

The Creative Launcher

Journal URL: <https://www.thecreativelauncher.com/index.php/tcl>

ISSN: 2455-6580

Issue: Vol. 8 & Issue 6 (December, 2023)

Publisher: Perception Publishing

Published on: 31st December, 2023

Peer Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed & Open Access: Yes

Journal DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.53032/issn.2455-6580>

©The Creative Launcher (2023). This Open Access article is published under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 International License

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>, which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

For citation use the DOI. Please contact editor on: thecreativelauncher@gmail.com

Licensing:  <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>



Article History: Abstract Received on: 10th November 2023 | Full Article Received on: 15th November 2023 | Revision received on: 29th November 2023 | Plagiarism Checked on 30th November 2023 | Peer Review Completed on: 10th December 2023 | Article Accepted on 15th December 2023 | First Published on: 31st December 2023

Research Article



Revisiting the Aspects of Arnold's Philosophy of Culture and Education


Prof. (Dr.) Charu Mehrotra

Principal,

Gokuldas Hindu Girls College, Moradabad

Affiliated to MJP Rohilkhand University, Bareilly

Email: charubareilly@gmail.com

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8760-2092>

 <https://doi.org/10.53032/tcl.2023.8.6.13>

Pages: 100-107

Abstract

The present article examines the fundamental principles and ideas that underpin Matthew Arnold's views on culture and education, highlighting his profound influence on Victorian thought and beyond. It outlines Arnold's conception of culture as the pursuit of perfection and sweetness and light, through the study and appreciation of the best that has been thought and said. The paper explores Arnold's argument that culture is a powerful agent for societal improvement, capable of elevating human spirit and mitigating the harshness of industrial society. Furthermore, it analysis Arnold's educational philosophy, which advocates for a broad, humanistic curriculum that emphasizes moral and intellectual development over practical skills, arguing that education should aim to cultivate thoughtful, informed citizens. The article assesses the impact of Arnold's ideas on contemporary education and culture, critiquing their

relevance and application in today's context. Through a detailed analysis, the article presents Arnold's philosophy as a holistic approach to education and culture, one that seeks to harmonize the individual's inner life with the outer demands of society. The question of access to education has always been at the forefront of class struggle. Capitalist societies have privileged kind of schools'– a hierarchy of schools. The schools available to most wage and salary earners are largely provided by the state, an organization which exercises power on behalf of the ruling class. Matthew Arnold was one of the inspectors of elementary schools under Her Majesty's reign, and remained in his post for nearly thirty-five years. He brought forth his opinion about the relevant role of the State in education. He was concerned primarily with the educational rights of the middle class. He cherished the hope of improving society through its educational institutions. He believed that the object of education was growth and promotion of culture. The education in his opinion was an instrument of general civilization. Arnold was undoubtedly a 'man of culture'. He was a critic of society. Culture, in his opinion, could be the remedy against the malady of anarchy.

Keywords: Social Expediency, Consistency, Liberal, Utilitarianism, Incantation, Intervention, Controversy, Apprehensive, Deprecate, Ceasation, Meticulous, Ambivalent

At the time when Matthew Arnold got a little bit interested in his job, the aims of education were not distinctive. Education during his times was more religious in nature than social. The religious learning was further separated from the secular education because in that state of opinions, it was impossible to amalgamate the two in a way as to cater to the needs of many people. Before Matthew Arnold, there was a widespread response to the effects of industrialization on different social strata, especially the working class. Macaulay understood the importance of educating the common man. "He characteristically, argued that the 'ignorance' of the common people' was a danger to property, and therefore their education was necessary. Carlyle on the other hand, had rejected any argument for education based on grounds of social expediency; 'as if the first function (of) a government were not to import the gift of thinking. (*Culture and Anarchy*, 94)

The early 1850s saw an attempt to implement an educational legislation. This was a clear indication of the dawning of a new age of social consciousness, which realized the inadequacy of age-old practices which needed immediate mending. Under such challenging and dynamic conditions of educational aims of the age and society did Matthew Arnold assume his position as the inspector for education for Her Majesty in the year 1851. Arnold was a man of lucid ideas. There was seldom to be found a single philosophical ideology or persistence of thought in his statements. Likewise, his technique was simple and it was based on his consciousness and about his stock habits of thinking and acting. He didn't believe in seeking for philosophical reasoning of his ideas, rather he was for an understanding of the principles which can guide the contemporary society towards progress.

Arnold professed himself to be a liberal, but a liberal with a difference. He was deeply influenced by Burke, and edited his Irish speeches in 1881. But he declared himself against the principle of abstract rights. Matthew stated that not freedom, but equality has always been the primary necessity of a society that aims for a natural and rational way of life. It was the call of

time to promote education to humanize the poor. The utilitarians had entered early in the field of education. They suffered a general opposition. The widespread opposition to utilitarianism and the overwhelming response to the increasing power of the working classes worked together to produce significant social repercussions. The influence of the difficult liberalism of the 1830s of Matthew Arnold's father, Thomas Arnold, on him can be traced in his "Englishman's Register" (1831). In his view the value of education does not lie in its making men into good citizens or in its vocational uses. The aim of instruction is implicit in the content of instruction – knowledge itself is valuable, for knowledge shapes the mind towards perfection. Arnold did not treat education merely as an instrumental process. Arnold viewed that education and the development of mind through knowledge are intrinsically valuable. Arnold, to support this view, often resorted to vagueness and incantation – such notion as 'culture', 'perfection' and 'civilization', and the same are frequently employed to conceal difficulties in his attempts to say what makes education and the development of mind through knowledge valuable in themselves.

But at the same time 'culture', 'perfection' and 'civilization' were terms which Arnold employed to indicate the kind of values which he thought were being overlooked as educational provisions rapidly changed and expanded. Every administrative reform favoured by Matthew Arnold promoted culture and subsequently aimed for human education. Therefore, his contemporary, Sidgwick calls him the "Prophet of culture". Matthew Arnold wanted to employ education as the tool of uplifting English civilization. Arnold talks of a perfection which we attain as a result of engaging ourselves in art, science, poetry, philosophy, history, religion, etc. These engaging activities promote a growth of awareness and understanding. The aim and office of instruction, as conceived by the educationists, is to inculcate the values of citizenship, or valued Christianity or social etiquette in an individual to enable him to adapt to the world, and aim him to fulfil his duties towards a dignified state of life. Infact, the modern way of thinking gives importance to none of the above, and considers all these as mere secondary or indirect modes of education; its "prime direct aim is to enable a man to know himself and the world."

Arnold argues that the aim of education should be to relate knowledge to 'our sense for conduct, our sense for beauty'. And education lays hold upon us by satisfying this demand. Religion and poetry have an immense impact on human beings because of this force of theirs in satisfying the man's need. Medieval Universities were concerned with the delivery of the knowledge of the scriptures and the church. Arnold defends those Universities for the simple reason that they (Medieval Universities) engaged the emotions of their subjects powerfully simply for their desire and curiosity for conduct and beauty. He concludes that an education of letters should subordinate to other knowledge. So, he argued for humanities to have a leading place in education. Arnold was a man of culture. It was his argument that education should aim at the preservation of culture. Arnold stated in most of his writing that culture should not remain the exclusive privilege of the few, but by 'apostles of equality' (Arnold, 1965, p.113) should be diffused among the many, in the middle and working classes; it was the task of education to achieve this.

In 1851 when Matthew Arnold joined as one of Her Majesty's Inspectors, it was a time when formal schooling had anchored its roots deep in the Education system in England. Education was being imparted through public schools, grammar schools, Ragged schools,

factory schools, English Dissenting Academies, Catholic colleges, Private academies and schools, Scottish/Irish/Welsh schools, Private tutors and home. They were supported by government, religious bodies, factories etc. Their sources were general or local taxation, endowments, church, grants from the government, voluntary contributions, payments by scholars etc. The year 1846 saw a new age in the education in English. Earlier the part the state played regarding education was ambiguous. The Church played a dominant and controlling role and hence the education was mostly religious. The mediation of the state in educational matter in the early Nineteenth-Century was considered as something low. With the passage of time, religion was losing hold on education and was falling in the hands of the voluntarist. For some time education showed effectiveness. But the voluntarists lost their cause when their staunch supporters like Edward Mill, joined forces with the advocates of state intervention. State intervention into educational affair set a strong protest from churchmen. Gladstone, Lord John Russell and Lord Lansdowne fought for religious indifferentism in education.

The secularists stuck hard on the conception. The two concepts of religion and education were practically homogeneous. They opined that in actuality the two were differentiated at school level and secular instruction could be thus imparted without relating it to religiosity. The secularist part supported an education system which was based on its utility for the local people. Education at schools were thus meant to be free. They advocated for compulsory education. The Denominationalists agreed with the secular party, on matters related to administration, but disagreed in their view of the religious part of the education system. The Denominationalists insisted upon the continued teaching of religion and the Bible.

The committee of council- an extra parliamentary committee, was constituted in 1839, in order to supervise the distribution of the annual grant that the parliament had decided to give as aid for educating the "poorer classes". This committee was therefore indirectly concerned with education. The popular justification for the development of the state's interest in education was given in defence of the 1846 minutes by Macaulay who was then a member of the committee of council. Macaulay had said educating the masses is "the most effectual means of protecting persons and property" (Mid-winter, 1980, p.44). Cobett had the politically motivated view that the movement supporting education of the working classes must be controlled by them; Southey in his detailed proposals for reform stressed a national system of education. In Owen's view, a new state of being could be brought into existence by a proactive government, and the idea of positive culture going hand in hand with the national education system gained wide acceptance and consensus. In the debate on the 1867 Reform Act, Lowe commented, "I believe it will be absolutely necessary that you should prevail on our future masters (working classes) to learn their letters," later popularized as "we must educate our masters" ('Parliamentary Debates', 64). Ruskin in 1852 wrote in the 'Stones of Venice' that every member of the Christian community should acquire adequate education. Carlyle proposed for popular education, and it was a fortunate and an influential proposal. Education was thus at the crux of the widespread and popular demand for 'more government.' Much changes, in the sphere of education began in the year 1848.

Carlyle, Cobett and many others had argued for a new national system of Education, but none had the authority or effect of Arnold. Those who accuse him of a policy of 'cultivated inaction' forget not only his arguments but also his life. As an inspector of schools, and

independently also, his effort to establish a system of general and humane education was intense and sustained. Basically, Matthew Arnold was a poet and an intelligent literary critic. But he was concerned with state elementary schools for thirty-five years in the capacity of Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the call of the time was 'National Education'. It got maximum columns in the dailies, the journals, the reviews and the periodicals. It was a burning point of the agenda of the parliamentary debates. It was the subject of the sermons of the church and the preaching from a pulpit. Yet, there was no scheme of things or idea of education that could be termed as a 'National' one. Kay-Shuttleworth established himself as a tireless worker for the cause of national education and in his collection 'Public Education' he views by saying that education is the most serious and essential duty of the state and his opinions are like Macaulay's "Government must, within a certain sphere, be even a moral teacher" ('Kay Shuttleworth', 65).

In 1861, Arnold presented his official report of his tour of France, Holland and Switzerland as part of the Newcastle commission. Till then, he had formed a firm and concrete idea about the State's role in education. "Education is to be main target of 'State action'; is the most explicit and straight-forward exposition of the function of the state" (*The Popular Education of France*, 35). Arnold advocates a compulsory education for all. Matthew Arnold opinions that the state will act as the vital instrument to redeem and protect the society from regression into grossness. The State action proved restrictive to the middle classes when it was controlled by the aristocratic part of society. The era had come to an end with its fall in the hands of the middle classes. In that condition they (middle classes) had no need left to fear the repression of them by the State, for now the power was in the hands of the common people. "So it is not state-action in itself which the middle and lower classes of a nation ought to deprecate; it is state-action exercised by a hostile class, and for their oppression" (*The Popular Education of France: Democracy*, 110).

Then this power of state action might be utilized for the collective benefits of the ceasing of mediocrity and poverty. Through the influence of the State the middle classes can be elevated. The middle class "want culture and dignity; they want ideas. They have energy and worship of liberty" (*The Popular Education of France: Democracy*, 110). When the culture, dignity and ideas of aristocracy are combined with their energy and respect of liberty, a great nation is formed. Such an amalgamation benefits the poorer sections of society too, as they are trained and educated by the people just above them on the social ladder, namely the middle class. If "these classes cannot win their sympathy or give them their direction, society is in the danger of falling into anarchy" (*The Popular Education of France: Democracy*, 110).

Arnold's hypothesis of state-action was not the outcome of any philosophical school but it was based on a simple and pure practical basis. When Arnold became one of Her Majesty's inspectors, he found that the aristocracy of England had its Eton and Harrow; on the other hand, the education of the middle classes was restricted to inadequate private schools and the lower-classes had no provision.

To Arnold's desire, the state was in fact an Academy of life, with education as its chief function which would create permanent benchmarks not to impose a uniform and conformist structure of society, but to give it unity, and to inspire a perfect way of living, which is the

rightful aim of all human endeavour. Arnold confessed himself a liberal as well as advocate of equality.

Matthew Arnold explains the cause of this anti-civilising effect. The middle class sees splendid materialism of wealth and luxury of the aristocratic class and the same is utterly out of their reach. Same happens with the lower classes with a difference that this gap is still deeper than in the case of the middle classes. In this, such a discrepancy makes the upper classes materially stronger, brings down the middle class lower on the societal ladder and reduces the lower classes to barbarism. Matthew Arnold talks about the love of freedom (liberty) and the love of equality as the two pivotal and inevitable ingredients for Man to retain humane qualities in society and the lack of any of these leads to inevitable depression and degradation among the inferior masses.

Thus, Arnold concludes that in a society based on equality an individual seeks to know himself and leads a worthy life. But this desired aim can be achieved only by the expansion and improvement of educational facilities. Surely, here Arnold's position is Marxian regarding the equality of opportunity and social solidarity.

Arnold describes a relevant and pertinent way to education for contemporary England in his article on education that appeared in 1886. In that scheme of his views of a system of rendering education in England, two-things were of utmost importance to time. They were firstly, more extensive ways to provide amenities for schools of various grades and types, and secondly, an organic connection between all schools, that is primary, secondary and higher. In his scheme of the educational organisation he stressed his attention to the lowest strata of society and hence to the perfect of various grades of primary schools some of which should be totally free of cost for the poorer sections of society. Some should have a nominal fee, and be according to the economic conditions of the working classes. He advocated the need of commercial schools, professional schools, high schools, scientific schools but of course all with an organic interconnection and the whole country divided into educational districts.

Arnold very carefully blends advisory and executive functions in his administrative suggestions and thus he put forth a very pertinent and vital tenet of administrative planning. He stated that the proper implementation and success of all policies that are planned depend largely on how much the policy makers agree among themselves regarding the purpose of the proposals.

Victorians lived in a pluralistic society. All Victorians did not share the same values and beliefs. It was a problem of social cohesion and the philosophers and educationists of the time tried to settle that problem. Matthew Arnold was an educational administrator who gave his insight towards this problem. Educationists can be divided into two groups with contrasting views of education; the 'idealists' and the 'progressives'. 'Progressives' see education in terms of growth, teaching as child centred rather than subject-centred. Idealists see education in terms of acquiring knowledge, to see teaching as initiating pupils into traditional culture.

Matthew Arnold proved himself to be an idealist with a difference from the other idealists on the point that he was a leading champion of the middle classes. He was not against comprehensive schools. He saw culture, and especially the pursuit of perfection, as a social idea which would ultimately lead to a narrowing of differences between classes. In his various

reports, he put forth his opinion regarding the curriculum. His affinity was towards the study and teaching of humanities.

Arnold cared for the propagation of culture to a greater number. Though his attitude towards the masses likely receptivity to culture was at times, ambivalent yet he always argued that “culture shouldn't remain the privilege of the few, rather it should be dispersed and diffused among the many, in the middle and working classes” (*Culture and Anarchy*, 183).

And he saw that the same could be done by education. Arnold realised the increasing impact of science on the Victorian Society which was ‘external’ in nature, competitive, materialistic, practical and complacent. Material progress was displacing religion and science was posing a threat to the Bible. Classical curriculum was being attacked from all sides and liberal education was getting down to earth kickbacks. Arnold felt a dire need of curriculum reform in the public schools and the need of literary studies to be implemented in elementary schools. He observed that the curriculum in the schools for the working classes merely reflected the ‘mechanism’ of the outside world.

Arnold had to advocate for the implementation of literary studies in the face of severe opposition from the advocates of scientific studies like Herbert Spencer, Thomas Huxley and many others. Their tall claims put forth the supremacy of science in broadening and elevating the vistas of knowledge and led to the development of abilities and it forced Arnold, in “Literature and Science”, to write in a defensive and supporting tones about the humanities.

He was always reluctant towards making science as a useful alternative in school curriculum. In his General Report for 1876, he stated that only letters, poetry, religion can moralise a human being. It was the time when Bentham’s impact was strong. His nationalism was gripping and it was winning a sweeping majority. It led to an atheist, restless and ‘mechanical’ society. Matthew Arnold had a theistic bent of mind with an indelible impression of idealism under the influence of his father Thomas Arnold of Rugby.

Under the Romantic poet’s alienation from his society, Arnold developed the belief in the moral superiority of the artist. Arnold was convinced with the morally educative power of literature. He proposed its study to counteract the imperfections of the society at a time when science appeared to be gaining support in middle-class education and, as he stated it, ‘the masses are losing the Bible and religion’. Arnold supported for the retention of the traditional classical curriculum for the public schools, Latin for older secondary pupils and English for the lower-middle class and elementary-school pupils. Some people licensed him for the perpetuation of class-differences on the basis of such an advocacy of curriculum.

Systems of education are mirrors of the notions of the present times about social structure, the nature of knowledge, the possibility of human improvement, the function of the government and so on. Education as a part of the cultural superstructure is influenced by and influences, in its turn, the economic base of the society. Both are dialectically interrelated. Educational institutions and education itself have a very important role to play in gathering support for and assert the legitimacy of the prevalent political and economic equations. The educational aspect of society, to a very large extent, is a vital part of the State itself. Therefore, the nature, quality and extent of education are largely determined by the needs of the ruling class or ruling elite to sustain their social hegemony and interests.

The history and development of class consciousness bears testimony to the fact that education as a mode of enlightenment and the enhancement of mental faculty, as well as a catalyst for social betterment, has always been the prime concern of the working class in the age of industrialization, as well as the teachers of school children. Education should be for the masses. This way of perceiving society would be unattainable if education were regarded as an obstacle race or sieve for catching the most able and discarding the rest. Education has to be the tool to elevate the entire population to as high a social position as is possible, because the creation and education of mere specialists do not serve the purpose of social upliftment. Mass education is positive political commitment among the masses. Moreover, "Access to good education should be as much universal social right as access to pure water" (Hoggart, 1982 p. 6). Spurred by the example of the continent, Arnold put forth his idea of the true spirit and role of the State in matters of education. He had in his mind basically the requirements of the middle section of society. He said, "They want culture and dignity; they want ideas." And he was of the determined opinion that the state had the capacity to further the interests of the masses much more than the inadequate private schools whose flaws were mercilessly and blatantly exposed in the reports of the Taunton Commission.

Matthew Arnold had the liberal humanist's desire for socio-economic, political and religious upliftment of his country-men. He cherished the hope of improving society through its educational institutions. He believed that the object of education was growth and promotion of culture. The education in his opinion was an instrument of general civilization. Matthew Arnold also believed that the middle class would administer and govern the state because it was most fitted for the task; "once they had been transformed by education to a higher culture, they would be able to rule by means of their best selves.

An individual is the result of his environment and Matthew Arnold was no exception. He came from an aristocratic family and he was not fully aware of the hardships faced by the poor and underprivileged. He, therefore, never advocated the education for all or compulsory schooling. He favoured a 'National System of Education' but never spoke for the education of the masses.

In conclusion, Matthew Arnold's approach to education during the mid-nineteenth century highlighted the evolving socio-cultural landscape of England. Arnold, serving as one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools, not only recognized the inadequacies of the traditional, religiously skewed education system but also foresaw the necessity of an educational reform that would cater to a broader societal spectrum. His liberal but distinctive perspective was influenced by a blend of intellectual traditions and practical demands of his time. Arnold's insistence on a holistic education underscored the intrinsic value of knowledge and the cultivation of a "culture" that should transcend socioeconomic barriers. He envisioned education as a powerful tool for societal upliftment, advocating for a system that emphasized the humanities and the development of critical thinking rather than mere vocational training. His critique of the existing educational framework and his subsequent proposals for a more inclusive and comprehensive system echoed the changing dynamics of a society grappling with the effects of industrialization and class stratification. Arnold's ideas, though sometimes met with ambivalence or resistance, underscored an emerging awareness of the need for an educational system that could foster civil responsibility and personal development. By

promoting an educational philosophy that integrated the pursuit of knowledge with the cultivation of beauty and moral sensibility, Arnold contributed significantly to the discourse on education, advocating for reforms that aimed not only at intellectual growth but also at nurturing the moral and aesthetic dimensions of human life. Thus, Arnold's legacy in the field of education can be viewed as a profound endeavor to align the educational goals with the broader needs of society, emphasizing the role of education in enhancing human dignity and social equity. His work remains a testament to the enduring value of integrating cultural depth with educational practices, aspiring for a society where education serves as a cornerstone for comprehensive personal and communal advancement.

Works Cited

- Arnold, Matthew. *Culture and Anarchy*. cited in Williams, 1996, p. 94.
- Arnold, Matthew. *Schools and Universities on the continent*. cited in Gribble, 1967, p. 89.
- 'Parliamentary Debates' cited in Connell, 1950, p. 64.
- 'Kay Shuttle worth' cited in Connell, 1950, p. 65.
- Arnold, Matthew. *The Popular Education of France*. cited in Gribble, 1967, p.35.
- Arnold, Matthew. *The Popular Education of France: Democracy*. cited in Sutherland, 1973, p. 110.
- Arnold, Matthew. *The Popular Education of France: Democracy*. cited in Sutherland, 1973, p.110.
- Arnold, Matthew. *Culture and Anarchy*. 'Aapostles of Equality'. cited in Sutherland, 1973, p. 183.
- Arnold, Matthew. *The Popular Education of France: Democracy*. cited in Connell, 1950, p. 77.
- Bantok, G.H. *Education and Values*. Faber and Faber, 1965
- Brown, Richard. *Knowledge, Education and Culture Change*, Papers in the Sociology of Education. Tovistock Publication, 1913
- Ghurye, G.S. *Culture and Society*. Geoffrey Cumberlege O.U.R, 1947
- Mathieson, Margaret. *The Preachers of Culture*. George Allen & Unwin, 1975