Ex Oriente Lux: Eastern Teachings Offer a Renaissance in Higher Education

Henry Winthrop
University of South Florida

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In recent years a substantial volume of literature has appeared on the deficiencies of modern higher education. The most prevalent criticism—which takes its lead from youthful dissent directed towards the major values of American society—is that modern higher education is "irrelevant." The focus of this criticism is that much, and perhaps most, of what is taught in our colleges and universities today is not germane to the social issues of our time. A university education, the critics have argued, tends to be insulated from important, controversial problems of the day. The claim is also made that when timid college professors do take a stand on these problems, they usually support the status quo. The young assert that "square" professors will usually argue that this is the best of all possible worlds and that they cast themselves in the role of apologists for anything that the Establishment has done, is doing, or proposes to do. However, the keynote of all the major criticisms leveled in the '60's against higher education is that it has been "irrelevant." It has been irrelevant, it is said, to human suffering in the present and to the potentialities of a new and a better world-a-coming that are inherent in developments in science and technology and in the great wealth with which we are blessed.

In the deepening educational conflict over this key criticism, many of us have lost sight of the original—one might even say, the "primal"—purpose of education. That purpose was—and continues to be—
the task of increasing the “awareness” of the young, so that when they take their places as full-fledged citizens, they will be able to meet properly and efficiently the tasks, challenges and problems of modern society. But the awareness that we have to impart is not solely intellectual in nature. Awareness of the conflicts that rage within each human breast is equally important. Awareness of one’s true identity and of the actions that go towards the fulfillment, rather than the dissolution, of that identity is also very important. The need to impart all the known techniques of mental discipline has historically been a major concern of education, appearing in the masterful dialectics of Socrates and in the stress on sound and correct formal thinking as systematized by Aristotle. This latter is more than ever needed in our socially complex society, where problems are becoming very difficult to solve and, intellectually, very taxing to analyze. The average voter who takes his citizenship seriously must almost become an expert, himself, in order to vote intelligently and to give adequate voice to such political measures as the initiative, the referendum and the recall.

The need for increased spiritual awareness has likewise grown in importance. The problem of good and evil takes on special forms and special meaning in the mass technological society. To know when one is doing good and when one is doing evil is hard enough. It is even harder to know how to do good and how to avoid evil. So great are the interdependencies of the institutions of a complex technological society that an action undertaken here and now to achieve a measure of welfare about which there is no controversy in the community may carry the seeds of evil in its wake. The same measure may prove destructive to the welfare of groups far away and at a later date. This, in a way, is exemplified in the effects of new developments in science and technology on our national life and in the tragic results to other cultures that sometimes flow from our best-intentioned efforts to help underdeveloped countries to industrialize and to come abreast of the twentieth century.

In their stress, however, on the social considerations that modern education is neglecting, the young have missed what should, perhaps, be the most significant core of higher education. I need say nothing about what the members of the Educational Establishment have missed, if only because they seem to have missed everything. The significant core to which I am referring is the self-mastery that—when you think about it—should be the sine qua non of the educated and civilized man. This is the opposite of the self-permissiveness and freeranging, mentally undisciplined drug “trips” that so many of the young prefer. This self-mastery—both in its mental and its physical dimensions—has been the traditional objective of Yoga and other Eastern techniques of self-control. Likewise, the ability to enable the mind to dominate the body has been the inherent ambition of Karate
and other skills of physical self-mastery. These, too, have come from the mysterious East.

It has remained, however, for an obscure professor of history to recognize the essential values of Yoga and Karate for the training of the mind, the body and the soul, and to suggest that higher education be revamped along these lines. This professor has recognized the profound truth that relevance is not enough. He has reminded us of the classic objective of ancient education—still germane to our own way of life—which has been summed up in the ancient adage *mens sana in corpore sano*. We owe a great debt to any educator who reminds us of the obvious and who constructs an educational philosophy from essentials that we have allowed to go off the beaten track. No measure of gratitude will be sufficient to the educator who is perceptive enough to recognize that the malaise of modern society is curable through the inauguration of a curriculum devoted to Yoga, Karate and various other distinguished bodies of knowledge and disciplines which we have tended to lose sight of in modern education.

The professor of history of whom I speak may be completely correct when he implies that relevance is not enough. I have found that the educational philosophy that he has broadly described in an article in a student newspaper is so convincing and so compelling, that it is only reasonable that I reproduce his very short article here. Inasmuch as I wish to comment on this professor's views later, the reader's understanding will best be served if we include that article at this point.

*Yoga and Karate Indispensable*

It is no accident that both Yoga and Karate have been introduced in this country during a period of social stress, cultural malaise and of a major reexamination of values. As the oldest known system of physical and mental discipline, Hatha Yoga, which originated in India some 4,000 years ago, is also the most comprehensive and complete system of exercise yet devised toward achieving physical and mental health, self-control, self-awareness and inner harmony.

While Karate began as a technique of defense or material art, it also combines basic insights of Zen Buddhism with dynamic forms of physical focus and energy concentration toward self-control, awareness and inner harmony.

One of the serious limitations of physical education programs is the confused, poorly thought-out relation between body and mind development. In addition to the lack of any coherent philosophy of physical education, there is also the problem of the one-dimensional view; the failure to see the education of the body as an aesthetic mental and spiritual
education of the whole man in the context of nature and society, as did the Greeks or the Italians of the Renaissance.

Listen to the response of a physical education program director when queried about introducing Yoga and Karate instruction: “Well, all that stuff is the same to me. I don’t understand it. If they (students) want exercise, we have all they need here.”

Indeed they have! Fine tennis courts, golf courses, swimming pools, and who could deny that these activities are enjoyable! At the same time, how to account for the frustration and dissatisfaction experienced by students forced to take courses in physical education?

A paradox, but simple nonetheless. The courses are not integrated in any way into the student’s sense of self, sense of purpose, educational growth, and so on.

One of the unfortunate legacies of organized Christianity was the divorce between mind and body. Since the various churches held little store in the body as a vehicle for spiritual growth (except by denying it), or even held it a potential source of evil and corruption of soul, no attempt was made to elaborate a body awareness discipline which would serve spiritual enlightenment (flagellation serves body awareness, but only through intense pain!).

Of course, no single explanation will suffice, but the reality of the failure to develop a coherent system of physical, mental, spiritual exercises is still there.

Yoga teaches complete relaxation of the body by rendering the body flexible, and leads to a complete physical awareness of the inter-relatedness of all parts of the body through correct breathing (pranayama) and spinal suppleness.

For the practitioner, this means self-control: the elimination of anxiety, tension, fear, rigidity, hostility and aggression; the achievement of health, joy and harmony with self and environment. At the same time, Yoga, through the physical exercises (which are enjoyable because each exercise emphasizes not only stretching, but relaxing, unlike calisthenics and other forms), teaches concentration and meditation.

As the student learns to control his body, so he learns how to control the random thought and how to achieve focus (dhyana), and ultimately peace and oneness (samadhi). Yoga serves to integrate the entire organism. As psychotherapy, in contrast with the abstract, mentalistic, crude, long and expensive approach to Western psychoanalysis, its value is inestimable.

Karate, despite its unfortunate association with fighting techniques, and despite its tendency in this country to attract
"muscle-head," chip-on-the-shoulder types, is in its correctly conceived and correctly practised form one of the most powerful forms of body and mind control in the service of self-awareness and inner tranquility. Karate incorporates the basic Zen perspective on wisdom and consciousness: to make the mind as still as clear water in a pool.

Imagine the mind in its normal muddled state. Such a mind is continually confused, anxiety-laden, bombarded by uncontrolable thoughts, impressions, preoccupations, searching for a hold on reality. But for the clear mind, all thoughts and impressions entering the limpid water are seen sharply and distinctly as in a mirror, hence calmly.

Fear and uncertainty are removed. The accomplished Karate practitioner is lithe, supple, fully relaxed, fully aware, yet capable, like the tiger, of immediate, lightning focus. (Karate draws many of its movements from those of animals; its aesthetic forms are closely attached to nature, and can be compared to Zen landscape painting. Emphasis is on spontaneous, not contrived, movement.)

Karate, then, is not for the brutish, dull-witted, aesthetically insensitive. Like Yoga, it requires a guru, or sensei, essentially an enlightened teacher.

It now becomes clear that both Yoga and Karate occupy an indispensable place in any physical and educational curriculum. As designs for physical, mental and spiritual awareness, they are far more relevant than any of the existing programs in the University today. And more fortunate we are to have gurus for both Karate and Yoga . . .

Now that the reader is familiar with the recovery of these great ideas in education which—without the lucubrations of our good friend the historian—might have been permanently lost to the continuing dialogue concerning reconstruction in higher education, I should like to give my reactions to this material. I read with great interest what this historian had to say. For years I have been concerned with the drastic revolution needed in the curriculum of higher education and have written extensively on the subject. It remained, however, for a mere stripling in the field of educational philosophy to come up with a suggestion for a really significant innovation in higher education.

I think that this historian has succeeded beautifully in showing what's wrong with our present curriculum. We have at present no education for awareness. But if the university undergraduate curriculum were built around Yoga and Karate, awareness would become the order of the day. Awareness via Yoga would enable us to recognize our enemies. Karate would enable us to dispatch them. What more could one ask?
The only criticism that I have of this masterful contribution to educational philosophy is that it does not go far enough. I was somewhat disappointed that the author of this article failed to work out a detailed curriculum for several of the approaches that would increase, as he put it, “physical and mental health, self-control, self-awareness and inner harmony.”

I have therefore rushed into the breach and taken the responsibility of proposing in some detail a “Curriculum for Awareness” that would do justice to the ideas it contains. As a result I am setting forth below some of the curricular innovations which, I feel, would properly support the educational philosophy outlined by this historian. Whatever merits these proposals possess are to be credited to the inspiration provided by this learned scholar of history.

The “Curriculum for Awareness” that I propose would consist of the following courses, for openers:

**Curriculum for Awareness**

1. *Tibetan Tantric Techniques for Sexual Power* (Physical Education)—Enrollment limited and consent of the instructor required. Not to be taught by younger professors.
2. *The Effects of Shamanism on State Government* (Political Science)—Students must sign a loyalty oath before admission and give evidence of good character.
3. *Hathi Yoga and Pranayamas: The Control of Respiration* (College of Education)—How to help your students when they find your courses breathtaking.
4. *The Influence of Yoga on Pre-Raphaelite Painting* (Art)—Evidence will be presented that Pop, Op, and Mop Art are older than you think.
5. *Sufi Ecstasy and Sufi Poetry in Stream of Consciousness Literature* (English)—Students on “pot” will not be admitted.
6. *Zen Buddhism and Altered States of Unconsciousness* (Psychology)—For rigid personalities who are full of designs other than experimental ones.
7. *Mortification Ascess for Nymphomaniacs* (College of Medicine)—A very meaty course and if you enroll you won't be skinned. Registration must be arranged for privately.
8. *The Occult as a Transfer Payment to Understanding* (Economics)—How to strike the balance sheet between appearance and reality. No prerequisites except utter confusion.
10. *The Role of Mysticism in Dematerialization* (Physics)—This
course begins with theories of anti-matter and then goes beyond them.

11. **The Effects of Prayer on the Acceleration of Plant Growth** (Botany)—Those interested in agronomy and ecology should not select this course. It is intended chiefly for those who intend to trade in the futures market.

12. **The Life Divine and the Way Sublime** (Basic College)—A celestial view of the purposes of education that will enable the student either to meet his Maker or to get introduced to his own subconscious.

13. **Judo for Temple and “Pad”** (Free University)—Excellent for students who have to discuss their poor grades with bad-tempered faculty members.

14. **Jiu jitsu for Marital Happiness** (Sociology)—If your wife complains about mental cruelty, why not try a physical variant of the same medicine?

15. **Karate for Pianists** (Music)—For people with butter-fingers and those who would like to make the piano sound like rock music.

16. **Macrobiotic Cooking, Good Health and Mental Alertness** (Home Economics)—Recommended only for students with a good digestion. This course will keep your hormones popping and make male students feel that they can rape the Statue of Liberty. The text will be *Zen Macrobiotic Cooking* by Michel Abehera.

17. **Sanpaku Versus Total Health** (Home Economics)—Students will have to live on rice for a whole quarter. This course will make it clear why rice is the natural food for those who seek spiritual or aerodynamic elevation and other types of uplift. The text will be *You Are All Sanpaku* by Sakurazawa Nyoiti. This is a book that has proven effective in creating physical well-being and states of sexual vigor that would bowl over even Johnson and Masters.

I think it should be perfectly clear that the “Curriculum for Awareness” is intended for the education of the whole man. *Samadhi* is assured. For that matter, so is rice. As our historian friend puts it, the “mind in its normal muddled state” will be transformed into a mind that may likewise prove to be muddled, but at least the muddle-headedness after training in the “Curriculum for Awareness” will not be typical. It will be an abnormal state of muddle-headedness, perhaps, but one that confers unmixed blessings. It will certainly not be “searching for a hold on reality.” It will have left such plebian enchantments behind long ago. And its empyrean advantages will be accompanied by all the good health, virility and physical self-mastery that Karate is bound to produce. Karate, as our historian friend points out, “is not for the brutish, dull-witted, aesthetically insensitive.” The ease with which our undergraduate charges will become expert at Yoga will
increase as we continue to raise our standards of admission. And the ease with which they will become expert at Karate will likewise increase, since the general health of our population is improving all the time.

We will, therefore, have fewer and fewer of the brutish, dull-witted and aesthetically insensitive. In this sense the success of the “Curriculum for Awareness” is assured. The one serious problem that the university will have to face is that of finding teachers who will turn in a creditable performance, while dispensing the “Curriculum for Awareness.” Gurus today are in short supply. But perhaps this problem can be relieved by an exchange of teachers with India. We could trade demographers for gurus. This would clearly be of benefit to both parties to the transaction.

One should not assume that textbook materials would be rare for programs and courses of this sort. Just the opposite is the case. In this connection we suffer from an embarrassment of riches. In a few cases classic writings might have to be translated into English for the first time. Every instructor would also find that there is a wealth of periodical literature available in the learned journals—literature on all of the subject matter of the courses I have proposed—much of which could be made part of reading lists that are handed out to students.

The sooner we recognize the tremendous originality and importance of the educational philosophy proposed by our historian friend, who has realized the core importance of Yoga and Karate for the social foundations of education, the better will it be for us all. The conflict over the purposes to be served by modern higher education will continue to rage. If, however, some of our leading universities show some courage and pioneer in the establishment of the curriculum needed for the altruistic and spiritual growth of modern man, this will constitute a major breakthrough. Not only will our dissenting young learn to appreciate this breakthrough, once they have had some experience with it, but we can also be certain that we shall earn the undying gratitude of posterity. If new educational developments along these lines should start steam-rolling, the ’70’s will probably be known as the “Decade of Spiritual and Educational Rebirth.”

I recognize, of course, that Rome wasn’t built in a day. By the same token, the much overdue “Curriculum for Awareness” cannot be instituted overnight. It will have to be introduced gradually. In order, however, to speed up the rate of its introduction, I suggest that lectures and demonstrations be given while students eat bowls of rice and other macrobiotic foods. Cookery schools can be established in this country, modeled after the famous Nippon Apuka School of Cooking, which prepares its graduates to become experts in the preparation of rice as part of the cuisine. Graduates of such schools can be attached to each college and university that inaugurates the “Curriculum for Awareness.”
In this way the growth of the “Curriculum for Awareness” may be hastened, so that well before the year 2000 America may have become the world’s first nation all of whose citizens will be so adept in physical skills that no nation at war with her would dare risk hand-to-hand combat with her soldiers. But most important of all will be the recovery of mental discipline and self-mastery. With Yoga and Karate the educational staple of all citizens, the achievement of the good life is assured. When that time comes the words of one of our patriotic songs will carry their most impressive meaning. “Oh, beautiful for spacious skies” will then refer to the first national community that succeeded in making fullest use of man’s hidden powers via the method of universal spiritual education.