A STUDY OF ABSOLUTISM: PLATO AS AN ABSOLUTIST
AND HIS INFLUENCE ON MODERN EDUCATION

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CHAPTER I

MEANING AND PHILOSOPHY OF ABSOLUTISM

The word absolutism frightens many people, yet some are unknowingly absolutists. Our inherited religious systems from primitive times to the present have been based upon the philosophy of absolutism. Since our schools were built by our forefathers according to specifications laid down by the church and by the religious leaders of the times, generation after generation of American people have been brought up as absolutists.

Absolutism was one of the basic roots upon which other philosophies were established. Many readers of philosophy confuse absolutism with other philosophies; especially with idealism. But absolutism had a long historical development of its own before the philosophy of idealism was known.

To reduce the chance of being misunderstood, it will be well to give the definitions upon which this study has been developed. There are many vague ideas as to the meaning of absolutism as a philosophy. It has had various uses from the time when Moses set up the Ten Commandments to the present day of progressive education in our modern schools. So what is absolutism? It is a noun coming from the English
word *absolute*, which is a direct and accurate translation of
the Latin word *absolvere*. Its literal meaning is "to be
loosed from" as it is not dependent upon conditions, circum-
stances, or anything else. A synonym of *absolute* which might
clarify the translation is the word *unconditional*. Now we
might say *absolute* means "without limitation of any kind."
Absolutism is defined as the "doctrine of that which is ab-
solute, unconditional, or independent -- Philosophy of Ab-
solute is the name given to that idealistic doctrine which
conceives the whole of reality as one interconnected organic
unity, spiritual in its nature."¹

The absolute does not stand in relation to anything. It
is independent within and of itself. The absolute is a rep-
resentation of God as He is eternal, unchanging, and abso-
lutely One. The philosophy of absolutism is the philosophy
of eternity, while our later philosophical isms are philoso-
phies of time. In Baldwin's *Dictionary of Philosophy and
Psychology* one may note that "the absolute exists in and by
itself, having no necessary relation to any being."² Now
in the philosophy of absolutism, if anything is true at all,
it is always true. In mathematics we learn facts as fixed
and always true; for example, the fact that two plus two are
four is as true at one time as at another. It was the

¹"Absolutism," Webster's New International Dictionary

² "Absolutism," Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology,
James Mark Baldwin, editor, p. 4.
philosopher Ralph Barton Perry who wrote that "absolutism is mathematical and dialectical in method, establishing ultimate truths with demonstrable certainty; . . . Absolutism is monistic, deterministic, quietistic; . . ."  

The present outstanding philosopher, John S. Brubacher, wrote that "'absolutely' means that one takes no exception to it; that he makes no reservations; there are no conditions to his adherence."  

So knowing that absolutism is something unconditional, with no exceptions, no reservations, and no further conditions, one sees that it needs no other justification than itself. It is rock bottom. A few characteristics of the word absolutism are fixed, permanent, unchanging, and eternal; meaning the same yesterday, today, and forever.

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3 Ralph Barton Perry, Present Philosophical Tendencies, p. 198.

CHAPTER II

PLATO, A PHILOSOPHER OF ABSOLUTISM

Absolutism had a long and significant historical development of its own. The very earliest germs of this doctrine might be traced to the Greeks of the golden era. Heraclitus of approximately 500 B.C. was a forerunner of his more illustrious countryman, Plato. During the Middle Ages philosophy other than that connected with the church and its elaborate system of doctrines and dogmas was more or less dormant. Then there was an awakening of philosophical thought during the neo-classical period. It is from this period that the moderns developed a more clear-cut philosophy of absolutism than had been known previously. Instead of being slavish imitators, the neo-classicists accepted the early Greek tenets but revised, elaborated, and adapted them to their own times, conditions, and situations.

One of the great exponents of the doctrine of absolutism in its earliest beginnings was Plato. He was born about 427 B.C. No commentators seem to know the exact year of his birth. He was a descendant of one of the foremost families of the ancient Attic aristocracy.\(^1\) Since he was from a

\(^1\)Constantin Ritter, The Essence of Plato's Philosophy, p. 21.
wealthy and aristocratic family, he probably received the highest educational advantages of any Athenian citizen of those days. He was a typical Greek in that he sought after wisdom and was not satisfied until he had learned all there was to know about life and mankind and the world.

Plato lived a full life and was hard at work writing when death came suddenly and easily about his eightieth year. From his early youth he was closely associated with Socrates. When a young man he had no particular liking for philosophy, but Socrates' tragic death turned him in that direction and caused him to become an ardent disciple not only of Socrates himself but also of philosophical thought in general, once and for all. Plato was one of the most devoted followers Socrates ever had. He was a great philosopher and spoke what he thought. "No philosopher, either of ancient or of modern times, save, perhaps, his master, Socrates, and his pupil, Aristotle, has so won and retained the esteem of thoughtful men."²

Plato gathered and made usable the entire harvest of Greek philosophy. He took thoughts of such great philosophers as Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Socrates as germs of new developments which he himself launched in the realms of philosophical thought. From the axioms of previous great thinkers, especially Socrates, he developed a system of thought of his own.

²B. C. Burt, History of Greek Philosophy, p. 74.
Plato is the first of the Greek philosophers who not merely knew and made use of his predecessors, but consciously completed their principles by means of each other, and bound them all together in one higher principle.  

But Plato failed to accept all that Heraclitus advocated; for Heraclitus taught that everything changes, even to the extent that things are and then they are not. Plato, the absolutist, believed in a world that was fixed, permanent, and unchangeable. Therefore he put his emphasis upon another world; a world more important and better than the earthly world of experience.

What Plato lacks above all, perhaps, is the Heraclitean sense of flux and change; he is too anxious to have the moving picture of this world become a fixed and still tableau.

Plato was in the highest degree an original thinker. By using the thoughts of the previous philosophers as a foundation, he built the palace of a great philosophy.

Plato was the first person in the history of the world to produce a great all-embracing system of philosophy, which has its ramifications in all departments of thought and reality.

It was in Athens that Plato, during the last period of his life, appeared as a professional teacher and philosopher. His whole philosophy is the theory of ideas. In fact, everything else hinges on and is dominated by this theory. This philosophy "is in itself a systematic and coherent body of


4Will Durant, The Story of Philosophy, p. 54.

thought," yet Plato did not express it in a systematic way. He scattered his ideas in all directions and at random in any order. One will be disappointed if he expects to find dogmatic conclusions at every step in Plato.

Again the central and governing principle of Plato's philosophy is the theory or philosophy of ideas. As to his theory of ideas, many confuse the Platonic term *idea* with the ordinary man's definition of idea. The ordinary man takes *idea* to be something in some one's mind; a concept conceived by and having its existence in a consciousness. John Locke, Berkeley, and other philosophers declared that we know only what is in the mind. Locke looked upon the mind as busying itself with ideas. This is the psychological sense of the term. This later theory is just the opposite to Plato's. The Platonic term *idea* is not something in some one's mind. Plato advocated that ideas are not products of any mind, not even of God's mind, as the mind does not form them but discovers them. He did not explain how these ideas exist except that they are always there and do not have their origin in experience. They are just received from on high as God made all things and are the seat of eternal truth, beauty, and goodness.

Plato, however, retained the moral and significant essence of his ideas, and while he made them ideal absolutes, fixed meanings antecedent to their changing expressions never dreamed that they could be natural existences, or psychological beings.⁷

⁶Ibid., p. 176.
⁷Walter C. Muelder and Lawrence Sears, Development of American Philosophy, p. 455.
Before the time of John Locke ideas were held to be innate. Locke differed from Plato's theory that the mind comes into the world already in possession of certain innate truths. We are born with perfectly blank intellects and our ideas come through sensation and reflection, he asserted. The mind learns ideas from experience. But during Plato's time, he held firmly to his belief that principles exist subconsciously in the mind at its beginning and are discovered later by the conscious as it gradually awakens to an awareness of their presence.

The "Idea," apparently, for him, was as little dependent upon mind for its existence as it was upon the material world. It had a kind of being all its own which would not be disturbed, were all the intellects entertaining as well as the particular objects entertaining it to be destroyed.\(^8\)

Plato believed that ideas are eternal, that is, the same yesterday, today, and forever. All ideas exist eternally in the realm of ideas. They are present always, present everywhere, self-existent, self-identical, and absolute. But most important for the educational philosophy of absolutism is the fact that these ideas are held to be eternal and unchanging.

Although there were many objects, there was only one idea of a class of things. The one idea was permanent, static, and unchangeable. It would go on forever. Therefore, again, an idea was absolute. Each idea was independent

\(^8\)A. G. Fuller, *A History of Philosophy*, p. 76.
of another and of every other idea. The idea was complete and perfect in every respect. From the beginning the Platonic ideas were ideals. They were absolute and perfect models of the qualities they represented. They were the essences and perfections of things.

For instance, the Idea of man was an idealized portrait. It was human nature as it would be relieved of all shortcomings and disabilities. The Form of the horse was not any old nag, but a thoroughbred. The Idea of the bed had no lumps in its mattress. The true nature of health was not ordinary but perfect physical and mental well-being.

Now Plato's supreme idea was the idea of the good. He took it as the eternal real ideal or as a pattern of all excellence. He would say that we know things in so far as we apprehend them as good and would proceed to infer their absolute goodness. He held that the good is the ground and cause of all things. Plato went a step farther when he said that all earthly good is a copy of the eternal good. His idea of God fitted into his theory of ideas and made him a greater absolutist, since "God, for Plato, is the principle of absolute spiritual perfection, everlastingly real, the source of all lesser perfections and the pole star of the spirit."¹⁰

As has been said, Plato used Socrates' philosophy, for he "adopts, without alteration, the Socratic doctrine that

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⁹Ibid., p. 78.

¹⁰Joseph A. Leighton, The Field of Philosophy, p. 75.
all knowledge is knowledge through concepts."\textsuperscript{11} Now a concept, which is the same as a definition, is the expression in words of the nature of an idea. According to the philosophy of Plato, it is not merely an idea in the mind but something that has a reality of its own, a reality which is outside and independent of the mind. An absolute is fixed and permanent, therefore an absolute is a concept. The absolute and the reason are self-explanatory principles. From the following quotation it is seen that the absolute is reason:

Plato's theory is that the Absolute is reason, is thought, is concepts, is the universal -- these are merely four different expressions of the same theory. Now this proposition, that the Absolute is reason, is the fundamental thesis of all idealism. Since Plato's time, there have been several great idealistic systems of philosophy. That the Absolute is reason is the central teaching of them all. Plato, therefore, is the founder and initiator of all idealism. It is this that gives him his great place in the history of philosophy. That the Absolute is universal thought, this is what Plato has contributed to the philosophical speculation of the world. This is his crowning merit.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{11}Stace, op. cit., p. 182.

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p. 235.
CHAPTER III

INFLUENCE OF PLATO AND HIS ABSOLUTISM ON MODERN EDUCATION

Up to the twentieth century the word absolute was frequently used with the greatest approval in educational literature. It was at the head of advanced educational thought. Because of its importance it was often spelled with a capital "A" and modified by the article "the." Absolute, then, was the alpha and omega of idealistic educational philosophy.

As has been shown, Plato was an absolutist; therefore his educational program was very stable, fixed, permanent, and unchangeable. But Plato, like many other educators and philosophers, has been criticized on the basis of his theory of education. Naturally he fell short of many of our modern thinkers, while on the other hand he was in advance of some. Many of the topics of undying interest today were discussed frequently by the Greeks in Plato's time. Plato opposed the modes of education of his time, but it can hardly be said that he invented many new ones.

The source of our knowledge of the Platonic doctrine is in Plato's writings. The Republic is recognized as the
greatest of his works, being also the longest with the exception of the Laws. It gives new and old thoughts for no certain age but for all eras. It is the first systematic treatise on educational philosophy in Western literature.

Plato's views of education are in some respects remarkable, and certainly, for their time, they were unique. He kept in mind the characteristics of the education of the Greek people. His views of education were partially in conformity to accepted Greek beliefs, but they were essentially ideal.

Plato founded the first university in Europe when he set up the Academy. Educational procedures administered in his Academy have influenced our schools to the present time. We owe to Plato the idea of an organized school with a regular staff of teachers and with a definite curriculum. Very little evidence has been recorded as to the plan of teaching and study that Plato employed in his Academy. But Plato's object in all activities of the Academy was to arrive at final philosophical truths and to arouse the soul to a consciousness of the meaning of life and the mind to a recognition of the importance of thought. His greatest aim for education was "to put the soul in tune with this world and with God."¹ There is evidence that biological studies were

of great interest among his pupils. He used the Academy not only as a lecture hall where his hearers took notes but also as an institute for scientific research. "Plato seems to have done a great deal in the way of directing research and suggesting problems of investigation." He believed that anything really worth knowing could not be learned by merely listening to instructions. For he was convinced that the only true method of learning science was that of being actually engaged in the discovery of scientific truth while in company with more advanced minds or with instructors. Since John Dewey's principle of "learning by doing" became recognized and popularized in our schools, modern educators have advocated the theory set up by Plato. Besides the lecture method and the research method, Plato's question-and-answer method was seemingly his favorite type of recitation. For "Plato believed thoroughly in keeping the mind open and trying questions in every possible way."  

Plato's curriculum began with the very young child. He believed that educational instruction should be presented to the child without compulsion because he was sure that learning or knowledge acquired under compulsion has no hold on the mind. It is easier for the teacher to find out the talent or natural bent of the child if his early education is a sort of amusement. This is certainly in step with our

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2G. C. Field, Plato and His Contemporaries, p. 38.
3E. C. Furt, History of Greek Philosophy, p. 77.
modern kindergartens and primary schools. This plan, frequently accepted as recent or ultra-modern, was advocated by Plato in his Republic. But to Plato, the amusements must not become lawless if youth is to grow up into a well-disciplined citizenry. In spite of this sort of amusement, Plato believed that youth has to be trained in a strict system of order or discipline so that it will ultimately become a well-behaved citizenry.

Plato expected the children to learn their "rudiments" in a comparatively short period of three years. He meant by their "rudiments" the "three R's"; that is, reading, writing, arithmetic, and probably drawing. The Greek curriculum of his time was very simple. No lessons were devoted to geography, history, grammar, or religion except those found in the limited number of stories or in memory work from Homer and other poets. Plato was convinced that the child would learn religious and moral truths, and good manners and taste, if he could be brought up in happy surroundings where neither sights nor sounds of evil could hurt his character. The child was to live in an atmosphere of health. In fact, all the child's surroundings were to convey ceaseless impressions of truth and goodness. His school had a marked religious atmosphere. The moral instruction from stories and myths left such impressions on the child that he would naturally choose the right conduct, it was thought.
Again Plato influenced our modern educators in the belief that the beginning training is the most important stage in educating youth. At that time the youth's soul is fresh and unsophisticated; therefore it is readily open to impressions. The child's body and mind are then most plastic. The master, Plato, believed that children should hear only the tales and stories which are good, that is, models of virtuous thought. Traditionally we have leaned to the view that literature and art are absolute standards of beauty. Then realizing the importance of their educational values, we use them in our curricula. Plato believed that youth should have before it only the best imitations of life because these representations not only can but they actually do influence habits which affect youth's body, voice, and mind. Young people should hear of the noble characters in good literature as well as learn to love and admire good literature. Therefore Plato recognized that one gradually becomes what he imitates. For this reason the importance of subjecting youth to wholesome influences to challenge emulation of the noble and the good is pre-eminent.

Plato practically anticipated the latest results of child study, which tell us that the child builds up the whole substance of his conception of himself out of materials borrowed from others and incorporated in himself by imitative reproduction.4

In Plato's time, as has been indicated, certain years

of the child's life were devoted to required subjects. A child began reading and writing at the age of ten but did not start music and gymnastics until he was approaching the teen age.

A boy should begin reading and writing at the age of ten and spend three years on them; music need not be begun till he is thirteen and should be continued for three years. These times should be made compulsory whether the boy or his father has any taste for the subjects or not.5

Plato thought of music as a pleasure as well as an attainment of virtue. There were to be separate songs for the boys and girls. The boys' music was to imitate the brave while the girls' was to imitate the modest. He believed in teaching gymnastics along with the music in order to obtain complete, coordinated, and harmonious growth. Music by itself, he asserted, makes youth too soft to face the hardships and dangers in life. Gymnastics by itself makes youth's nature too savage. But by combination of the two, the child will form a well-balanced mind and a stable character. He will become noble and good because rhythm and harmony will find their ways into the soul. A good soul improves the body. Now Plato's entire educational program is addressed to the soul or the heart rather than to the head. His educational program is to develop character as much as it is to develop the talents. Our courses in character

5John Burnett, Greek Philosophy, Thales to Plato, p. 309.
training and child guidance derive from this philosophy. He would approve our present-day courses in industrial arts and picture books in science because they are used as a means for the appreciation of beautiful works of art and beautiful objects in nature. In fact, he considered that what one loves is more important than what one knows.

Thus, according to Plato, the important thing for youth to secure, by the time he is seventeen, is the admiration of noble deeds, and noble words, and noble character.  

From the ages of sixteen to eighteen mathematical sciences were the studies to be taught and to be learned in order for the child to cultivate the habit of abstraction. In some of our classrooms today the children are struggling with mathematical sciences for no other purposes than to receive credits to graduate or to cultivate the habit of abstraction as planned by their school authorities. Plato insisted on preliminary training in mathematics for all students and on study of geology, botany, and zoology for all male adults.

Higher education in Plato's scheme was almost exclusively mathematical. He exaggerated the need of mathematics because any one of the mathematical sciences trains the reasoning faculties. He said that those who had studied geometry were infinitely quicker in apprehension than those who had not. To Plato each pupil must learn to think.

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6Hyde, op. cit., p. 135.
Now, no discipline is finer in sifting out the deficient, and in achieving progress in the direction of understanding, than the study of mathematics: one requirement stands out supreme; he must think. Through mathematics one enters not only the sacred realm of ideas but one is touching at every hand the chaste realm of ideals. For Plato ideas are ideals.\footnote{Vergilius Ferm, First Adventures in Philosophy, p. 151.}

But during the last two decades education has veered from the study of mathematics except in its most rudimentary skills. However, there seems to be a general tendency in recent years to restore this subject to its former high place in education.

In Plato's educational program the children entered at a certain age into the prescribed learning experiences, and their steps of advancement were planned according to the age of the individual child. This plan still holds true in many of our schools, especially in the elementary grades. It can be said that compulsory education was developed by and handed down to us from Plato. Certain subjects are required of the pupils whether they show an aptitude for them or an interest in them or not. Of course, these subjects are the tools, theoretically at least, that will enable the child to advance into his desired field of special training. But often these subjects that have been selected in advance by school authorities are assumed to be the most necessary part in our programs. The child is to achieve an absolute minimum of them in order to be successful as a student in school, as an earner.
of a livelihood in later life. But in Plato's time education was intended strictly for the ruling minority. He confined his plan of higher education to a select aristocracy. He thought the working classes were not capable of being educated. Plato took for granted that every individual would belong to one of three classes: the artisan, the warrior, or the ruler. Each class would have specific duties in which its members were to be carefully trained. Plato trained the child for his place in society while today through modern educational practices we help the child to make his own place in society. Plato's beliefs that human beings vary widely in intellectual ability, that only a few are capable of grasping higher learning, and that only the few capable of learning the advanced subjects should take them are still beliefs of our modern educators. These are evident in our universities which give matriculation examinations. After the deficient were sifted out by the stringencies of his educational program, Plato would select the most promising youths; namely, the sons of the ruling and prominent families of northern Greece, and give them a severe course in the study of science. Today in our high schools and in our institutions of higher learning, the students make a special study of some one or two particular courses.

Plato laid down the fundamental principles of a philosophy of education when he asserted that it was the business of education to discover what each person is good for, and to train him to mastery of that mode of excellence, because such development
would also secure the fulfillment of social needs in the most harmonious way. His error was not in his qualitative principles, but in his limited conception of the scope of vocations socially needed; a limitation of vision which reacted to obscure his perception of the infinite variety of capacities found in different individuals.\(^8\)

Plato did not seem to recognize the fact that education is relative to the characters of individuals. He desired to impress the same set patterns of learning on all minds. He was such an absolutist that he feared a change would be dangerous. If the games played by one generation were changed, Plato feared that that generation would grow up a different sort of people. These ideas have influenced our schools greatly, for we find that "one of the hardest things for us to learn is that it is not our business to impose our own standards upon the next generation."\(^9\) We must remember that every age demands an education suited to its own conditions and times.

In speaking of training the youth of Plato's time, we find divergent statements in regard to the education of the girls and women. At the age of six lessons were to begin in earnest with the segregation of the girls from the boys. Plato believed that the girls should begin military exercises and the use of weapons from ages three to six as the boys did if they liked. He emphasized that care should be taken

\(^8\)John Dewey, Democracy and Education, p. 361.

\(^9\)Boyd H. Bode, Modern Educational Theories, p. 238.
to train the children to be ambidextrous or otherwise the children would be only half able-bodied. This was considered very necessary in teaching the use of weapons; especially for the boys in handling the bow. The women of his day were to receive the same training as the men in so far as their reputedly weaker intelligent natures permitted. He did not consider men and women equal in education. Women must even undergo military training so that they would not be a useless burden to the state in time of peril.

It is not easy to gather from Plato’s language, either in the "Republic" or in the "Iaws," in what he intended that women should be educated. In both dialogues he tells us that the two sexes are to learn music and gymnastics on equal footing. 10

In our day no distinction is made between the education of the sexes. Even courses that were planned for one particular sex are just as popular with the opposite. But when we find conflicting statements as to Plato’s plan, as we do in reading Warbeke’s analysis of his philosophy, we are somewhat at a loss to determine a logical middle course between divergent views. We can safely say, however, that Plato’s scheme definitely influences our modern schools.

There are no distinctions of sex in Plato’s educational scheme. From its beginning to the highest ranges of scientific and philosophical studies, women are to have the same privileges as men. 11

10Jowett, editor, Works of Plato, p. 444.

Plato was the first writer who distinctly said that he was certain that the proper function of education is to comprehend the whole of life and to make its meanings clear to youth. He was in advance of modern philosophers and theologians when he taught that education is to be continued through life and to be begun in another world. Again the modern educators are influenced by Plato because they believe in a continuous education from the cradle to the grave. So Plato's thought may not be wholly inapplicable to our own times when adult education has advanced rapidly in order to raise our American men and women above the routine of their everyday occupations or professions. Modern adult education in America differs from that of Plato in that it is for every citizen as he chooses, while Plato intended it for only a few; namely, the philosophers or the men of genius. This implies that Plato had a higher opinion of the value of education than even the modern democrat, who imagines that education is to diffuse knowledge to the masses. In our democratic country education itself is an absolute requirement. The hope of the world seems to hang on education.

Of course we want to achieve economic, civic, and religious objectives through education, but even more important to education is the insurance of the continuance of its own process. In other words, education is truly its own end. It is like growth, so fundamental that it needs no eternal or ulterior warrant for its justification. It is a good in and of itself. It, too, is an absolute.12

It was Plato's belief that man must be educated in order to attain justice on this earth and to cure vice which arises chiefly from ignorance. Is it not the belief of our educators today that through the education of our citizens there should be less vice in the world? The whole of education should be directed to acquire such knowledge as will teach the learners to refuse the evil and to choose the good. As has been indicated in Chapter II, the idea of good is the highest knowledge, and all other things become useful and advantageous only by their use of this knowledge. Plato believed that the whole of education would teach man to refuse the evil and the ugly, and to choose the good and the beautiful. The love for the good and the beautiful is indicative of the highest type of character. Again Plato's whole idea of education was to achieve an orderly and harmonious soul which would be in perfect attunement with God.

"Man must be educated in order to attain justice and through it to become like God."^{13}

"In this present age of thought, Plato's absolutism becomes a term of opprobrium or a word of reproach. It is not popular in the democratic countries. We had just as well admit that absolutism is at odds in our modern educational program. The term has fallen into disrepute because it is often used to indicate the direct opposite of what is now

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^{13}Alfred Weber, History of Philosophy, p. 73.
thought to be modern, democratic, or progressive education.

But after searching the standards of our schools, we might say that here lies absolutism, because our modern education holds to its fundamental beliefs tenaciously. Then the struggle seems to be between absolutism and our modern educational program. On the one hand absolutism is always absolute, exacting, and fixed; while on the other hand our modern educational program involves absolutes if one analyzes its foundations and if its leaders say everything must be modern or democratic or progressive.

Our clue to democracy lies in its quarrel with absolutes. Democracy stands for the common man and for the application of "operational" procedures in the construction of ideals or purposes, as well as in the determination of means for achieving predetermined goals. The great obstacle to democracy, down to the present day, is the Platonic philosophy which lifts purposes or values out of the realm of everyday living and places them where "operational" procedures cannot reach them. The center of an educational program which professes to be democratic must be irreconcilable conflict between democracy and absolutism.\textsuperscript{14}

Again, somewhere in the background of all educational theories, there is an inherent absolutism. Our modern or democratic educational program, which theoretically is contrary to absolutism, is absolute itself when it has set up, as it so often does, its do's and don't's in order to be modern. It has been said many times that education is life.

Life, it seems, demands absolutes, no matter what educators may say. Progressive education never

\textsuperscript{14}Boyd H. Bode, \textit{Progressive Education at the Crossroads}, p. 112.
escapes from the coils of absolutism. The trail of the serpent is over it all.  

Our inherited religious systems from primitive times to the present have been characterized by absolutism. Right and wrong have always appeared to be very definite and pronounced. Our religious forefathers built the schools on the plans of the church. Naturally absolutism has had its influence on the educators for many generations. "Absolutist beliefs and modes of thinking are far too deeply ingrained in our civilization to be laid aside easily."  

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16 Bode, Progressive Education at the Crossroads, p. 115.
CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION: A CHALLENGE TO THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES OF TODAY

Since it is difficult to confine absolutism as a philosophy of the old school only, a few suggestions are in order to lessen the influence of absolutism in our public schools and colleges of today.

Sad, but true, in many of our popular colleges and universities teachers of tomorrow are being trained by faculties indoctrinating progressive educational theories through the old absolute methods. College faculties and students need to recognize modern educational theories and to practice them. There are too many rigid demands, too much stress on the credit or grading system, too many burdensome assignments, too long a list of absolutely required subjects, and too little leisure, in and out of classrooms, for students' own thoughts, much less for pursuing their interests in personally preferred studies. It is doubtful that our modern schools will ever overcome absolutism or be free of it when professors continue to use the lecture method or, rather, the pouring method from their ancient notebooks. Then, in turn, students are expected to hand back the lecture almost
word for word in order to secure a high score. Many teachers have the idea that the children are empty vessels and that they are the full vessels. These teachers feel it is their duty to transmit their knowledge to the children by continuously lecturing or even reading from ancient, cut-and-dried notes. The pupils can take the notes, listen, or just sit as some teachers go so far as to tell the class they can take it or leave it. Then these lecturing teachers ask for their given notes back on examinations. These teachers should remember that youth are active, exploring agents and not passive recipients.

There are many objections raised against examinations on the ground that they breed unhealthy competition, that they are an inadequate test of real value to the individual, and that they develop ostentatiousness. Examinations or tests should be given only in so far as they can serve as educational procedures that can logically promote the habit of accurate, precise, and speedy thinking.

Universities, colleges, and many high schools need more discussions and reports from the student body. When this one particular thing is accomplished, our youth will be able to express themselves in an intellectual manner. Then our trained teachers can in turn furnish our colleges with students who are able to express their own beliefs on classroom topics without fear of jeopardizing their chances for a high score.
When college faculties, who are training teachers for tomorrow's public schools, say everything must be progressive in handling the young child, yet instruct the college youth with absolute methods, our modern, progressive, and democratic educational theories are weakened. The teachers are entitled to require certain work to be done, since it is presumed that they are the best judges as to what should be accomplished. It is the business of the teachers, who must have a broad, deep understanding of life along with a safe and sane life philosophy, to present the subject matter so that it will become vital to the learners.

Too many modern educators, as a guide in exacting their own viewpoints in their particular courses, have held the word absolute taboo, yet absolutism still dominates their own characteristic methods; namely, those which are fixed, permanent, and unchanging. These educators have organized their subject matter in such a cut-and-dried fashion that the youth will become thwarted and crushed. A more wholesome educational environment needs to be created so the youth will be directed and strengthened in their natural dispositions. Often instructors who use these absolute methods of teaching cover so many pages in the different texts, whether or not the students have learned the subject matter therein contained. "Woe to him who teaches faster than they can learn."

\[^1\text{Durant, op. cit., p. 16.}\]
Attitudes, appreciations, purposes, and ideals are far more important in learning than completed exercises, recitations, and crammed examinations. So to the instructors of this professed modern educational system, let our youth have opportunities to develop an all-American personality in a democratic school. This is the most pronounced need of the hour.
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