

UTOPIANS AND EDUCATION

- 1 The Greek word *utopia* has been used by those who envision a perfect world. The social reformers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, like the British industrialist Robert Owen and the French theorist Charles Fourier, are considered Utopians because they believed in impossibly ideal conditions of social organization. **Convinced that they possessed the truth, Utopians often exhibited a sense of mission by which they tried to persuade the unbeliever to accept the truth of their visions.** Nonviolent but persuasive, Utopians relied heavily on providing unbelievers with information to convert them to the Utopian vision so that joined the cause. Utopians relied on informal education to make their messages know to an ever-widening audience. Owen and Fourier, for example, were tireless writers who produced volumes of essays and other publications. In particular, Owen was a frequent lecturer and organizer of committees designed to advance his Utopian beliefs.
- 2 Education was designed to create a popular movement for joining the Utopian cause. In this journalist or lecture stage, Utopian education consisted of two elements. First, it mentioned the ills of society and suggested how they might be remedied. Second, it presented a picture of life, often minutely detailed, in the new society.
- 3 Utopians believed that modern industrialism had caused individuals to lose interest in the values of both family and the larger society, resulting in personal and social disorganization. To overcome this sense of alienation, Utopians sought to create perfectly integrated communities. Like the ancient Greek city-state, the new community would be a totally instructive environment. Work, leisure, art, and social and economic relationships would reinforce the sense of community and cultivate communitarian* values. Fourier's form of communal organization, the phalanstery, consisted of 2,000 members and was organized into flexible groups that provided for production, education, and recreation. In addition to communal workshops, kitchens, and laundries, the phalanstery would also provide libraries, concert halls, and study rooms for its members.
- 4 Utopian theorists, especially Owen, emphasized the education of the young in institutes and schools. The child, they reasoned, held the key to continuing the new society. Rejecting older concepts of child depravity and inherited human weakness, Utopians believed that human nature can be **molded**. Owen and other Utopians advocated beginning children's education as early as possible. Young children, they reasoned, were free of the prejudices and biases of the previously established social order. If they were educated in community nurseries, they would be free from the contaminating ideas of those who had not yet been cured of the vices of the established society. They could be shaped into the desired type of communitarian* human being. Community nurseries and infant schools performed a second function: freeing women from the burdens of child rearing and allowing them to have full equality with the male residents of Utopia.

TRACE READING EXERCISE

- 5 According to Fourier, the family and the school in the previously established social order were agencies used to criticize and correct children. Fourier intended to replace them with associative or group-centered education in which peer friends would correct negative behavior in the spirit of open friendship. Fourier's associative form of education involved mutual criticism and group correction, which was a form of character molding that brought about community social control and conformity. Fourier believed that children, like adults, had instincts and interest that should be encouraged rather than repressed. He envisioned a system of miniature workshops in which children could develop their industrious instincts.
- 6 His associative education was also intended to further the children's complete development. First, the body and its senses were exercised and developed. Second, cooking, gardening, and other productive activities would cultivate the skills of making and managing products. Third, mental, moral, and spiritual development would incline the child to truth and justice.
- 7 Schooling in the Utopian designs of Owen, Fourier, and others rejected learning that was highly verbal, rigidly systematic, and dominated by classical languages. Because of its concern for forming character, it often led to pioneering insights in early childhood education. **It** was intended, however, to bring about a sense of conformity to group norms and rules. While immersion in the group diminished the personal alienation caused by industrial society, it also restricted the opportunity to develop individual difference and creativity.

***communitarian**: marked by membership or support of a social organization in small, collectively controlled communities.

1. Which of the sentences below best expresses the essential information in the following sentence from paragraph 1? *"Convinced that they possessed the truth, Utopians often exhibited a sense of mission by which they tried to persuade the unbeliever to accept the truth of their visions."*

- A) Because they felt they were right, Utopians convinced unbelievers to accept their point of view.
- B) The belief that they were right gave Utopians a strong sense of purpose in persuading others.
- C) Unbelievers often changed their minds once they realized that the Utopians thought that they possessed the truth.

2. According to paragraph 1 and 2, what was the main method that Utopians used to spread their beliefs?

- A) They formally educated students in schools.
- B) They expressed their ideas to audiences in writing and speaking.
- C) They organized groups of Utopians to meet in people's homes

TRACE READING EXERCISE

3. Why does the author mention “the ancient Greek city-state” in paragraph 3?
- A) To contrast ancient Greek culture with Fourier’s vision of Utopian culture
 - B) To suggest that both Greek and Utopian communities were organized for educational purposes
 - C) To emphasize that both Greek and Utopian communities encouraged individual expression
4. Paragraph 3 suggest that according to Utopian belief, modern industrialism harmed people by ---.
- A) causing personal and social disorganization
 - B) increasing their desire for social activity
 - C) restricting their economic relationships
5. The word “**molded**” in paragraph 4 is closest in meaning to
- A) understood
 - B) shaped
 - C) confused
6. According to paragraph 5, how did Fourier believe that children should be educated?
- A) They should learn from their interactions with other children.
 - B) Their behavior should be supervised by older adults.
 - C) They should be instructed primarily by the individual family unit.
7. According to paragraph 5 and 6, what was one purpose of associative learning?
- A) It taught children how to develop strong critical abilities.
 - B) It enabled children to live harmoniously in a group setting.
 - C) It demonstrated the superiority of spiritual over physical development.
8. The word cultivate in paragraph 6 is closest in meaning to ---.
- A) separate
 - B) require
 - C) develop
9. The word “**it**” in paragraph 7 refers to ---.
- A) Utopian schooling
 - B) Verbal, rigidly systematic learning
 - C) Concern for forming character
10. According to the passage, all of the following are advantages of a Utopian education EXCEPT:
- A) Women are freed from the obligations of raising children.
 - B) Children learn to work hard naturally in groups.
 - C) Personal creativity is emphasized.

ANSWER KEY: 1B 2B 3B 4A 5B 7A 8B 9C 10A 11C

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