also training to A formal students; while in the latter sense it embraces all the influences which effects every person mentally, physically with all aspects of life continuously. According to B. Russell it is the “building up of character”.<sup>7</sup> This process of “bringing” includes the development of innate or inherent potentialities of a person.

No doubt formal and systematic education is a step by step process taking place at institutions but it surely does not end there. Society and life experiences also contribute this greatly though consciously or unconsciously. Institutions came into existence much later when perhaps alphabets were invented and knowledge widened so the acquisition of certain type of knowledge which naturally divided the masses into the

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<sup>1</sup> Etymology: L. '*educatio*', 'To Bring Up'

<sup>2</sup> Klein, ed. *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*. New York: Elsevier Publishing Co., 1969.

<sup>3</sup> Pearsall, J., ed. *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*. Oxford: Oxford: Clarendon Press., 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Famous Hadith

<sup>5</sup> Audi, Robert, ed. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> Hughes, E. H. *Education: Some Fundamental Problems*. London: Longman, Green and Co Ltd, 1963.

<sup>7</sup> Russell, Bertrand. *Bertrand Russell On Education*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1976.

master and disciple on the one hand and the especial type of acquisition of knowledge made the syllabi or curriculum.

We can trace such formal educational institution in ancient Egypt, China, India etc. but their approach was mystic or occult and was not rational in the spirit which is seen in the Greece. Among them the Pythagoreans were the first who observe strict formal rules, discipline and teaching curriculum (though tinged with mystic and religious elements) and latter the Sophist who started teaching keeping in mind their own objectives but no doubt they flourish rational free thought and made teaching an institution. Before them there were individual philosopher who disseminated their thoughts to people but they did not establish any formal institutions like the two groups e.g. the Pythagoreans and the Sophist. (surprising fact is that both the terms assigned to two groups not for two persons). The objective of the Pythagorean education was religio-political for that they, for a short period took rule of Crotona<sup>8</sup> but in the age of Sophist scenario changed and their objective of teaching was to prepare children to take part in politics and to educate them the art of rhetoric and dialectics so that they could participate in the city-state practical politics. They cultivated skepticism, doubt, art of criticism, dialectics and argumentation ignoring the right or wrong objectives. They were perhaps the first who took money for teaching the wisdom. Because they teach and “sell” dialectic and argumentation so that the people can express their claims in common life as well as in city state politics so they were considered first lawyers.<sup>9</sup> The age was full of skepticism, criticism and was marked by destruction of all values and standards resulted in the destruction of religion, criterion of morality, laws of state and institutions.<sup>10</sup>

In such a state of chaos, skepticism and faithlessness, it was Socrates who took the task of teaching masses, establishing standards, restoration of morality, rehabilitate the institutions for which he used the method of dialogue which was objective oriented. The Characteristics<sup>11</sup> of his method were Deductive, Inductive, Dialectic, Dialogue,

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<sup>8</sup> Stace, W.T. *A Critical History of Greek Philosophy*. New York: Macmillan & Co. Ltd, 1962.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Stace, W.T. *A Critical History of Greek Philosophy*. New York: Macmillan & Co. Ltd, 1962.

<sup>11</sup> Thilly, F. (1949). *A History of Philosophy*. Allahabad, India: Central Book Depot.

Discovering Concepts, Skepticism and cross-questioning. He also walked in the streets and asked questions to the common people and specially those who thought themselves as men of knowledge. He asked questions quite innocently and led the persons to the desired results. He was in fact a “waking-talking institution” seen everywhere in the streets, at crossroads educating the youth free of cost. He exposed those who consider themselves scholars and man of letters were only false suitors. They have no knowledge but only false claims and superficial information.

But Plato, instead of adopting his predecessor’s method of teaching in streets, established formal Academy and created a completely unique system of education comprising all aspects of life. He did not think it sufficient and made a hierarchy of educational system and examination and made not only the classes of population on the basis of education But also presented the theory of “The Wise/Philosopher King” who had gone through all the examinations of education including Gymnastic, Art, Tales, Music, Drama, Geometry, Mathematic, Sciences, Dialectics and Army training also. So, Plato was the first person in Greece who introduced a complete system of education and founded the state, population, ethics and defense on his system of education. He considered the state to be responsible to provide the education to all the people in the state. In his system there is no person who lives in state and in not a part of his education system. Education is not only compulsory but also all encompassing and unavoidable fact.

Plato expounded his theory of education in his magnum opus *The Republic*. The objective of this book is multi-dimensional nature but it is in fact a treatise on education which throws light on the teachings of different disciplines of education according to the age of children. This system includes education, indoctrination, training and practical knowledge with the objective to make a complete, beneficial and flawless society headed by a most wise man e.g. the philosopher king. According to the Platonic plan, the education starts from the birth of child or in fact the child birth is also planned due to selection of parents’ population which aimed at healthy progeny and this systematic education ended in the form of Philosopher king’s demise. This process “from the cradle to the grave” encompasses the following types of education and training.

He describes four cardinal virtues as the hallmark of Greek nation: Wisdom; Courage; Temperance or Self-Control and Justice and he wanted these virtues to be inculcated in the heart and soul of the Greek youth and this is the central point in his educational system.<sup>12</sup>

Plato as a metaphysical philosopher a an idealist is in search of Ideals in every field of life as well as above life, that is why he made two worlds viz. the world of ideas and the material world which is “shadow” of the above world. But he did not stop here, he wanted this “shadow-world” to be like the ideal-world and to gain his objective he wanted to teach and train the children from birth so he devised his educational system which aims at ideal stat headed by an fully trained ideal person: the philosopher king. The function of education there is to prepare the masses for the achievement of this purpose.<sup>13</sup>

The top priority in every society is considered to provide such circumstances in which its youth is going to be brought up so that the young can become a useful agent in the development of good and ideal society. There are the following steps which are most important in the process viz. care of the young and the provision of essential necessities, training and facilities to them along-with physical growth the mental development and socialization which gives identity to the young which gives them the sense to be a useful contributor to the society and sense to take responsibility to play relevant role properly. So to sum up Plato we find a complete system of education in the Republic.

But in fact the plans, objectives, process, continuous teaching and training, examinations, making of hierarchy of masses, types of knowledge and practice of arts, morality and establishing the monarchy under the headship of most learned “philosopher king” his education was for the “Leadership”<sup>14</sup> not for masses. His education is only or

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<sup>12</sup> Nettleship, R. L. *Lectures on the Republic of Plato*. New York : Macmillan & Co. Ltd. , 1964.

<sup>13</sup> Taneja, V. *Educational Thinkers*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1980.

<sup>14</sup> Mc Culloch, G. *Philosophers and Kings: Education for Leadership in Modern England*. Cambridge University Press, 1991.

being carefully professed, a type of indoctrination<sup>15</sup> (teaching a person or group to accept a set of beliefs uncritically) rather education. Though He placed every necessary aspect of life in his system but he missed the point that there is an element in human nature which latter term by Bergson *élan vital* ('vital impetus', which drives evolution on, though not towards any pre-ordained goal).<sup>16</sup> So this creative evolutionary element is missing in Plato's System. Everyone is bound in his system this was due to the fact his scheme may be called a "Doctrination" rather than Education.

In contrast to Plato, Bertrand Russell presents a more acceptable scheme of education in which children grow and use their creative latent potentialities. "On Education"<sup>17</sup> Russell clearly states that he wants to set forth the goals of education which could create such qualities in men and women which could make them excellent. He considers these four elements viz. Vitality, Courage, Sensitiveness and Intelligence the foundation of an ideal character<sup>18</sup> (Plato regarded as Wisdom; Courage; Temperance or Self-Control and Justice).<sup>19</sup> The first three ones deal with the development of character and are related to early childhood period in nursery level and at home while the last one takes place clearly after the age of six and continues.

Russell founded his theory of education on the basis of psychology especially on the Child psychology. According to him the first six years are most important in child's life. For the teaching of the children he considers two important things most important. First to create and develop curiosity in children which is essential for intellectual development. Second it is the duty of the teacher to provide the stimuli to the children which can awake curiosity in them and make them able

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<sup>15</sup> Pearsall, J., ed. *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*. Oxford: Oxford: Clarendon Press., 1998.

<sup>16</sup> *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. New York: Routledge, 1998.

<sup>17</sup> Park, J., ed. *Bertrand Russell On Education*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1963.

<sup>18</sup> Russell, Bertrand. *Bertrand Russell On Education*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1976.

<sup>19</sup> Nettleship, R. L. *Lectures on the Republic of Plato*. New York : Macmillan & Co. Ltd. , 1964.

to the level so that they can satisfy their curiosity. And in any case this curiosity must not be suppressed. Some other qualities are necessary in the pursuit of knowledge which are: Open mindedness, Patience, Concentration, Faith in Acquisition of Knowledge, Exactness and Perseverance.<sup>20</sup>

Russell like his earliest predecessor Plato has present a comprehensive structure and system of education. Both of them starts from early age and presented a hierarchy of exams, techniques, arts, fields of knowledge, age wise specialization of different fields of arts and knowledge. Plato's aim is to make a "wise and philosopher-king" to rule a society with justice and prudence but Russell's aim is to make useful learned society. Plato's education is indoctrination for leadership while Russell's education is learning process for good life.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Sharma, Y. K. *The Doctrines of the Great Western Educators (From Plato to Bertrand Russell)*. New Delhi: Kaniska Publishers, 2002.

<sup>21</sup> Park, J., ed. *Bertrand Russell On Education*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1963.

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