

## The Educated Person

*Post-Capitalist Society* deals with the environment in which human beings live and work and learn.

It does not deal with the person.

But in the knowledge society into which—we are moving, individuals are central.

Knowledge is not impersonal, like money.

Knowledge does not reside in a book, a databank, a software program; they contain only information.

Knowledge is always embodied in a person; carried by a person; created, augmented, or improved by a person; applied by a person; taught and passed on by a person; used or misused by a person.

The shift to the knowledge society therefore puts the person in the center.

In so doing it raises new challenges, new issues, new and quite unprecedented questions about the knowledge society's representative, the educated person.

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In all earlier societies, the educated person was an ornament.

He or she embodied *Kultur*—the German term which in its mixture of awe and derision is untranslatable into English (even "highbrow" does not come close).

But in the knowledge society, the educated person is society's emblem; society's symbol; society's standard bearer.

The educated person is the social "archetype"—to use the sociologist's term.

He or she defines society's performance capacity.

But he or she also embodies society's values, beliefs, commitments.

If the feudal knight was the clearest embodiment of society in the early Middle Ages, and the "bourgeois" under Capitalism, the educated person will represent society in the post-capitalist society in which knowledge has become the central resource.

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This must change the very meaning of "educated person."

It must change the very meaning of what it means to be educated.

It will thus predictably make the definition of an "educated person" a crucial issue.

With knowledge becoming the key resource, the educated person faces new demands, new challenges, new responsibilities.

*The educated person now matters.*

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For the last, ten or fifteen years a vigorous—often shrill—debate has been raging in American Academia over the educated person.

Should there be one?

Could there be one?

And what should be considered "education" anyway?

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A motley crew of post-Marxists, radical feminists, and other "antis" argues that there can be no such thing as an educated person—the position of those new nihilists, the "Deconstructionists."

Others in this group assert that there can be only educated persons with each sex, each ethnic group, each race, each "minority" requiring its own separate culture and a separate—indeed, an isolationist—educated person.

Since these people are mainly concerned with the “humanities,” there are few echoes as yet of Hitler’s “Aryan physics,” Stalin’s “Marxist genetics,” or Mao’s “Communist psychology.”

But the arguments of these anti-traditionalists recall those of the totalitarians.

And their target is the same: the universalism that is at the very core of the concept of an educated person, whatever it may be called (“educated person” in the West, or “*bunjin*” in China and Japan).

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The opposing camp—we might call them the “Humanists”—also scorns the present system.

But it does so because it fails to produce a universally educated person.

The Humanist critics demand a return to the nineteenth century, to the “liberal arts,” the “classics,” the German *Gebildete Mensch*.

They do not, so far, repeat the assertion made by Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler fifty years ago at the University of Chicago that “knowledge” in its entirety consists of a hundred “great books.”

But they are in direct line of descent from the Hutchins-Adler “Return to Pre-Modernity.”

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Both sides, alas, are wrong.

The knowledge society must have at its core the concept of the educated person.

It will have to be a universal concept, precisely because the knowledge society is a society of knowledges and because it is global—in its money, its economics, its careers, its technology, its central issues, and above all, in its information.

Post-capitalist society requires a unifying force.

It requires a leadership group, which can focus local, particular, separate traditions onto a common and shared commitment to values, a common concept of excellence, and on mutual respect.

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The post-capitalist society—the knowledge society—thus needs exactly the opposite of what Deconstructionists, radical feminists, or anti-Westerners propose.

It needs the very thing they totally reject: a universally educated person.

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Yet the knowledge society needs a different kind of educated person from the ideal for which the Humanists are fighting.

They rightly stress the folly of their opponents' demand to repudiate the Great Tradition and the wisdom, beauty, knowledge that are the heritage of mankind.

But a bridge to the past is not enough—and that is all the Humanists offer.

The educated person needs to be able to bring his or her knowledge to bear on the present, not to mention molding the future.

There is no provision for such ability in the proposals of the Humanists, indeed, no concern for it.

But without it, the Great Tradition remains dusty antiquarianism.

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In his 1943 novel *Das Glasperlenspiel* (The Glass Bead Game),\*<sup>1</sup> Hermann Hesse anticipated the sort of world the Humanists want—and its failure.

The book depicts a brotherhood of intellectuals, artists, and Humanists who live a life of splendid isolation, dedicated to the Great Tradition, its wisdom and its beauty.

But the hero, the most accomplished Master of the Brotherhood, decides in the end to return to the polluted, vulgar, turbulent, strife-torn, money-grubbing reality—for his values are only fool's gold unless they have relevance to the world.

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What Hesse foresaw more than fifty years ago is now in fact happening.

"Liberal education" and "*Allgemeine Bildung*" are in crisis today because they have become a *Glasperlenspiel* which the brightest desert for crass, vulgar, money-grubbing reality.

The ablest students appreciate the liberal arts.

They enjoy them fully as much as did their great-grandparents, who graduated before World War I. For that earlier generation, liberal arts and *Allgemeine Bildung* remained meaningful throughout their lives, and defined their identity.

They still remained meaningful for many members of my generation, which graduated before World War II—even though we immediately forgot our Latin and Greek.

But all over the world today's students, a few years after they have graduated, complain that "what I have learned so eagerly has no meaning; it has no relevance to anything I am interested in or want to become."

They still want a liberal arts curriculum for their own children—Princeton or Carleton; Oxbridge; Tokyo University; the *Lycée*; the *Gymnasium*—though mainly for social status and access to good jobs.

But in their own lives they repudiate such values.

They repudiate the educated person of the Humanists.

Their liberal education, in other words, does not enable them to understand reality, let alone to master it.

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Both sides in the present debate are largely irrelevant.

Post-capitalist society needs the educated person even more than any earlier society did, and access to the great heritage of the past will have to be an essential element.

But this heritage will embrace a good deal more than the civilization that is still mainly Western, the Judeo-Christian tradition, for which the Humanists are fighting.

The educated person we need will have to be able to appreciate other cultures and traditions: the great heritage of Chinese, Japanese, Korean paintings and ceramics; the philosophers and religions of the Orient; and Islam, both as a religion and as a culture.

The educated person also will have to be far less exclusively "bookish" than the product of the liberal education of the Humanists.

He or she will need trained perception fully as much as analysis.

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The Western tradition will, however, still have to be at the core, if only to enable the educated person to come to grips with the present, let alone the future.

The future may be "post-Western"; it may be "anti-Western."

It cannot be "non-Western."

Its material civilization and its knowledges all rest on Western foundations: Western science; tools and technology; production; economics; Western-style finance and banking.

None of these can work unless grounded in an understanding and acceptance of Western ideas and of the entire Western tradition.

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The early nineteenth-century West African who carved the wooden masks which the developed countries so eagerly collect knew nothing of the West and owed little to it.

His descendant in West Africa who carves wooden masks today (and some are extraordinarily powerful) still lives in a mud hut in the tribal village.

His country may not even be “underdeveloped” yet.

Still, he has a radio, a TV set, and a motorbike.

He uses new tools, all of them products of Western technology.

He carves for an art dealer in Paris or New York.

And his aesthetics owe as much to the German Expressionists and to Picasso as they do to his own West African ancestors.

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The most profoundly “anti-Western” movement today is not Fundamentalist Islam.

It is the revolt of the “Shining Path” in Peru—the desperate attempt of the descendants of the Incas to undo the Spanish Conquest, to go back to the Indians’ ancient tongues of Quechua and Aymara, and to drive the hated Europeans and their culture back into the ocean.

But this anti-Western rebellion finances itself by growing coca for the drug addicts of New York and Los Angeles.

Its favorite weapon is not the Incas’ slingshot; it is the car bomb.

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Tomorrow’s educated person will have to be prepared for life in a global world.

It will be a “Westernized” world, but also increasingly a tribalized

world.

He or she must become a “citizen of the world”—in vision, horizon, information.

But he or she will also have to draw nourishment from their local roots and, in turn, enrich and nourish their own local culture.

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Post-capitalist society is both a knowledge society and a society of organizations, each dependent on the other and yet each very different in its concepts, views, and values.

Most, if not all, educated persons will practice their knowledge as members of an organization.

The educated person will therefore have to be prepared to live and work simultaneously in two cultures—that of the “intellectual,” who focuses on words and ideas, and that of the “manager,” who focuses on people and work.

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Intellectuals see the organization as a tool; it enables them to practice their *techné*<sup>2</sup>, their specialized knowledge.

Managers see knowledge as a means to the end of organizational performances.

Both are right.

They are opposites; but they relate to each other as poles rather than as contradictions.

They surely need each other: the research scientist needs the research manager just as much as the research manager needs the research scientist.

If one overbalances the other, there is only non-performance and all-around frustration.



The intellectual's world, unless counterbalanced by the manager, becomes one in which everybody "does his own thing" but nobody achieves anything.

The manager's world, unless counterbalanced by the intellectual, becomes the stultifying bureaucracy of the "Organization Man."

But if the two balance each other, there can be creativity and order, fulfillment and mission.

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A good many people in the post-capitalist society will actually live and work in these two cultures at the same time.

And many more should be exposed to working experience in both cultures, by rotation early in their careers—from a specialist's job to a managerial one, for instance, rotating the young computer technician into project manager and team leader, or by asking the young college professor to work part time for two years in university administration.

And again, working as "unpaid staff" in an agency of the social sector will give the individual the perspective, the balance to respect both worlds, that of the intellectual and that of the manager.

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All educated persons in the post-capitalist society will have to be prepared to understand both cultures.

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For the educated person in the nineteenth century, *technés* were not knowledge.

They were already taught in the university and had become "disciplines."

Their practitioners were "professionals," rather than "tradesmen" or "artisans."

But they were not part of the liberal arts or the *Allgemeine Bildung*, and thus not part of knowledge.

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University degrees in *technés* go back a long way: in Europe, both the law degree and the medical degree as far as the thirteenth century.

And on the Continent and in America—though not in England—the new engineering degree (first awarded in Napoleon’s France a year or two before 1800) soon became socially accepted.

Most people who were considered “educated” made their living practicing a *techné* whether as lawyers, physicians, engineers, geologists, or increasingly in business (only in England was there esteem for the “gentleman” without occupation).

But their job or their profession was seen as a “living,” not a “life.”

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Outside their offices, the *techné* practitioners did not talk about their work or even about their disciplines.

That was “shop talk”; the Germans sneered at it as “*Fachsimpeln*.”

It was even more derided in France: anyone who indulged in shop talk there was considered a boor and a bore, and promptly taken off the invitation lists of polite society.

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But now that the *technés* have become knowledges in the plural, they have to be integrated into knowledge.

The *technés* have to become part of what it means to be an educated person.

The fact that the liberal arts curriculum they enjoyed so much in their college years refuses to attempt this is the reason why today’s students repudiate it a few years later.

They feel let down, even betrayed.

They have good reason to feel that way.

Liberal arts and *Allgemeine Bildung* which do not integrate the knowledges into a “universe of knowledge” are neither “liberal” nor “*Bildung*.”

They fall down on their first task: to create mutual understanding, that “universe of discourse” without which there can be no civilization.

Instead of uniting, such disciplines only fragment.

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We neither need nor will get “polymaths” who are at home in many knowledges; in fact, we will probably become even more specialized.

But what we do need—and what will define the educated person in the knowledge society—is the ability to *understand* the various knowledges.

What is each one about?

What is it trying to do?

What are its central concerns and theories?

What major new insights has it produced?

What are its important areas of ignorance, its problems, its challenges?

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Without such understanding, the knowledges themselves will become sterile, will indeed cease to be “knowledges.”

They will become intellectually arrogant and unproductive.

For the major new insights in every one of the specialized knowledges arise out of another, separate specialty, out of another one of the

knowledges.

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Both economics and meteorology are being transformed at present by the new mathematics of Chaos theory.

Geology is being profoundly changed by the physics of matter, archaeology by the genetics of DNA typing, history by psychological, statistical, and technological analyses and techniques.

An American, James M. Buchanan (b. 1919), received the 1986 Nobel Prize in Economics for applying recent economic theory to the political process and thereby standing on their heads the assumptions and theories on which political scientists had based their work for over a century.

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The specialists have to take responsibility for making both themselves and their specialty understood.

The media, whether magazines, movies, or television, have a crucial role to play.

But they cannot do the job by themselves.

Nor can any other kind of popularization.

Specialties must be understood for what they are: serious, rigorous, demanding disciplines.

This requires that the leaders in each of the knowledges, beginning with the leading scholars in each field, must take on the hard work of defining what it is they do.

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There is no "Queen of the Knowledges" in the knowledge society.

All knowledges are equally valuable; all knowledges, in the words of

the great medieval saint and philosopher St. Bonaventura, lead equally to the truth.

But to make them paths to truth, paths to knowledge, has to be the responsibility of the men and women who own these knowledges.

Collectively, they hold knowledge in trust.

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Capitalism had been dominant for over a century when Karl Marx in the first volume of *Das Kapital* identified it (in 1867), as a distinct social order.

The term "Capitalism" was not coined until thirty years later, well after Marx's death.

It would therefore not only be presumptuous in the extreme to attempt to write *The Knowledge* today; it would be ludicrously premature.

All that can be attempted—all this book attempts—is to describe society and polity as we begin the transition from the Age of Capitalism (also, of course, the Age of Socialism).

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But we can hope that a hundred years hence a book of this kind, if not one entitled *The Knowledge*, can be written.

That would mean that we have successfully weathered the transition upon which we have only just embarked.

It would be as foolish to predict the knowledge society as it would have been foolish to predict in 1776—the year of the American Revolution, of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, and of James Watt's steam engine—the society of which Marx wrote a hundred years later.

And it was as foolish of Marx to predict in mid-Victorian Capitalism—and with "Scientific infallibility"—the society in which we live now.

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But one thing we can predict: the greatest change will be the change in knowledge—in its form and content; in its meaning; in its responsibility; and in what it means to be an educated person.

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<sup>1</sup>Published in English as *Magister Ludi* (1949)

<sup>2</sup>(Google: “technē” produced over 14,000 hits e.g. <http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/SPT/spt.html>)