

## RELIGION ONLINE

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# Education and the Common Good: A Moral Philosophy of the Curriculum

by [Philip H. Phenix](#)

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Published by Harper & Brothers, 1961. This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted and Winnie Brock.

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## SUMMARY

**(ENTIRE BOOK)** Professor Phenix purposes a new curriculum centered around the concepts of intelligence, creativity, conscience, and reverence. There is a distinction between the *life of desire*, self-satisfaction narrowly conceived, and the *life of worth*, goodness and excellence, conceived in terms of a moral commitment. Around these concepts come the human characteristics and values essential for a sound education.

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## Chapters

- Chapter 1: Text and Context

An introductory chapter summarizing the intent of the entire book. A variety of subjects — from table manners to international organization, from scientific methods to the tax structure — are discussed at several unifying levels, including education itself to the nature and source of values.

- Chapter 2: Two Democracies

There are two kinds of democracy. The first kind is founded on the principle of organizing life to insure maximum satisfaction of human interests or claims. The other type of democracy centers around devotion or loyalty to the good, the right, the true, the excellent. If the American way of life is to be worthy of survival, and if democratic societies are to offer any lasting solution to the problems of men, the solution lies with this second kind of democracy which is referred to as the democracy of *worth*.

- Chapter 3: Intellectual Excellence

Human intellect is universal; intellectual life is crucial to democracy because it is the source of the human community; intelligence is the source of human freedom; intelligence is the foundation of individuality. Therefore, education should be universal, socially oriented, aimed at the development of mature judgment, and cognizant of individual differences.

- Chapter 4: The Mass Media of Communication

There are three animating spirits in the magic of the new mechanical and electronic arts: First, the mass media are tools for advancing the interests of those who control them. Second is the view that the function of the agencies of mass communication is to create and sustain a "popular culture." The third is that the process of communication is not simply a bipolar one between the publisher and his public, but is a triadic one involving also the controlling reality of truth, which transcends the participants and transforms the relationship between them.

- Chapter 5: Esthetic Excellence

In the aristocratic view it is assumed that esthetic judgments are relevant only to certain kinds of activity and are reserved for the aristocracy only. In the

democratic view there is no experience that does not have its esthetic aspects or dimensions, and the difference between these two views of esthetic ideals have clear consequences for education.

- Chapter 6: Manners

Fundamentally manners are *symbolic forms*, which point to meanings beyond themselves. It is these meanings, not the forms of conduct in themselves, which are important, for they reflect the ideals and the spirit of a culture.

- Chapter 7: Work

Democratic society will not accept the contrast between slave and free and therefore universalizes the responsibility for work. No one is exempt from work, and no fixed classes of persons are assigned to the labor of hand and brain, respectively. Society is not expected to be stratified with respect to labor and leisure, for work is accepted as an intrinsic and universal component of the human situation. Modern technology has largely decreased the difference between the aristocrat and the democrat.

- Chapter 8: Recreation

Leisure is no longer the privilege of a select few; science and invention have been a great support to democracy. Thus the average worker has been so far released from wearing toil that the privileges of “aristocrats” and “ordinary people” have been exchanged. The pleasure principle, which is commonly taken for granted as appropriate in recreation, has influenced the whole of educational practice. The “fun principle” inherent in recreation has infected liberal education and this problem is discussed in detail.

- Chapter 9: The Uses of Nature

Since earth is gratefully recognized as mankind’s home, it is important to give serious consideration to the natural conditions for human well-being and survival. Pollution, the preservation of earth’s resources, and population growth are some of the items discussed.

- Chapter 10: Health

The importance to health is discussed in terms of recreation, work, safety, the use of motor vehicles, bodily exercise, cleanliness, dietary habits, the use of alcoholic

beverages, tobacco and drugs, and mental health.

- Chapter 11: Sex and Family Life

The importance of the family, of marriage, of the nurturing of children, of the proper attitudes and use of the sexual desires, of over-population, of birth control, of homosexuality, of masturbation and of the interrelation of all of these issues are addressed in this chapter.

- Chapter 12: Social Class

The fundamental democratic principle for social class is that the orders and distinctions of society should be based upon the contribution made by a person to the good of society and not upon personal privilege. The distinction between social class and functional classification is discussed particularly in the field of education and the dangers of grading students abilities and the grades in which students are placed.

- Chapter 13: Race

This chapter discusses racial grouping, stereotypes, the errors of racial indicators, the insignificance of skin color, the self-confirming nature of racial stereotyping, and errors in understanding inheritance. Schools must make special efforts to compensate for the effects of race prejudice.

- Chapter 14: Economic Life

There are three systems in which the economic game of desire is played:

*Individual free enterprise; associated free enterprise; controlled economy.*

The American economy has always been a mixture of the three. Because of the growth of population and diminishing resources, the third principle has appeal. The dangers inherent in this and the need for education concerning this are further discussed.

- Chapter 15: Political Organization

The importance of the following items in a democracy of worth are given consideration: the place of law; of power; The Constitution; separation of powers; limited powers; representation; party system; local versus Federal control of education; bearing of political democracy on education; and the responsibility of professional educators.

- [Chapter 16: World Responsibility](#)

A primary objective of education today, in homes, in schools, and through the mass media of communication, should be the full and forceful dissemination of knowledge about the extreme destructiveness of modern weapons of war and about the awful consequences for everybody which would result from their use in any large-scale conflict.

- [Chapter 17: Religion](#)

While it is not within the province of government to determine who is religious and who is not, nor to discriminate between the different forms of religion, irreligion, and idolatry, except where public security is at stake, it is the function of the democratic state to persuade and encourage its citizens toward religious faith and away from irreligion.

#### PREVIOUS

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#### NEXT

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Religion Online is designed to assist teachers, scholars and general “seekers” who are interested in exploring religious issues. Its aim is to develop an extensive library of resources, representing many different points of view, but all written from the perspective of sound scholarship.

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