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## PERENNIALISM – A CONCEPT OF EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

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Perennialism philosophy of education is a very conservative and inflexible philosophy of education. Students are taught to reason through structured lessons and drills. Even the national standards that are coming into place emphasize the ideas of Perennialism. As now days we are stressing reading, writing and arithmetic in education but the decline of the music and art. Teaching the students for job and the knowledge is what we need today so Perennialism philosophy of education is what helps in educators is to equip them with “universal knowledge Perennialists philosophers, despite a variety of minute distinctions, generally feel that they are advocates of the True Philosophy and with it the True Philosophy of Education. They are often unwilling to concede the possible validity of different interpretations of the same data. Adler, in his article aptly titled, “In Defense of The Philosophy of Education,” has this to say about the possible validity of any other system of philosophical inquiry:

Education is a preparation for life, not an imitation of life; or as the progressive insist it is not ‘life itself.’ Education should be basically the same for all men. The term Perennialism is used when referring to this point of view in education, while in the more general philosophical area it is referred to as Neo-Thomism or Neo-Scholasticism. Perennialism is the preferred educational term because of the insistence of philosophers associated with the position that there are certain everlasting values to which we must return and which much be brought to the attention of all youth in the schools.

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### HISTORICAL RETROSPECT OF PERENNIALISM

#### 1. Pre-Christian Origins: Aristotle

Perennialism is not rooted in any particular time or place. Perennialism is open to the notion that universal spiritual forms Aristotle contributed to the basis realist position with his conception of form and matter. Form, it will be recalled was viewed as being at the apex of the pyramid or hierarchy while matter was at its base. Matter existed as pure potentiality. It acquired meaning only as form was imposed on it. It was form that was seen as the principle of actuality. All things were composed of form and matter. Man, for example, had a physical being composed of matter and mind composed of form. Form was equated with pure rationality while matter was equated with pure materiality.

#### 2. Christianity: The first thousand years

One of the great voices during these first thousand years of Christendom was the voice of St. Augustine. Since the works of Aristotle were lost for the first thousand year of Christianity, the great influence on the early medieval thinkers was Plato. Plato, indirectly, and Augustine, directly, set much of the pattern of Christian theology until the time of St. Thomas Aquinas. For Augustine, reason was subservient to religious dogma and the material and practical aspect of life were to play only a minor role as compared with the spiritual aspects. First came faith and then came reason.

### 3. The Thirteenth Century: St. Thomas Aquinas

St. Thomas Aquinas, the Angelic took the work as Aristotle and after accepting his form and matter thesis, added to it the concept of existence. He reconciled the Christian principles of his faith with the realism of Aristotle by insisting that beyond essence (the combination of form and matter) lay existence. Aristotle, according to St. Thomas, was right in what he said, but had failed to raise the question of the existence of essence. Thus, for Aquinas, essence becomes the principle of potentiality while existence becomes the principle of actuality. Pure Existence or Pure Actuality is, of course, God. We can know Pure Existence only through revelation although we can know about it through reason. In this manner Aquinas postulated a realistic world in which man must make his way while preparing for life in the hereafter. While reason is able to deal with the world of nature, revelation deals with the world beyond nature.

### 4. Contemporary Thinkers: Maritain and Adler

**a. Jacques Maritain** is usually considered the most prominent contemporary spokesman of the Perennialists position.. As an educator he has written and taught both in his own country and in the United States. Maritain's position is typical of the Neo-Thomists, with a strong reliance on reason and faith. His writings often deal with education and he has been particularly concerned with reconciling the democratic conception of education and the Perennialists point of view.

**b. Mortimer Adler** Although a non-Catholic, Adler has been welcomed into the perennialist camp with open arms because of his strong support of the philosophical position they espouse. Adler goes on to out that the education of man is not complete without religious education and that there is a whole realm of knowledge with which this deals which is not attainable through rational means.

## FORMS OF PERENNIALISM

The Perennialists will generally fall into one of two camps, secular and theistic. The differences between these two camps are small but significant.

### SECULAR PERENNIALISM

As promoted primarily by **Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler**., Secular Perennialists espouse the idea that education should focus on the historical development of a continually developing common western base of human knowledge and art, the timeless value of classic thought on central human issues by landmark thinkers, and revolutionary ideas critical to historical western paradigm shifts or changes in world view. A program of studies which is highly general no specialized, and no vocational is advocated. They firmly believe that exposure of all citizens to the development of thought by those most responsible for the evolution of the Western tradition is integral to the survival of the freedoms, human rights and responsibilities inherent to a true Democracy.

### RELIGIOUS PERENNIALISM /THEISTIC PERENNIALISM

Perennialism was originally religious in nature, developed first by **Thomas Aquinas** in the thirteenth century in his work De Magistro (The Teacher).theistic Perennialists believes in a world of Reason, Being, and God (metaphysics) and in truth as Reason and Intuition. Furthermore, ethics is the Rational Act and aesthetics is a matter of Creative Intuition. From this very general philosophical position, the secular Perennialists would tend to view the Learner as a rational and spiritual being, the Teacher as a mental disciplinarian and spiritual leader, the Curriculum as the subject matter of the intellect and spirit (mathematics, languages, logic, Great Books, Dogma, etc.), the Teaching Method as training the intellect, and the Social Policy as transmitting the great ideas, both secular and religious.

## PHILOSOPHICAL RATIONALE

This is a very conservative and inflexible philosophy of education. It is based on the view that reality comes from fundamental fixed truths-especially related to God. It believes that people find truth through reasoning and revelation and that goodness is found in rational thinking.

## ONTOLOGICAL OR METAPHYSICSICAL POSITION

The Perennialists believes that all things are composed of form and matter which make up their essences. But in order for things to be in the world they must have Existence. Essence is the principle of potentiality while Existence is the principal actuality. For the Perennialists, Existence is of a higher order than essence. It stands in the Aristotelian ontology. At the top of the hierarchy is Pure Existence or Being. The essence of being is Existence. For the ecclesiastical Perennialists this Being is equated with God. God cannot be known except through faith and revelation Father William Mc. Gucken has summed up the Catholic Church's position nicely when he writes: God is **pure actuality**.

## EPISTEMOLOGICAL POSITION (KNOWLEDGE)

Perennialists see the analytic statement as a self-evident truth that may be know apart from all empirical experience. It is, for them, a first principal. And according to the perennialists, man is capable of intuiting first principal or having them revealed to him through revelation.

These self-evident truths open, for the perennialist, a whole realm of truth that cannot be reached by science. For the lay perennialist truth can be known through reason and intuition. For the ecclesiastical perennialist there is, added to these two ways of knowing, the certitude of revelation which is given to man. While intuiting is an activity of man, man is simply the recipient of revelation given from a source external to man. Catholic educators rely heavily on the materials of revelation.

To summarize, knowledge is independent of man. Truth can be known by man through reason, but there is certain other truths-... which transcends the 'natural' order of the universe - which can only be known through intuition and / or revelation.

Two warnings about the perennialist epistemology might be pointed out. To begin with, first principles should not be confused with clever sayings, with slogans, or with proverbs. While such statements as "a fool and his money are soon parted," may be commonly true, first principles are always and universally true. An example of such a first principles might be, "Either man has free will or he does not have free will." Secondly, there is little justification for the argument that the perennialist's use of reason is only to support belief. Revelation is simply an independent way of arriving at some truths. The ecclesiastical perennialist would argue that faith is not proof of reason, nor is reason proof of faith. They are simply two routes which, on occasion, lead one to the same truth. For example, the existence of God is accepted on faith despite the five logical proofs of the existence of God given by St. Thomas Aquinas in the Summa Theological.

## AXIOLOGICAL POSITION

### What is Truth

The perennialist believes that to know the truth about something is to know its essence. As he has been indicated in the foregoing, in order to know the entire truth about reality we must rely on intuition, faith or revelation. Faith and reason are two different and separate realms.

Since the perennialist ontology is teleological, the hard core of reality is logical, permanent, and unchanging. Truth, therefore, is also logical, permanent, and unchanging. Man tends toward knowledge. His mind is basically curious; thus, he needs little special prodding to start him on his epistemological expedition. The perennialist believes that there are certain things that are self-evident and that the structure of knowledge rests upon those self-evident truths that we know.

## 1. What is Good (Ethics)

Just as man tends towards knowledge, so he tends towards the moral life. And, just as knowledge is attained through reason, so the moral life is the life consonant with reason. The good act is the act controlled by man's rationality. But man does not always act in terms of his rationality; he is sometimes controlled by his will, which may err, or his desires. The good man is one whose will is habituated to and subservient to the intellect. The ecclesiastical perennialists hold that where sin exists (the will acting in opposition to the intellect), forgiveness may be attained if the sinner can show his intentions were good. By the same token, if a man does not know his is wrong, he cannot be held responsible for his acts.

## 2. What is Beautiful (Aesthetics)

Just as man tends towards knowledge and morality, he tends towards beauty. We know something is beautiful when we respond to it immediately and with pleasure. Man tends to be creative; he desires to give to his material the meaning that is potential in it. Art, therefore, is immediately self-evident. The artist intuitively meaning rather than approaching it logically, although he may appreciate a work of art through the pleasure it gives the intellect.

### PERENNIALISM IN EDUCATION

The most conservative, traditional, or inflexible of the five philosophies is perennialism, a philosophy drawing heavily from classical definitions of education. Perennialists believe that education, like human nature, is a constant. Because the distinguishing characteristic of humans is the ability to reason, education should focus on developing rationality. Education, for the perennialist, is a preparation for life, and students should be taught the world's permanencies through structured study.

### EDUCATIONAL AIMS

Because human beings are essentially the same, education should be essentially the same for everyone. The function of a citizen may vary from society to society, but the function of man, as a man, is the same in every age and in every society since it results from his nature as a man. "The aim of an educational system ... is to improve man as man.

For Perennialists, the aim of education is to ensure that students acquire understandings about the great ideas of Western civilization. These ideas have the potential for solving problems in any era. The focus is to teach ideas that are everlasting, to seek enduring truths which are constant, not changing, as the natural and human worlds at their most essential level, do not change. A Perennialist views nature, human nature, and the underlying principles of existence as constant. The principles of knowledge are enduring. Truth never changes.

Education should be for the 'long-haul' not for the immediate, contemporary fad. It is not the job of the school to meddle in contemporary problems, social reform, and political action. It is the job of the school to provide an education on the basis of which education, students later after graduation can rationally initiate the efforts for social reform, change, and political action.

### THE SCHOOL

The ecclesiastical perennialists see the school as concerned with the secular in education and particularly the training of the intellect. But in addition to this they see a second aim carefully interwoven through the fabric of education. They view education as a moral and religious undertaking. The ecclesiastical perennialists believe that the school cannot separate itself from the study of those things that have come to man through faith and revelation. Thus, the Roman Catholic Church in America has continued to maintain a separate school system so that it might permeate its 'secular' teachings with its moral and religious convictions. If we were to sum up the whole educational aim of the ecclesiastical perennialists in one

sentence it would be, 'Catholic,' and it is at this that the Catholic parochial schools from kindergarten through graduate school aim.

They believe that there is a common core of knowledge that needs to be transmitted to students in a systematic, disciplined way. The emphasis in this conservative perspective is on intellectual and moral standards that schools should teach. The core of the curriculum is essential knowledge and skills and academic rigor. Schooling should be practical, preparing students to become valuable members of society. It should focus on facts-the objective reality out there-and "the basics," training students to read, write, speak, and compute clearly and logically. Schools should not try to set or influence policies

## THE STUDENT

The student is seen as a rational being with tendencies toward Truth and knowledge. But the learner also has a spiritual side. It is the responsibility of the school to help him develop both. The rational power of the learner tends to be viewed from a position of faculty psychology. Thus, the faculty of reason is trained through the formal discipline of those subjects with the most logical organization. This would include subjects such as mathematic and logic. The faculty of memory is trained by having students memorize. Any foreign language which requires extensive memorization both of forms and content would seem to be desirable.

## DISCIPLINE

Because man's highest characteristic- the one differentiating him from the lower life forms- is his reason, he must use it to direct his life and control his instincts. Men are free, not determined. They are responsible for their actions. We cannot excuse a child's actions because of his environment or personal problems. Because men are rational, they must live rationally. Hence, children must be held to the standards of reason, and this is one function of education.

Students should be taught hard work, respect for authority, and discipline. Teachers are to help students keep their non-productive instincts in check, such as aggression or mindlessness. Discipline in the classroom is essential to learning. A noisy classroom is not a desirable place for learning to take place. Order is vital. Students cannot always think of the future. Consequently, teachers and parents must help students overcome their desire for immediate ends and direct them to future objectives. Self-discipline is fine, but most of the times it is insufficient. Adults therefore must give direction. The classroom is teacher-centered. The teacher as a professional is far more likely to know what her students will need to know in the future than do they. She/he is responsible for the education and intellectual growth of his/her students. Education requires the mastery of content, of subject matter.

## THE TEACHER

Perennialists disapprove of teachers requiring students to absorb massive amounts of disconnected information. They recommend that schools spend more time teaching about concepts and explaining they are meaningful to students.

The teacher, to the perennialist, is a mental disciplinarian with highly developed logical skills, capable of teaching logical thinking and the use of reason to his students. The teacher must have the ability to work with the natural tendencies of the students toward reason. He must serve as a benevolent taskmaster, exercising the minds of the students in order to help them develop their rational faculties.

Thus, besides having been trained in logic, the teacher must have the proper spiritual orientation. Nor is this all. Since the teacher is to train the students in reason, memory and will power, he must certainly have these three qualities if he is to help the student on the road to knowledge and the development of his faculties.

Education requires hard work and effort. If the student is interested in the subject, well and good, but if not, s/he still must be required to do the tasks. After all, the student does not know what s/he will need in



the future. Motivation is fine, and if the teacher can provide it, well and good, but if not, the student must work at the task regardless

Perennialists believe that reading is to be supplemented with mutual investigations (between the teacher and the student) and minimally-directed discussions through the Socratic method in order to develop a historically oriented understanding of concepts. They argue that accurate, independent reasoning distinguishes the developed or educated mind and they thus stress the development of this faculty. A skilled teacher would keep discussions on topic and correct errors in reasoning, but it would be the class, not the teacher, who would reach the conclusions. While not directing or leading the class to a conclusion, the teacher may work to accurately formulate problems within the scope of the texts being studied, Perennialism, typically considered being teacher-centered. However, since the teachers associated with perennialism are in a sense the authors of the Western masterpieces themselves, these teachers may be open to student criticism through the associated Socratic method, which, if carried out as true dialogue, is a balance between students, including the teacher promoting the discussion

## IMPORTANCE OF BOOKS IN EDUCATION

Perennialists believe that the focus of education should be the ideas that have lasted over centuries. They believe the ideas are as relevant and meaningful today as when they were written. They recommend that students learn from reading and analyzing the works by history's finest thinkers and writers. A number of perennialists, notably Robert Maynard Hutchins, Mortimer Adler,, have supported the idea of a university level curriculum based on the great books. These are the books that are considered great because they have withstood the test of time, it is argued that if they have survived for any length of time, it is because they are applicable through time, and are therefore "truer" than books which have had only as short-term appeal. This is totally in line with the traditional purposes of the university. One of which, as seen by McGucken is, "an interpreter and guardian of values," and the conservation of knowledge. Maritain too feels that the best way to educate is through the reading of great books.

## CURRICULUM

As with the essentialists, perennialists are educationally conservative in the requirement of a curriculum focused upon fundamental subject areas, but stress that the overall aim should be exposure to history's finest thinkers as models for discovery. The student should be taught such basic subjects as English, languages, history, mathematics, natural science, philosophy, and fine arts. Adler states: "The three R's, which always signified the formal disciplines, are the essence of liberal or general education."

The perennialist curriculum is universal and is based on their view that all human beings possess the same essential nature. Perennialists think it is important that individuals think deeply, analytically, flexibly, and imaginatively. They emphasize that students should not be taught information that may soon be outdated or found to be incorrect

The child should be taught certain basic subjects that will acquaint him/her with the world's permanencies: English, languages, history, mathematics, natural sciences, the fine arts, and philosophy. The child should learn reading and writing, how to speak and how to listen. He is a social being and lives in a community of men. Thus he must use his reason- his powers of rationality- to communicate with other men. The three Rs are important.

## METHOD OF TEACHING

A particular strategy with modern perennialists is to teach scientific reasoning, not facts. They may illustrate the reasoning with original accounts of famous experiments. This gives the students a human side to the science, and shows the reasoning in action. Most importantly, it shows the uncertainty and false steps of traditional real science. Because the nature of man is constant - because men as men are everywhere the same - education should be basically the same for all men. This means that children are rational beings,

not plastic personalities to be molded to the teacher's whim. Problem-solving is thus a waste of time on the part of pupil. They use tried and true teaching methods and techniques that are believed to be most beneficial to disciplining students' minds the method of teaching for the perennialist is rooted in mental discipline and in the training of the intellect through the discipline inherent in the subject matter. Since the child has a natural tendency to learn, the basis of the perennialist method is cooperation with the natural tendency of the student toward reason. The perennialist methodology relies heavily upon the use of lectures to Englishmen the student while he follows his natural curiosity under the moral authority of the teacher. Other techniques considered important by the perennialists are memorization of materials, and for the ecclesiastical perennialists, recitation of the Catechism.

**Education should adjust man to the truth which is eternal, while the contemporary world is not. "Education implies teaching. Teaching implies knowledge. Knowledge is truth. The truth everywhere is the same. Hence, education should be everywhere the same." Perennialists believe that one should teach the things that one deems to be of everlasting importance to all people everywhere.**

**In a simpler society there may be no danger is such a regressive social policy, but in an age of automation, over-production, over-abundance for some and starvation for others, in an age of atomic and hydrogen over-kill, and an age of red buttons that could destroy all human life leaving this planet nothing more than a charred ember in the universe, we cannot risk looking only into the past to find solution to problems of the present and the future.**

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