Education and Character

The Classical Curriculum of Wilhelm von Humboldt

by Marianna Wertz

It is by now a commonplace that our schools are turning out illiterates, freaks, morons, and homosexuals more readily than competent, well-trained individuals. The "reforms" of the past twenty years have done what they were, in fact, intended to do: destroy American public education.

Almost fifteen years ago, however, in August 1981, Lyndon LaRouche authored a Special Education Supplement called "War Against 'Liberal' School Reforms." LaRouche recommended adoption of a modified version of the classical education curriculum implemented by the Nineteenth-century German philologist Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) during his brief stint as head of the Prussian educational establishment, as the best antidote to the "liberal" education reforms that were already ravaging the minds of our children. That curriculum, LaRouche said, was "a quantum-leap superior to the American educational system, and . . . the highest degree of approximation of what education should be which civilization has developed in any nation to date."

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Wilhelm von Humboldt

Whatever urgency LaRouche attached to adopting the Humboldt curriculum in 1981 is doubly and triply urgent today. The only real question, is not whether to fight for the classical curriculum, but whether it is too late for this generation of students. Have the minds of our children been too polluted by the influence of de-schoolers and "politically correct" thought police, to be able to learn how to think?

Why Classical Greek?

Wilhelm von Humboldt's reforms of the Prussian school system were thorough-going and revolutionary. They produced the best-educated citizenry that any nation has ever known—a fact which is universally acknowledged.

What was the secret? His reforms were based on Humboldt's understanding, as a student of philology, of the universal role of language in the development of the human mind. Philology, whose Greek root means "love of words," pertains to the study of comparative language. In particular, Humboldt centered his reforms on mastering the language of the Golden Age of Greece, which Humboldt himself mastered by the age of eighteen.

In an age when not only are Greek and Latin virtually no longer taught, but when a student is lucky to learn one foreign language, Humboldt's proposals may sound

utopian. But the study of classical languages goes to the heart of the problem we face today in answering the question: Why can't Johnny read?

Humboldt wrote, in a letter to his wife Caroline, "It is only through the study of language that there comes into the soul, out of the source of all thoughts and feelings, the entire expanse of ideas, everything that concerns man, above all and beyond everything else, even beauty and art."

He held that "Language is deeply entwined in the intellectual development of humanity itself, it accompanies the latter upon every step of its localized progression or regression; moreover, the pertinent cultural level in each case is recognizable in it. . . . Language is, as it were, the external manifestation of the minds of peoples. Their language is their soul, and their soul is their language. It is impossible to conceive them ever sufficiently identical. . . . The creation of language is an innate necessity of humanity. It is not a mere external vehicle, designed to sustain social intercourse, but an indispensable factor for the development of human intellectual powers, culminating in the formulation of philosophical doctrine."

No wonder today's students, taught by the disciples of the Modern Language Association that the word "woman" should be written "womyn" to eliminate sexual bias, are losing their souls!

As to the study of classical Greek, Humboldt, in an autobiographical fragment written when he was nearly fifty, emphasized the role that the study of the classics had in his own development: "I have always had a revulsion against interfering in the world and an urge to stand free of it, observing and examining it. This led me naturally to feel that only the most unconditional self-control might give me the standpoint outside the world that I should need. . . . These notions were first awakened in me by antiquity, later they kept me in relation to the ancients for evermore."

In commenting on the importance of studying classical Greek for the Prussia of his day, Humboldt's words are equally appropriate for our own time: "The study of the characteristics of Greek culture is especially beneficial in an epoch when, for countless reasons, attention is more focussed on masses of men than on individuals, more on external values and uses than on inner worth and enjoyment, and when a high and variegated culture has deviated very far from the earlier simplicity. . . . When the [Greek] nation had not yet entirely raised itself out of primitive circumstances, it already possessed an uncommonly subtle feeling for everything beautiful in nature and art. . . . The broad diffusion of the feeling for beauty among the entire nation is especially admirable; and nothing can be more important for *our* world than a comprehension of this characteristic feature."

His intent, he said, was to "inoculate the Germans with the Greek spirit."

In LaRouche's 1981 article, he pointed to the connection between mastery of classical language and of physical science, as the key to understanding why Humboldt's reform program was so successful.

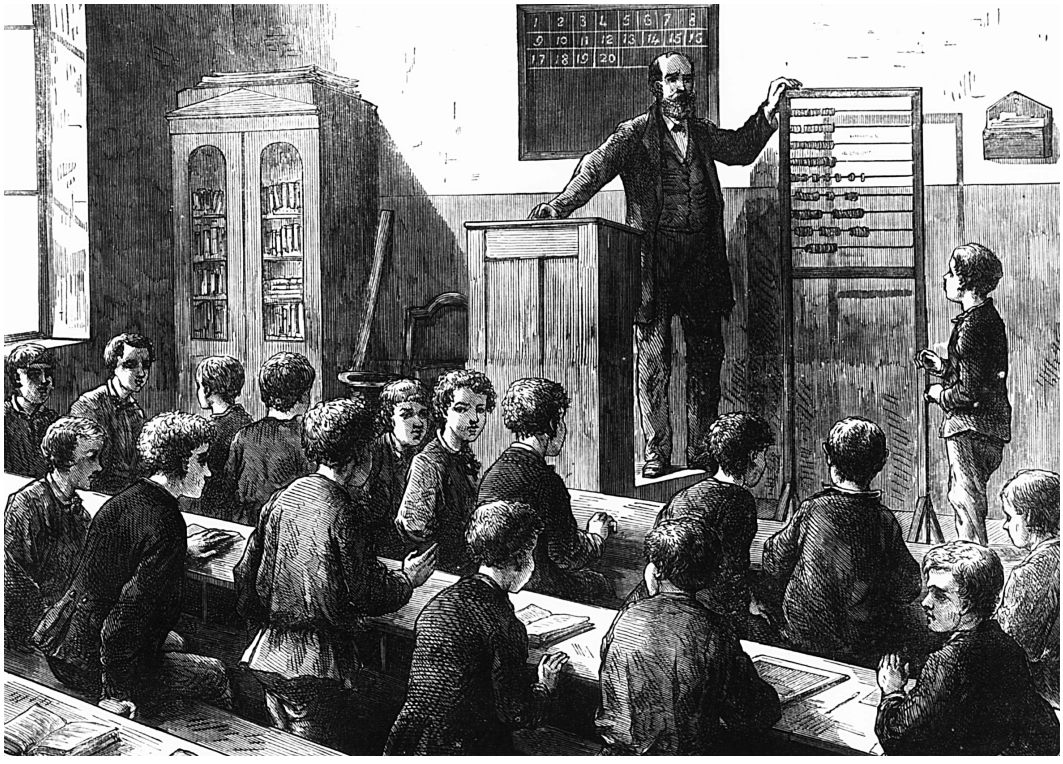
"The great discovery to be made, to understand adequately the Humboldt program's success, is that the mastery of classical philology against a background of classical Greek literature, is the method proven most effective for developing a *potentially* great master of discovery in physical science. . . .

"A language which has developed the facility to communicate conceptions congruent with physical geometry, if this feature is mastered by the student, imparts to the student a highly developed predisposition for mastering physics from a physical-geometric standpoint. . . .

"Classical Greek has a special place in every successful and attempted renaissance in European civilization. It was the massive introduction of classical Greek sources into Europe in the Fifteenth century, typified by the role of Plethon in this, which provided the explosion of knowledge and revolutionary impulse in development of European languages—out of the depths of brutish local dialects during that period. . . .

"The clear historical significance of classical Greek—from Homer through Plato—is that this represents the development of a language out of the barbaric depths of the preceding dark age of illiteracy, a language which, through the mediation of the Ionian city-states and the allies of Solon, Socrates, and Plato, assimilated into its best usage the sum of all of the essential knowledge gathered from the world of that time. It was a language which reflected in its best usages, necessarily, the evolution of the capacity to assimilate and develop such acquired knowledge. . . .

"Classical philology, combined with classical music and poetic compositional knowledge, applied to the mastery of one's own language, impart critical consciousness of one's own thought, impart a sense of the causal connectedness of large spans of history, and help the young individual to locate himself or herself efficiently within history as a process of development. This can be accomplished only with aid of a classical language, not one's own, in which the highest level of moral culture, such as Plato's, is provided. This must be a real language of the past, in respect to which one can situate the development of one's own language and the



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"Through general education, the person's powers, i.e., the human being himself, become strengthened, purified. Any skill which does not elevate the powers of thought and imagination is dead and sterile," wrote Humboldt.
Above: *A Nineteenth-century Berlin schoolroom.*

civilization of which one is part.

"What we discern, examining these matters in light of primary sources discovered in archives as well as those already in print, is that what the collaborators of the great organizers, the Humboldts, built into the German educational system's achievements is nothing other than a distillation of the greatest contributions of European civilization—including the young United States—up to that point."

Who Was Humboldt?

Wilhelm von Humboldt was a philosopher, a scholar, a philologist, and a statesman. His brother Alexander (1769-1859), a scientist, world-traveller and statesman, is the better known of the two, because of his global voyages in search of scientific knowledge. The name Humboldt adorns cities, libraries, statues, rivers, and streams on almost every continent in the world, as a result of the two brothers' works.

While both Humboldts were involved in the reform of Prussian education, it was more immediately the work of Wilhelm, as Alexander was in Paris during most of the period in which the reforms occurred. We will therefore focus our account on Wilhelm.

Wilhelm von Humboldt was born of baronial lineage. His father served as Chamberlain to Frederick the Great, King of Prussia (1740-86), and was a personal friend of his successor, Frederick William II (1786-97). The Humboldt brothers therefore grew up in royal circles, familiarity with which was crucial for the implementation of the reform program under Frederick William III (1797-1840), great-grandson of Frederick the Great.

From his mother's side, Humboldt got his Huguenot lineage. The Huguenots, French Protestants, colonized Prussia following the 1685 revocation of the Edict of Nantes. They were the transmitters of culture wherever they settled and their colonization is the true secret of the rise of Prussian power in the Eighteenth century.

Humboldt was brought up and educated in Berlin by a private tutor. He attended Göttingen University, then the center of scientific learning in Prussia. His training in classical antiquity began at Göttingen under Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729-1812), the classical scholar and archeologist.

The two greatest and most formative influences on the young Humboldt were Friedrich August Wolf (1759-1824) and Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805). Wolf was the first German to call himself a student of philology. A professor at the University of Halle, he was considered the greatest classical scholar in Germany, and passed on to a generation of scholars and teachers the enthusiasm for ancient Greece that had conquered the German intellectual world in the late Eighteenth century. He became Humboldt's trusted adviser and friend in implementing his reforms.

Friedrich Schiller, the great "Poet of Freedom," had the most profound impact on Humboldt, who spent two years in his close company, during one of the most pro-

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Humboldt's closest teachers and friends included the philologist Friedrich August Wolf (left), and the poet Friedrich Schiller (right). His brother Alexander von Humboldt (below) became a world-famous naturalist and explorer.

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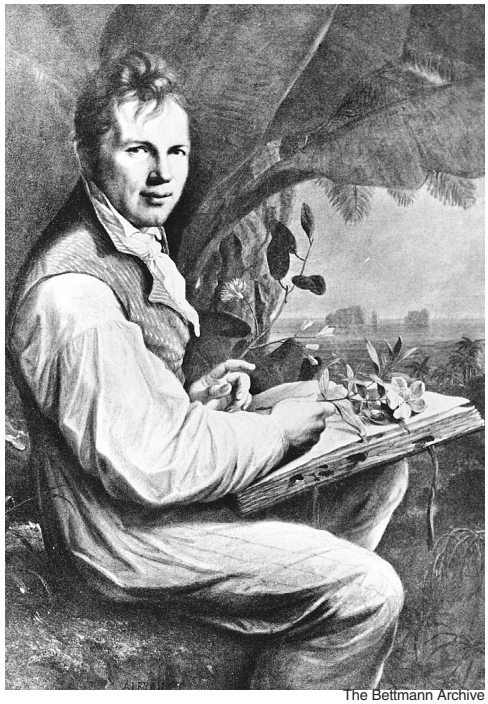
ductive periods in Schiller's life. Humboldt called Schiller "the greatest and finest person I have ever known."

In mid-1794, Humboldt moved his family to Jena, where Schiller had taken up a position as professor of history at the University in spring of 1789. Humboldt recounts, "I had chosen Jena as my residence in order to be near Schiller. . . . We saw each other twice every day. Especially in the evenings we were likely to be alone, and we generally talked until far into the night."



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Schiller, at thirty-five years old, had already published four important plays, *The Robbers, Cabal and Love, Fiesco,* and *Don Carlos;* two historical works, *The Revolt of the Netherlands* and *The Thirty Years War;* and much wonderful poetry. During the months spent in Humboldt's company, he was working on his seminal writing on aesthetics, the *Letters on the Aesthetical Education of Man,* which was a constant subject of discussion between the two, and had also just published *On Grace and Dignity.*

Humboldt captures Schiller's impact on him, through these discussions, and on the entire German nation as well, in his essay "On Schiller and the Course of His Spiritual Development," published in 1830. "There is a more direct and fuller influence which a great mind has than through his works. These show but a portion of his being. In the living presence, it overflows purely and completely. In a manner which permits of no detailed demonstration or investigation, which thought itself is not able to follow, it is assimilated by his contemporaries and passed on to succeeding generations."

Schiller's appreciation for, and criticism of, Humboldt, is expressed in a letter to their mutual friend Christian Gottfried Körner (1756-1831): "I find Humboldt infinitely congenial and at the same time a useful acquaintance. In conversation with him all my ideas develop better and more quickly. There is a totality in his make-up which one very rarely sees. . . .

"For conversation, he is quite remarkably well suited. He takes an exceptionally objective interest in the subject at hand, awakens every dormant idea, requires from one the utmost precision; at the same time he guards against one-sidedness and rewards every effort one makes to explain oneself by his remarkable aptitude for grasping and examining the thoughts of others. Helpful as this is for anyone who has a certain fund of ideas to communicate, it is also helpful to him; indeed it is very necessary for him to be set in action by an external stimulus . . . because he can never originate something but can merely analyze and combine."

Schiller's criticism was welcome to Humboldt, who was spurred on by it to greater achievement. In a letter to

Schiller in 1796, after the two had parted, Humboldt reflected his understanding of Schiller's greater genius, and of its source: "I feel very much what I lack," he confided. "It is the energy to attack a subject passionately, to be swept along by it, to be continuously seized of it: I lack genius. . . ."

Another major influence in Humboldt's life was the philosophy of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. Steeped in the works of Leibniz during his schooling, he never abandoned the Leibnizian world view and ethics. Leibniz's concept of striving for the truth as the real meaning of life, and inner perfection as its true end, remained his guiding principle. Indeed, his central educational concept—*Bildung,* or the cultivation of the individual's full personality as the aim of teaching—is grounded in Leibnizian philosophy.

Finally, the study and translation of classical Greek was central to his life from early youth to the day he died. Humboldt spent twenty years, from 1796, when he was living in Jena, to 1816, when he had just completed a losing battle as Prussia's negotiator of the Treaty of Vienna, translating the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylos.

It was of immense importance, Humboldt affirmed, that translations of the masterpieces of other nations and other times be widely read, for they reveal otherwise "unknown forms of art and of humanity." He held that the best translation is as true as possible to the original. It will necessarily have a coloration of strangeness, he said, for people like the Greeks were not moderns and should not be made to appear as though they were.

"I have undertaken to remain as faithful as possible to the meter of the original," he said, while working on translating the chorus from Aeschylos' *The Eumenides.* "This does not seem to me at all unimportant, since such a translation is not designed merely to give pleasure to the dilettante who can scarcely understand it, but has, rather, the purpose to test his vital energies [*Kräfte*] on a difficult work of art."

The Context of Humboldt's Reforms

The reform of Prussian education took place in what can be fairly described as a political and military cauldron. The situation Humboldt faced, in fact, was far worse than the admittedly hideous battleground that characterizes many of our nation's schools today. Prussia had just experienced total defeat at the hands of Napoleon Bonaparte. Indeed, it is a great historic lesson that it was Prussia's total defeat at the battle of Jena in 1806, and the resultant occupation and humiliation, which prompted, indeed drove, the general Prussian program of reform in which Humboldt's work was situated.

Unlike the French, of whom Schiller said that the "great moment" of the 1789 Revolution had found a "little people," the Prussian leadership rose to the occasion and transformed their defeat into an enduring triumph for Germany and mankind in general.

The following account, published in *German Education, Past and Present,* written in 1908 when German schools still reflected Humboldt's reforms, by Friedrich Paulsen, Professor of Philosophy in the University of Berlin, summarizes the context in which Humboldt's reforms occurred:

"The terrible downfall of Prussia came to it as a most effective warning that nothing but the full development and the unsparing self-devotion of all its national forces would suffice to restore its power, nay, to save the whole German people from utter ruin. This conviction formed the keynote of the great national uprising. . . . If the state and the nation are to be restored at all, they thought, the state must cease to be looked upon exclusively as a concern of the dynasty, and must come to be regarded as quite as much an affair of the people themselves. But this could only be accomplished by rousing the people from the passive lethargy engendered by the public police supervision, and the still more disgraceful private subjection to the great landowners, and by making them active cooperators in public affairs—in short, by raising mere subjects, and, indeed, subjects of subjects, to the level of free citizens of the state." This, indeed, was Humboldt's assignment.

Humboldt was notified in late 1808, while he was Prussian ambassador to the Holy See in Rome, of his pending appointment as privy councilor and director of the section for ecclesiastical affairs and education in the Ministry of the Interior. He let it be known that he preferred to remain in Rome, where he was pursuing his classical studies in a generally secluded lifestyle, though Napoleon's armies had also occupied Rome. But the call of duty prevailed.

Humboldt left Rome for Germany in October 1808, leaving his wife and children behind until he could get settled. In Prussia, Baron Heinrich Friedrich Karl vom Stein (1757-1831), acting on exceptional powers granted by King Frederick William III, who had come to power in 1797, had been carrying forward a vigorous reform and recovery program following the disastrous defeat at Jena. Vom Stein had chosen Humboldt to head the Prussian educational establishment, not because of any specific training—he had none—but because of the quality of his mind and his devotion to the German nation. Vom Stein had also, at the urging of Humboldt's friend

F.A. Wolf, nominated him as an honorary member of the Prussian Academy of Sciences in August.

Vom Stein's reform program included significant steps toward emancipation of the peasants, the creation of local self-government and a national army, and reorganization of the national government of Prussia, which had collapsed in the wake of the defeat at Jena. He and others in his milieu, including the military reform leaders Gerhard von Scharnhorst (1755-1813), *de facto* war minister and chief of staff, Neidhardt von Gneisenau (1760-1831), head of the Prussian Army, and Karl von Clausewitz (1780-1831), believed strongly that educational reform was necessary if enduring political and military reform were to be achieved. Later, in 1813, while negotiating for Prussia at the French-Austrian-Prussian-Russian conference at Prague, Humboldt wrote to Gneisenau, "I have the deepest respect for our army, which I regard as the noblest part of the nation, and this respect will guide me every step of the way."

Within two weeks after Humboldt arrived in Prussia, vom Stein was forced to resign. He had entered into plans for Prussian forces to join with the Austrians in a war of liberation against Napoleon, which the King, wishing to remain neutral, was unwilling to allow. Vom Stein represented forces in Prussia which were outraged at Napoleon's insistence that she pay a very large indemnity, while continuing to allow French troops to occupy fortresses in the heart of the country. Among other insults, was a Napoleonic edict ordering people to turn in at the mint all their silver, gold, jewels, and pearls, "up to the last teaspoon," in return for worthless paper money.

French forces, which had been occupying Berlin since 1806, left a month before Humboldt arrived. The King and his household were in Königsberg, in eastern Prussia (now Kaliningrad in Russia), out of Napoleon's reach. On April 9, war broke out between Austria and France. One day earlier, Humboldt had departed Berlin for Königsberg, anticipating the worst. By the middle of May the French were in Vienna, and, following a disastrous defeat for Austria, a shattering peace treaty was signed in October 1809.

The situation in the German countryside was similar to that we see today in the devastated areas of the former Soviet Union. Humboldt reported that people were eating wood. This, then, was the backdrop to Humboldt's sixteen months as head of Prussia's education ministry.

Philosophy of Education

Humboldt's approach to reforming the Prussian school system was based on his determination to create *citizens* capable of thinking for themselves. "The most ordinary day laborer," Humboldt said, must have the same *Fundament*—basic education—as "the most highly educated person," and "every part of the system should be interlocked with every other part."


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The concept of *Allgemeine Bildung*—or well-rounded education—was central to Humboldt's approach, and was based on his own lifelong learning process. *Bildung* was not a utilitarian enterprise to prepare students for particular ways of earning a living; rather, it was a lifelong process, distinct from vocational or professional training, and was to inform teaching at all three levels of the Prussian school system—elementary, secondary, and university. Through *Bildung,* each person might seek to realize the human potentialities that he possessed as a unique individual.

Contrast this to the attempt to "reform" our schools today by the "back to basics" movement or, worse yet, those who track students into trade schools or worse. No, Humboldt said, every person has a basic right to the best education possible, to become a fully functioning citizen.

As Humboldt was confronted by problems in the reform process, he drafted comprehensive memoranda which, taken together, provide the substance of the Humboldtian program of education.

Two of the most famous of these memoranda, the "school plans" for Königsberg and Prussian Lithuania, are classic pronouncements on the application of the ideal of *Bildung* to education. These plans, excerpted here, were written in response to a request for policy on the relation of vocational education to general education.

School Plan for Königsberg

Here is what Humboldt wrote:

"Philosophically, education has only three stages: Elementary education, scholastic [secondary] education, and university education.

"Elementary education should merely enable the child to understand and express thoughts, to read and write, and merely to overcome the difficulties involved in the major ways of *describing* things. It is not so much educa-

Following Prussia's defeat by Napoleon Bonaparte, Prussian political and military leaders supported educational reform, and in 1808 Humboldt was chosen to direct the reform program. **Left:** *Baron vom Stein.* **Clockwise from right:** *Gerhard von Scharnhorst, Neidhart von Gniesenau, Karl von Clausewitz.*

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tion, as it is preparation for education, and is what first makes the latter possible. Therefore, it is really concerned only with linguistic, numerical, and physical relations, and—because it is indifferent to the species of what is described—it always remains in the mother language. If other subjects are added (and rightly so), such as geography, history, or natural history, this is done partly so that by means of many applied examples, there is a reinforcement of the powers developed by, and necessary to, elementary education; and partly because, for those who go from these schools directly into life, it is necessary to go beyond elementary education *per se*.

"The purpose of scholastic education is the exercise of faculties, and the acquisition of factual knowledge, without which scientific insight and skill are impossible. It should prepare the young student for both of these, enabling him to collect the material which must always accompany his creative work—some of which he collects right away, and some in the future, at his convenience—and to cultivate his intellectual-mechanical powers. He therefore has a twofold concern: first, with learning itself, and second, with learning how to learn. . . .

"Scholastic education is divided into linguistic, historical, and mathematical studies; the teacher must always observe in the student, which of these three he dwells upon with special attentiveness, but the teacher must also rigorously see to it, that the student's mind develops in all three areas simultaneously. For the school must firmly bind together, so that the university can then better hasten to the pursuit of particulars, without doing harm. The student is ready to graduate once he has learned so much from others, that he is now able to learn for himself. . . .

"Thus, if the role of the teacher is only first made possible by elementary education, it is through scholastic education that this role is rendered dispensable. The university teacher, therefore, is no longer the teacher, and the student is no longer the learner, but himself does research, with the professor guiding his research and supporting him in it. University education situates the student to grasp the unity of science, to bring it forth, and therefore enlists his creative faculties. For, scientific insight as such—though of a lower order—is creative. . . .

"I also deny the possibility of purposefully setting up an essentially different establishment for future craftsmen, and it is easily shown, that the gap resulting from the lack of trade schools, can be completely filled by other establishments. . . .

"The general principle should be: *In any school, always to strive for the full and faultless exercise of the principal powers of the mind; to exclude from scholastic education any body of factual knowledge which—however necessary it may be—fosters those powers very little or too one-sidedly; and to reserve the specialized schools for practical life.* . . .

"Everyone, even the poorest student, would receive a full education, variously limited only in those cases where it could progress to further development; each individual intellect would be done justice, and each would find its

place; none would need seek their vocation earlier than what their gradual development permits; and finally, most, even if they left school, would still have had some transition from simple instruction to practice in the specialized institutions.

"And now, only a couple more suggestions on the learning of ancient languages. Proceeding from the principle that, on the one hand, the form of a language must become visible as form, and that this can happen better with a dead language, whose strangeness is more striking than our living mother-tongue; and on the other hand, that Greek and Latin must mutually support each other, I would assert:

"—That all students, without exception, absolutely must learn both languages in the elementary grades, whether it be both at once, or whichever one of the two is begun first. . . .

"Hebrew . . . must be likewise strongly encouraged, not merely because of the theologians, but also because its grammatical and vocabulary structure seem at first to be radically different from Greek; are closely related to the language structures of primitive peoples; and therefore expand the concept of the form of language in general. . . .

"The scholarly schools would admit no one who does not possess a firm foundation in elementary knowledge and is not at least nine years old. They would have five classes, and the elementary schools, two. . . .

"Education in the elementary schools would comprise:

"—reading,

"—writing,

"—mathematical relations and proportions,

"—recitation exercises,

"—the first and most necessary concepts of human beings and the human species, of the Earth, and of society,

"—music,

"—drawing,

"—geography, history, natural history, insofar as they can yield material which the mind can work on within the sphere assigned to each.

"Religious instruction is less teaching, than it is a stimulation of the emotions."

The Lithuania Plan

Humboldt wrote the following in his "Preliminary Thoughts on the Plan for the Establishment of the Municipal School System in Lithuania":

"All schools . . . that are recognized as such, not by a single social group, but by the entire nation or the state, must aim only at the general development of the human being. Whatever is required for the necessities of life or for one of its particular occupations, must be separated out and acquired only after general education has been completed. Whenever these two are mixed together, development becomes flawed, and the result is neither complete human beings, nor full citizens of particular social classes.

"These two forms of education—general and specialized—are guided by different principles. Through general education, the person's powers, i.e., the human being himself, become strengthened, purified, and channelled; through specialized education, he receives only applied skills. For the former, any knowledge, any skill which does not elevate the powers of thought and imagination, and through both, the soul, by means of full insight into rigorously enumerated reasons; or which does not accomplish the same through elevation into a universally valid idea (as in mathematics or aesthetics), is dead and sterile. In the latter, we are frequently limited to results whose reasons are not understood, because the skill must be made available, and because there is no time for talent or insight—as with unscientific surgeons, many manufacturers, and so forth. A principal goal of general education, is to lay a foundation such that few trades will involve skills which are not yet understood, and which thus never influence the human being's own development.

"Hence, the organization of the schools is not the affair of a single caste, a single profession, and especially not of the scholarly profession—a mistake made in times past, when languages were taught to the exclusion of all else, and even these, with respect to quality and not quantity, were taught for external exigencies (achievement of facility in reading and writing), and not for any true conceptual development (in knowledge of language and of classical antiquity).

"General scholastic [secondary] education is aimed at the complete human being, in his

"gymnastic,

"aesthetic,

"didactic, and again in this regard, his

"mathematical,

"philosophical (which in scholastic education is pure only because of the form of the language, but is otherwise always historical-philosophical),

"and historical

"capacities, and thus at the principal functions of his nature.

"Hence, this complete education recognizes one, and only one, foundation; the soul of the lowliest laborer must be initially put into harmony with the soul of the most finely cultivated person, if the former is not to fall

beneath human dignity and become crude, and if the latter is not to fail in human strength, becoming sentimental, fantasy-ridden, and eccentric. . . . In this way, even having learned Greek would be just as useful for the cabinet-maker, as would carpentry for the scholar. . . .

"I can recognize only the following as natural stages: Elementary education, scholastic education, university education.

"Elementary education consists simply in description of ideas of all sorts, and their primary and original classification; into this material, however, it can, without trouble, also incorporate various objects of that form, that is, a knowledge of nature and of the Earth. Elementary education first makes it possible to truly learn things, and to understand what the teacher is teaching.

"Scholastic education then leads the student into mathematics, linguistics, and history, up to the point where it would be useless to keep him tied to a teacher and education proper; it gradually liberates him from the teacher, while imparting to him everything a teacher is capable of imparting.

"The university is reserved for what the human being can find by and within himself: insight into pure science. For this self-activity in the fullest sense, freedom is necessary, and solitude is helpful; from these two requirements flows the entire external organization of the universities. Lecture courses are only a secondary aspect; the essential thing is that people live for a number of years for themselves and for science, closely alongside like-minded individuals of the same age, conscious that this same place has a number of already fully developed intellects who are solely dedicated to the elevation and promulgation of science.

"If we survey this entire course, from the first elements to exit from the university, we find that from an intellectual standpoint, the education authorities must have the following as their supreme (though only seldom expressed) principle: to bring forth the purest and most profound view of science, by bringing the entire nation—while preserving all individual differences—as quickly as possible along the path which, if further pursued, will lead to science, and to the point where it, and its results, can be variously intuited, grasped, seen, and practiced as talent and situation permit, thus aiding the individual by the enthusiasm awakened by perfect tempering of the whole."

What Humboldt Accomplished

As director of ecclesiastical affairs and education, Humboldt had responsibility for all public cultural and scientific institutions—the Royal Academy of Sciences, the Academies of Music and Art, the Royal Library, and the Botanical Garden. Soon he also took control over medical matters, including enforcement of professional standards, medical education, and the oversight of hospitals. He was also responsible for the censorship of literary publications. He approached this with the view that "unlimited press freedom was surely the only correct principle," but that the time for complete elimination of censorship had not yet come in Prussia.

His directorship of the division of ecclesiastical affairs, which came as part of his position, was supposed to be only nominal, as he was generally known to be anything but pious. He was, of course, a Protestant, as were approximately two-thirds of the Prussian population. Although he rarely attended church himself, he advocated Bible study in the schools and consistently supported the view that religious instruction was of central importance in elementary education. On the education of his youngest son, Hermann, he wrote to his wife Caroline, "In this winter we should have him receive religious instruction. . . . This instruction should last at least two years. Actually one cannot give too much time to it. The soul [*Gemüt*] must be aroused in every way to reflection and feelings about these sublime matters."

When Humboldt took over, according to one account, the typical elementary school throughout Germany "was run along lines appropriate for a penal institution." The schoolmasters were typically invalid soldiers or the village tailor or carpenter, who were scarcely literate themselves. Mechanical memorization of passages from the Bible, catechism, and hymnbook, was the sum and substance of instruction.

In the words of a former Prussian minister, the educational system had "left the peasant child to grow up like an animal."

Several months before Humboldt arrived on the scene in Berlin, the decision had been made to introduce the educational methods of Swiss innovator J.H. Pestalozzi into Prussia. Stein had placed two confirmed Pestalozzi disciples, Nicolovius and Süvern, in key positions of Humboldt's section.

According to Paul R. Sweet's biography of Humboldt,* Pestalozzi's primary model for a well-conducted school was a well-conducted home, in which a loving mother performed by instinct what the teacher should seek to carry forward by conscious effort. He emphasized a focus on the individual child and his aptitudes, concern

* Paul R. Sweet, *Wilhelm von Humboldt: A Biography,* 2 vols. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1978). The author has drawn much of the historical background in this article from Sweet's study.

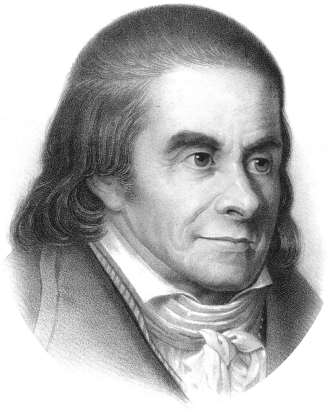
for the total personality, and the priority given to general, over vocational, education. There was little corporal punishment. The child was encouraged to learn by direct observation and to do things himself. Mathematics was also emphasized. Pestalozzi sought to infuse moral principles by teaching love of fellow beings and respect for the truth.

First experiments in teaching poor children with Pestalozzi's method had begun as early as 1774, and discussion of it circulated widely in Germany. Even Queen Louise was reading Pestalozzi's writings. Vom Stein often referred to Pestalozzi's method in his memoirs, and Clausewitz had visited Pestalozzi in Switzerland.

As a first step, the royal orphanage at Königsberg was made a model school and an institute for training teachers in Pestalozzian methods. Humboldt visited this school in November 1809 and, enthusiastically impressed, commented in a letter to his wife, "[The director] took thirty children, almost all of them orphans without father and mother, right off the street. At first they were like little pigs. And now . . . they are perfectly clean and polite, they solve problems in arithmetic . . . and sing hymns very truly in four parts. At the same time they are all happy; no one is ever struck, but there is such supervision by the teacher and by the children themselves over each other that disorder is almost impossible." Humboldt continued and expanded this work during his term.

One of Humboldt's greatest achievements, which he shared with J.W. Süvern, his chief subordinate, was the establishment of the humanistic *gymnasium* as the basic institution leading to the university. Prior to 1788, when reform of the school system had begun, there was no uniform examination for determining qualification for entry into the university. In that year, the *Arbitur* was introduced, a state-supervised examination at the conclusion of secondary schooling. Upon taking office, Humboldt regularized and developed the use of the *Arbitur* throughout Prussia.

Also at the secondary level he revolutionized teacher training. Before his tour as chief of section was ended, a royal edict drafted by his associate Süvern specified that to be eligible as a regular *gymnasium* teacher, a candidate must pass a general examination, supervised by public authorities. The examination included philology, mathematics, and history. Humboldt argued in April 1810, that the questions of uppermost importance to the state in selecting a public servant should be: With what degree of clarity does he think? With what warmth does he feel? How comprehensive is his concept of *Bildung?* In concrete terms, how does he regard human beings? Does he respect, or scorn, the lower classes?



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Humboldt introduced the educational innovations of the Swiss reformer Johann Pestalozzi (above), which were based upon a loving school environment and respect for the truth. **Right:** *Pestalozzi teaches a class of orphans.*

Imagine the effect of applying such criteria to the hiring and firing of teachers today.

Aside from what can be gleaned from the "school plans" cited above, Humboldt did not address himself to specific questions of curriculum. However, his associate Süvern, a former secondary school teacher, drew up a recommended curriculum for the *gymnasium* in 1812. It called for a ten-year *gymnasium,* beginning after four years of elementary school, that would teach ten years of Latin and eight of Greek, with mathematics and German also receiving substantial amounts of class time. Süvern's curriculum also included history and geography, religious instruction, and natural science. With the advent of the Wars of Liberation, however, this model curriculum was never implemented.

The University of Berlin

The founding of the University of Berlin was Humboldt's crowning achievement. It had already been agreed, before he took office, that a new institution of higher learning was urgently needed, and in September 1807 the King had agreed to it in principle. It was, however, only through the force of Humboldt's personal drive that, by the time he left office in the summer of 1810, lectures at the University of Berlin were about to begin.

French occupation armies, reflecting the hostility of the Revolution to science and learning, had forced several universities to close, and German authorities closed others in the wake of the difficulties of the occupation. Trier, Cologne, Strasbourg, Bonn, and Mainz closed early in the occupation. Erfurt, Wittenberg, Frankfurt/Oder, and others soon followed.

The groundwork for the creation of a university committed to the full development of the student in "freedom and solitude," as Humboldt stipulated in his Lithuanian Plan, was laid in Schiller's inaugural lecture at Jena University, "What Is, and To What End Do We Study, Universal History?," delivered on May 26-27, 1789. In this famous paper, Schiller denounced the "bread-fed scholars," whose only reason for existence at the university was the filling of their bellies. Schiller wrote, "Who rants more against reformers than the gaggle of bread-fed scholars? Who more holds up the progress of useful revolutions in the kingdom of knowledge than these very men?. . . The bread-fed scholar seeks his rewards not in the treasures of his mind—his recompense he expects from the recognition of others, from positions of honor, from personal security." The opposite, for Schiller, was the "philosophical mind," whose "efforts are directed toward the perfection of his knowledge; his noble impatience cannot rest until all of his conceptions have ordered themselves into an organic whole, until he stands at the center of his art, his science. . . ."

It was to the creation of this kind of student that Humboldt's revolutionary plans for the University of Berlin were directed. The university must uncompromisingly express commitment to *Wissenschaft* and *Bildung*. *Wissenschaft,* usually translated as science, has nothing to do with the current alienated idea of "natural sciences" that are divorced from "humanities." Such a concept was foreign to Humboldt's time. Rather, *Wissenschaft* was scientific knowledge in general, encompassing all areas of human learning.

In the plan Humboldt presented to the King, he urged that the new university utilize to the full, the scientific and cultural resources already available in Berlin, including the Academy of Sciences (founded by Leibniz), the Academy of Arts, the medical facilities, the observatory, botanical gardens, and the collections of natural history and art. In general, he envisioned a place where both professor and student were at the university to serve the cause of "*Wissenschaft* viewed as something that has not yet been entirely discovered and that can never be entirely discovered"—"to live science" (*der Wissenschaft leben*).

While Humboldt was unable to convince some of the best German minds to come to Berlin as professors—for instance, the greatest mathematician of the day, Carl Friedrich Gauss, refused to leave Göttingen to join the Berlin faculty, and even F.A. Wolf, Humboldt's friend and adviser, also refused a faculty position—by 1835, the year of Humboldt's death, the Berlin model was finding general acceptance in northern Germany. Eventually, the University of Berlin became the most prestigious model for universities throughout the Western world in the Nineteenth century.

Lyndon LaRouche concluded his August 1981 article with a challenge to those in our day who wish to reform education as Humboldt did: "We must build on the foundation bequeathed to us by the greatest mercantilists and cameralists of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries. It will not suffice merely to imitate those predecessors. We must be informed by their vitality of spirit, their courageous long view of dedication, and the lessons of their particular accomplishments. Yet, we must go beyond them, as they would have exceeded themselves of the past were they alive today."

Unquestionably, in us and in the work of the Schiller Institute, our predecessors do, in fact, live on.