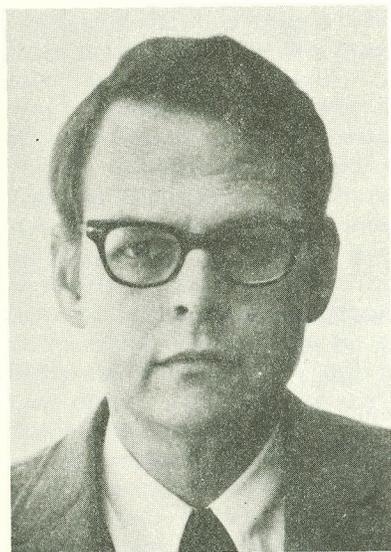


Is education structured only to manipulate the individual through an initiation rite into the acquisitive society asks Peden in an article adapted from a paper he gave at the World Congress of Philosophy in Delhi, India.

## Illich's omniscient individual: a process perspective

by Creighton Peden



An internationally known philosopher, Dr. Creighton Peden is the Fuller E. Callaway Professor of Philosophy at Augusta College of the university system of Georgia. Editor of the *Journal of Social Philosophy*, Peden is also co-chair of the Society for Social Philosophy, associate of the Institute for Social Philosophy, a Danforth associate, and founder and executive director of the Georgia Consortium for International Education. He has served as a curriculum consultant to the federal university system of Brazil, a panel consultant for the National Endowment for the Humanities and a Fulbright advisor. He received a Ph.D. from St. Andrews University in Scotland, his M.A. from the University of Chicago, and a B.A. from Davidson College.

Ivan Illich, self-proclaimed philosophical revolutionary, announces a philosophy of education which is supposed to provide an improved life-style for all persons as we move into the post-industrial world. It is his contention that the formal schooling systems of the industrial world have been used to condition persons to participate increasingly in an acquisitive society and that this increasing acquisitiveness will eventually bring about the destruction of humanity. We are all so bound up in acquiring goods and services that freedom of thought and expression has been sacrificed. He contends this to be true for the rich and poor of all nations, although it is supposed to be more degrading for the poor because their failure to consume confirms their human failure.

Illich's position is similar to that expressed by Herbert Marcuse in his contention that the technological based society tends to be totalitarian.<sup>1</sup> It is a form of non-terroristic totalitarianism in the sense that for the sake of technologically based economic rewards we are increasingly giving up our civil liberties. Computer efficiency becomes the criteria, so we conform to the instructions given even when these instructions require us to sacrifice in an increasing fashion our individual development and expression. This process may be physically enjoyable and materially rewarding, but the result is a form of totalitarianism because we are being forced to sacrifice our individual freedoms for the sake of a more affluent life-style.

What Illich, like Marcuse, seeks is a radically conservative restructuring of society. He offers a concept of a global village utopia in which individual initiative is the key factor determining the values of life. All formal education is to be destroyed, for this education is structured to manipulate the individual through an initiation rite into the acquisitive society. Without the formal educational structure, humans again will have to rely upon their own initiative. By participating in this fashion we will once again become responsible for the value decisions of ourselves and our society.

All peoples of the world, from the poor to the affluent, are forced to deal with problems, and societies are structured at least in part to deal with these problems. For our purpose it will be helpful to indicate the type society Illich envisages in order to evaluate how adequately his structure might deal with these problems. Illich's society will be socialist, but not socialism as we know it in either the more democratic or communistic tradition. In these forms of socialism you have bureaucratic control of the means of production and distribution. This bureaucratic power exists in the U.S., India, Russia, China, Brazil, Nigeria and in all societies acquisitively oriented. This

power needs equally to be destroyed because it greatly limits individual freedom. If we are going to understand Illich, we must grasp that he seeks a radical form of socialism which places the primary control and responsibility in the people.

Underlying Illich's educational and social philosophy is a particular theological view of the individual. In the classical tradition of western thought the individual was held responsible by the deity for fulfilling the revealed values. Such responsibility was held to be valid because the individual was considered as primarily autonomous in fulfilling these values. In the industrial society institutions have gained the power to establish values and reinforce these values through the rewarding of social status and consumable products. Whereas in the western classical tradition the Christian Church reinforced the values related to the deity, in the industrial society the educational system has replaced the Church and has become "the secular church" reinforcing the industrial values. The educational system is not only leading people in the wrong way, it is serving as the chief demonic force stripping humans of their individual autonomy and, thus, separating them from God. Illich's new life style will return initiative and accountability to the individual and, thus, restore the person in his proper relationship with the deity. In his words: "to liberate ourselves right now from our pedagogical hubris, or belief that man can do what God cannot, namely, manipulate others for their own salvation."<sup>2</sup>

### History and Philosophy

In evaluating Illich's philosophy, we suggest two lines of approach. First, taking a historical perspective, we raise the issue whether his position is realistic in our increasingly complex world. Second, we consider the underlying theological assumptions of his philosophy.

Illich assumes that the educational approach he condemns has been adequately tested and has failed. We would suggest that the historical evidence, using the United States as an example, does not support Illich's contention that education has been adequately tested. It is only since World War II that compulsory education has been widely tried in the United States; it is still not being fully employed. Although we have compulsory education as our goal, as high as 40% of the children in some urban areas today go without formal education by a process of reporting for the morning attendance check and then being allowed to leave. That in thirty years we have not been able to develop a non-wasteful and non-harmful educational system does not necessarily mean that we have failed; rather, it may well indicate that we have not devoted enough resources and energy in order to create a non-alienating initiation system into our acquisitive oriented society.

An important part of Illich's philosophy of education is his epistemology. For him the acquiring of knowledge is essentially an individual process which is basically non-social. Holding such a view it is understandable that he would consider the most valuable learning to occur apart from teaching. Following in the tradition of Aristotle, knowledge for Illich has as its highest goal contemplation and not social involvement. However, in his prophetic vision Francis Bacon indicated a new epistemological direction for humans because of the

cooperative and experimental method of science. It is because of our cooperatively organized intelligence that we have been able to move more in the direction of the subjugation of the energies of nature for the sake of dealing with human problems. One of the key institutions for the rapid advancements of these cooperative efforts has been structured education. In the societies that have made the greatest use of structured education based on the scientific method we find the strongest cooperative solutions to human problems. Illich is correct in contending that these educational approaches demonstrate many shortcomings. Chief among their limitations is the partial retention of the classical epistemology which focuses on knowledge being primarily individual as opposed to a stonger commitment to the social character of knowledge. This disjointed approach especially is fostered in the areas of the humanities and to a lesser degree the social sciences. We suggest that a more realistic approach for dealing with human problems includes a structured education methodologically supported by an understanding of the social character of knowledge.

### Omnicompetence

Illich's unrealistic alternative is based on what Walter Lippmann has called the idea of the "omnicompetent" individual. If individual initiative is asserted, all persons are potentially competent to know in all situations what is good and competent to enforce this knowledge of the good in order to deal with crucial social problems. We suggest that returning to a non-structured educational approach is inadequate because most individuals lack the required initiative, are not competent to know what is good and do not have the initiative or competence to implement the knowledge in terms of solving complex social problems, such as hunger, disease, pollution. Rather, we would contend that we can better deal with these problems by educating persons to be more responsible citizens who are sensitive to the humane needs of all persons, and by training specialists who can develop approaches for using our collective resources for dealing with these needs. A society based upon a non-structured educational approach totally dependent on pure individual initiative offers a romantic appeal, but the world in which we live requires cooperative structures and effort.

Our second evaluative approach attempts to focus upon Illich's underlying philosophical assumptions. He is calling for a revolution that will restore the God-human relationship and, thus, restore the integrity of the individual and the supporting village oriented society. His idea of revolution originated in Roman astronomy and was used metaphorically in the realm of politics. The term "revolution" indicated a recurring, cyclical movement. When used in politics it implied that there were a few forms of adequate governments to which society was drawn just as the planets followed their irresistible paths in the skies. Illich narrows the revolving form of government to one pattern in his traditional Christian perspective. This pattern is the preordained small society structure which gives emphasis to individual autonomy, an autonomy which allows the individual to be held responsible by the deity. As is often the case in western traditionally oriented thinkers, Illich universalizes in an absolute sense his revolving form of government.

He fails to take into account that just as the discoveries by Copernicus brought down the notion of a human-centered universe created by a deity, so the modern traditions of political revolution have invalidated his diety-established unitary form of social organization.

The modern age is essentially different from Illich's preordained classical world in that we approach reality in terms of things not being absolutely pre-established. In the physical sciences Einstein, Whitehead, Planck and others have introduced us to the realization that "novelty" is constantly occurring in the way reality is ordering itself. A similar understanding of social "novelty" is developed through the American and French Revolutions. It is true that the idealized notion of restoration of bygone days was often expressed by the 18th century activist, but Hannah Arendt is correct: "There is no period in history to which the Declaration of the Rights of Man could have harkened back . . . the strange pathos of novelty, so characteristic of the modern age, needed almost two hundred years to leave the relative seclusion of scientific and philosophic thought and to reach the realm of politics."<sup>3</sup>

In our contemporary understanding of reality the concept of "process" serves as a companion notion with "novelty." Reality flows in a constant process of becoming. "Novelty" is the concept used to designate occurrences in the process which do not conform to our understanding or expectations. We illustrate this point when we speak of mutations being novel occurrences in the evolutionary process of nature. When Illich offers deschooling as an answer to the current plights in society, he is not speaking in terms of a process understanding of reality. Rather, as we have tried to indicate, he postulates from his classical theological position a static view of reality. For Illich there exists an unchanging proper structure only through which can individual and social fulfillment occur, and deschooling is required in order to restore this structure. He does not understand life as a constant process of becoming in which we must continually seek new ways of meeting social problems—ways that emerge from and relate to the current process.

We would suggest that the philosophical understanding of reality in terms of process and novelty provides a more adequate orientation for developing a constructive future society than does Illich's view of a preordained, static social pattern. By realizing that novel events occur in the social process, modern persons are challenged by the realization that in order to be responsible we must continually strive to find more humane ways of organizing our life together.

#### REFERENCES

1. cf. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), pp. 1-18.
2. Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 73.
3. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*. (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), pp. 38-9.

## the battle of the books: the stakes are high

FRANKLIN PARKER. *The Battle of the Books: Kanawha County*. Bloomington, Indiana: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation (Fastback#63), 1975. pp. 34. 50 cents.

Here is a booklet as up-to-date as today's newspaper. All across the country school boards are under fire from various groups as well as from the media for a wide variety of reasons ranging from the dismissal of popular administrators to the holding of religious emphasis weeks. This essay deals with such an incident, but one which received national attention from the media because of its far-reaching implications and the social turbulence which accompanied it.

Franklin Parker is Benedum Professor of Education at West Virginia University and the author of numerous other books and articles, especially on African educational development. In this brief study, Parker outlines the events which occurred in conjunction with the widely-reported 1974 confrontation over textbook selection in Kanawha County, West Virginia. He relates the story of what happened, why, and suggests some lessons which can be learned from the incident.

The trouble allegedly began when school board member Alice Moore, wife of a local minister, protested against the adoption of what she considered offensive "anti-American" and "anti-Christian" textbooks. The county, which includes the state capital of Charleston, was subsequently plunged into turmoil by Mrs. Moore's progressive revelation of the content of the books in question. Some of the texts were withdrawn but not all of them. The community polarized over the issue and tempers flared. According to Parker, coal miners, rural people, blue-collar workers, and religious fundamentalists supported Mrs. Moore and her views while professional and white-collar types, urban dwellers, the economically well-to-do, and theologically liberal church people defended the books and the school administration's determination to retain them.

There followed a partially successful school boycott on the part of those parents and students who opposed the "dirty