

BOOK REVIEWS

Science, Philosophy, and Human Behavior in the Soviet Union, by Loren R. Graham. Columbia University Press, 1987, 565 pp.

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Until recently, visitors to the USSR could see many slogans on the walls of public buildings, especially during state holidays. The white letters on red fabric said "Glory to the CPSU" (i.e., to the Communist party). If a traveler drew the conclusion that this was the way the Soviet people expressed their love for the Party, he would be making a rude methodological mistake, because the posters had been hung according to the instructions of the Party itself.

However, this does not imply that the Soviet people do not love the Party; it just means that the slogan is not a reliable source of information. Should we question people in the street, only the sincerity of an anonymous "yes" answer could be trusted since this is a society where people who do *not* love the Party are considered potentially dangerous elements. Nor can one take the printed word at face value in a country whose government censors the press. Anyway, public opinion polls on this issue have never been conducted in the USSR.

This example illustrates how difficult it is for a scholar to study a system which resists being studied. Loren R. Graham takes on this extremely difficult challenge in his book *Science, Philosophy, and Human Behavior in the Soviet Union*. Only one officially permitted—and imposed—philosophy exists in the USSR (where each printed word is censored by the Party). This philosophy is called dialectical materialism, or diamat for short. All Soviet students of chemistry, metallurgy, electronics, the food industry, the arts, law, and so on, must diligently study diamat as the

most important part of the curriculum. As a result, Graham is faced with the dilemma of either trying to guess what Soviet philosophers and scientists really think and believe, or else taking diamat seriously, to the extent of analyzing it in terms of behavior, performance, and practice.

Graham has chosen to take the easier road. He carefully describes materials put out by Party publishers, giving them the benefit of the doubt as to their veracity—though without going so far as to become their apologist.

From a factual point of view, the book is perfect. It amounts to an accurate, profound, and comprehensive description of the evolution of a unique phenomenon: the only twentieth century philosophy that claims to embrace universal knowledge. A vast amount of first-hand information has been thoroughly selected and processed by the author. Undoubtedly, his own experiences as a student and, later, as a visitor in the USSR make him a valuable expert in the field. Unfortunately, Graham's book, by no fault of his own, carries a sort of totalitarian tint because the author is the only one in his field of research. "It is an unusual experience, rewarding yet worrisome, to be the only scholar making this endeavor," he notes about his uniqueness.

The book consists of a short review of dialectical materialism, and independent chapters about applications of diamat to particular sciences and problems such as the origin of life, genetics, biology and psychology, cybernetics, chemistry, physics, and astrophysics. Almost any Western natural scientist can gain from the accounts at least a partial understanding of what it is like to be his Soviet counterpart. In my opinion, however, some very substantial matters have been neglected. First of all, it is quite unclear why the author paid no attention to historical materialism, which is the main component of Soviet philosophy.

When I was a student of chemistry, philosophy was the most annoying and boring subject for all of us students. The intricacies of old and dark works by Engels and Lenin were so far from any real science and technology, as well as from everyday life, that some students lost their patience and asked the professor, "What do we need all that for?" I remember one of the answers—in strict accordance with the textbook—that diamat was the basis for historical materialism which was in turn the theoretical foundation for communism as an ideology. Historical materialism was an application of diamat to the theory of society, economics, and politics. It was the theoretical basis of the whole Soviet system. This is why dialectical materialism has been forcefully drilled into dozens of millions of heads. It was an essential preparation for the next step, i.e., the study of historical materialism, which was as mandatory as diamat. The final purpose was to prove to educated people that the Party possessed the universal truth.

Another essential aspect of the issue passed over by the author is the importance of ideological purity and orthodoxy for making a scientific or academic career in the USSR. Depending upon the historical period, there were two well proven methods of self-promotion in the highly structured Soviet scientific and academic world: either to show ideological fervor by witch hunting or, second best, by speaking up on ideological matters.

This is why the abundance of philosophical discussions and publications in the USSR, the apparent involvement of scientists in philosophical problems, and the very impressive number of philosophers in the USSR should by no means be taken as indicating what they would in the West. These all simply express the policy of the Party, exactly as does the slogan "Glory to the Party." They reflect not an interest in philosophy, but the fact that it is a self-

reproducing institution in the USSR. Too many people have made their living in this business, and so have naturally worked to maintain the ideologization of society. It is no accident that the chair of philosophy and the chair of sports are the only two that are obligatory for every Soviet higher school.

However, self-preservation alone is not sufficient to explain the sustained obsession of Soviet society with philosophy. When a young duckling hatches its egg and looks into the world, it walks after the first moving thing it can see. This phenomenon is called imprinting. The duckling will follow human legs if these are the first things it sees. Educated Soviet people have had nothing but an official philosophy to follow, since modern Western philosophers are not published in Russian (though they are ardently criticized). Imprinting explains why Soviet scientists sometimes keep an intimate interest in their spiritual mother, philosophy, long after they have passed their exams in the subject.

I was imprinted by diamat myself. While still in high school, I had come across *Dialectics of Nature* by F. Engels. A new world opened up to me—the world of abstract thought. I began to read everything I could find on philosophy. It seemed to give me answers to all the questions a seventeen-year-old boy can ask. It was a surrogate for scientific knowledge. Science was so desperately vast, diamat was conveniently pocket-sized. Diamat was sufficiently flexible, did not contradict science, was easy to stretch and easy to shrink: it had no bones, like the tongue.

The more knowledge of physics, chemistry, biology and history I acquired, the more irrelevant dialectical materialism came to seem, especially after its antiscientific inquisitorial role—described in detail by Graham—came to light. Nevertheless, my interest in a universal knowledge, and in a synthetic picture of nature remained.

While still a first year student, I learned some principles of mathematical logic. I knew about the criteria for the scientific approach that uses a set of axioms, rules of inference, and experiment as the final test for a theory. From this point of view, diamat was by no means a science as it pretended to be.

I came to the conclusion that diamat was a militant, intolerant, and destructive religion-like cult (a parallel noticed by Graham, too) built upon several inconsistent, mostly unfinished, entirely polemic, and totally political texts which in fact failed to develop a system. The more distant in time the texts of Engels and Lenin became, the more commentary, interpretation, and updating was necessary in order to connect them with the current reality. At the same time, modern reformist tendencies so widely diverge from the orthodox dogma that they must be shored up by quotations from the classics of Marxism, or else, as Graham notices, by shallow, mechanistic commentaries.

Graham is critical of the dogmatism of Soviet philosophy. Unfortunately, though, he does not analyze diamat as a system. He characterizes it as a set of true principles which, though none of these was originated by diamat, amount to a unique combination of philosophical ideas. He does not touch on the problem of the logical contradictoriness of diamat. I wish to give two examples of such contradiction.

According to diamat, materialism and idealism are irreconcilable opposites. Materialism is true. Idealism is wrong. However, according to one of the basic principles of dialectics, opposites are always necessary for evolution, which leads to their synthesis. The opposites mutually penetrate each other. If so, why are not materialism and idealism considered as opposites with equal rights and importance? Why are not proletarians and proprietors considered equally necessary for the de-

velopment of society? And finally, why should the struggle between capitalism and socialism have to end with the victory of socialism and not the synthesis of both systems?

Also, according to diamat, practice is the only criterion of the correctness of a theory. How, then, can Soviet philosophy be infallible if every Soviet leader after Lenin was pronounced a true Marxist during his life, yet was denounced after his biological or political death, and if the beneficiaries of diamat devastated Soviet science? Nobody in the USSR has yet to admit officially that it was diamat as part of a militant and intolerant Soviet ideology that was responsible for obscurantism. To shake diamat and historical materialism would mean the destruction of the very foundations of communism.

It is useless to look for logical answers to these and similar questions within Soviet philosophy. This amazing creation uses a perverse deduction. (The Soviet Union is the only free, dynamic, healthy, and just society in the world. Therefore, the theory used by the Party is sound, whatever the Soviet philosophers say is correct, and all those who follow their logic are doing a good job.) The mistakes of Soviet leaders and theoreticians are taken to prove only one thing—that the theory and practice of communism overcomes human shortcomings. Only the most recent Soviet policy seems to be expressing a certain amount of doubt about this.

Graham's book is full of dramatic illustrations of how the philosophical inquisition chased common sense and logic out of Soviet science in the 1950s. In the 1980s, according to Graham's observations, diamat, in a modernized form, is as alive and well as before. Why is it so tenacious? To answer this question, I think it necessary to outline briefly the institutional role of diamat omitted by Graham.

The Soviet system tries to control every

individual in the country. Unable to install an Orwellian telescreen in every home, the state collects information about individuals through the Party and the KGB (state security). This collection system, like the eye of a predator, is especially sensitive to sudden movements, i.e., to significant deviations from standard, officially approved behavior.

To control the intellectuals was the most difficult part of this program just because they were much more sophisticated than any average informer or local Party boss, and because they spoke in their professional vernacular. But the institution of official philosophy provided a state standard of thought and expression. This made it possible to identify nonconformists among scientists, academics, and professionals. The system's demand was an absolute conformity with the standard, i.e., an acceptance of the absurd, obedience to orders, the surrender of convictions, and a rote iteration of imposed nonsense. The standard allowed to an average bureaucrat an easy mechanical detection of a deviation just by comparison with the standard. The bureaucrat did not need to delve into the subtleties of any particular field of science.

The slow roller coaster of thaws and frosts in the USSR carries philosophers, as well as others, through ups and downs. Yet despite proclaimed openness, it has not brought them to the point of any ideological pluralism where people could publicly express divergent ideological approaches. This is why, when Graham discusses the question of whether or not Soviet scientists were or are sincerely attracted to *diamat*, or just pay lip service to it, the question of sincerity is senseless; in the absence of pluralism they have no choice.

According to information theory, the more probable an event, the less information any message about it contains. There-

fore, there is no information in a statement without a possible alternative. Since expressing an alternative to the standard was punished in the USSR under Stalin, Brezhnev, and Gorbachev himself during the first two years of his rule, any criticism of Marxism was highly improbable.

Given the immense pressures within the system in the recent past, no Soviet person, no matter how committed to the system, could be quite sincere in expressing his contentment with anything official. The same was true of the discontent expressed by the dissident. The science fiction-like field that always surrounds the Westerner in Russia, distorting all he observes, also distorts the behavior and expression of the Soviet people. For this reason, I would compare Soviet life to the attempt to set up housekeeping on a tilted floor. There is always one selected direction for things to move toward.

The time has passed when Soviet philosophers and scientists involved with *diamat* played in their slanting home with heavy rough pieces of wood good as cudgels but useless for sitting, sleeping, and eating. Now, according to Graham, they have learned how to make some decent-looking furniture, albeit with legs of differing heights. However, the new style of chairs and tables remains just as absolutely incompatible with a level surface—one that would permit the ball of speculation to roll in any direction. Probably, the completely parochial character of *diamat* is a simple explanation for why Loren R. Graham is lonely in his field. This philosophy has no application in the West.

Graham's work, then, in its own way, is a unique, complete, and reliable source of facts about the history and the present appearance of what is called Soviet philosophy. However, after the language barrier has been lifted, the remaining barrier of different human behavior patterns, in my opinion, has not been overcome by the

author, so that the term "human behavior" in the title of the book seems misleading. That subject remains closed to the outsider. Furthermore, I believe that it is human behavior, under the specific pressure of a Communist country, which creates the philosophy, and not vice versa. This behavior, which rarely follows the resisting Giordano Bruno pattern, sometimes is of the compromising Galileo type, but mostly is either pure conformism or enthusiastic allegiance.

A friend of mine has just come back from the USSR. He reports that the posters like "Glory to the Party" have disappeared from Moscow. Moreover, last February, Soviet scientists who attended the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science spoke about the deideologization of Soviet science.

However, coming back to the problem of reliability discussed in the beginning of this review, let us not forget that every official visit of Soviet scientists abroad is still a mission sponsored by the Party.

We should wait and see if Soviet scientists are free to say what they think about diamat and Marxism in general. Most of them know that diamat never had anything seriously to do with science, and that it was mostly a means of ideological control—an artifact of Stalin's era of primitive brainwashing. We will know that they are speaking freely when they begin to discuss alternatives to Marxism, and can refer to the rocky terra incognita discovered and mapped by Graham as a deserted island, or even a mirage. A few apologists will remain faithful. But Graham's book assures us that most Soviet philosophers are mature and sophisticated enough to think independently as soon as the ideological censorship under which they labor has been lifted.

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Education and the Public Trust: The Imperative for Common Purposes, by Edwin J. Delattre.

Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1988, 216 pp. \$16.95.

Hrach Gregorian

When a superior man knows the causes which make instruction successful, and those which make it of no effect, he can become a teacher of others. Thus in his teaching, he leads and does not drag; he strengthens and does not discourage; he opens the way but does not conduct to the end without the learner's own efforts. Leading and not dragging produces harmony. Strengthening and not discouraging makes attainment easy. Opening the way and not conducting to the end makes the learner thoughtful. He who produces such harmony, easy attainment, and thoughtfulness may be pronounced a skillful teacher.

Confucius

Book XVI.-HSIO KI

Edwin Delattre is one of America's most skillful teachers, and in the book here under review, he is very much engaged in the task of leading, strengthening, and opening the way to intellectual and moral fulfillment. His work is the emendatory companion to the recent flood of studies trumpeting a general crisis in American education. He offers counsel of a far more fundamental sort than that commonly encountered in reports by curriculum specialists and other tinkerers in so-called educational reform. He understands that our greatest hope lies in institutions that respect intellectual discipline, and personal and institutional decency; that attract and

keep great teachers; and that function within a supportive familial and civil environment.

The shorthand version of Delattre's recipe for institutional excellence is as follows: Identify what you stand for (your mission and purpose); make your means and ends clear to those within the institution and to the public at large; then see if your policies and practices jibe with your ideals. Do this repeatedly! Although success can never be guaranteed, such an approach provides reasonable hope that schools, colleges, and universities can fulfill their obligations to a public which, through considerable financial and other, less tangible, forms of support, has entrusted to these institutions a large measure of responsibility for the well-being of individuals and for the advancement of national life.

Educational freedom is a hallmark of our society. It has been rightly defended by the courts, particularly in cases involving institutions of higher learning. Delattre notes that such institutions enjoy freedom to choose their own purposes and the means to fulfill them; but, he adds: "Within the limits of this freedom, educational institutions must meet standards of conduct and performance that justify the trust placed in them." Of course schools cannot be everything to everybody, so they must explain what they can and cannot do.

Delattre fully appreciates the tension inherent in attempts to achieve common purposes and to guard individual liberty within an institutional setting. Dismissing the arguments of cynics, who would control disparate wills through institutionalized terror, and innocents, who are willing to place altogether too much faith in human goodness, he looks first to institutional structure, but only so far as to note that although management and governance structures can be organized in a variety of ways, in the end it is the quality of per-

sonnel, whether they be trustees, administrators, or faculty, that determines how well institutions fulfill their educational mission. Personal virtue, courage, and spirit of service are essential, but it is "generous understanding" that best insures achievement of common purposes with liberty.

Generous understanding (of those with whom we disagree) is that which allows for reasoned discourse and moderation in our conduct. It does not mean accepting all views and passions as legitimate or on par, rather, avoiding blindness to the thoughts and feelings of others. Delattre writes: "The first dimension of generous understanding—recognizing the moral status of others as equal to one's own—is essential to the achievement of common purposes because it is human decency that neither tyranny nor procedures and forms can duplicate or replace. The second dimension—overcoming our natural blindness, provinciality, and narrowness of perspective—is the most durable base of common purpose with others *as an achievement of genuine individuals.*" (Emphasis in the original.) It is an affirmation of our status as independent moral agents who willfully transcend natural differences to embrace shared purpose, following the dictates of reason and not those of a mob, herd, or tyrant.

Two prevailing misconceptions further impede the quest for excellence in education. The first is a false distinction between the classroom and "the real world"; the second, that values are not "real." Both, notes Delattre, "encourage students to disdain intellect and knowledge in favor of more immediate pleasures." Lest anyone think that denigration of the academy and anti-intellectualism are peculiar to modern commercial republics, the observations of the worldly-wise Callicles, as recounted by Socrates in the *Georgias*, are here offered:

It's an excellent thing to grasp as much philosophy as one needs for an education, and it's no disgrace to play the philosopher while you're young; but if one grows up and becomes a man and still continues in the subject, why, the whole thing becomes ridiculous, Socrates . . . my dear friend, take my advice: stop your refutations, take up the Fine Art of Business, and cultivate something that will give you a reputation for good sense.

There is, of course, a difference between the classroom and the rest of the world, but to assume that the realm of experience is somehow more "real," perhaps even superior, to that of formal study is to misunderstand both. As John Dewey once observed: "An activity which does not have worth enough to be carried on for its own sake cannot be very effective as a preparation for something else."

Delattre moves from Dewey to Plato in championing the serious study of ethics and of values, and in attacking the "values clarification" approach to such study, which in the name of tolerance "invites dismissal or utter neglect of principles and their rational application to our conduct." Purported education specialists who write: "Clarifying responses operate in situations in which there are no 'right' answers, such as in situations involving feelings, attitudes, beliefs, or purposes"; or, who opine: "Value statements may be seen as alternatives rather than correct answers"; confront in these pages the likes of Jacques Maritain. It is not a pretty sight. So too, ideologues masquerading as teachers are exposed as little more than dishonest manipulators who betray the trust placed in them by students. Having disposed of moral relativists and political advocates, Delattre turns to the more difficult task of identifying that which is essential to sound educational practice.

In the longest two chapters of the book, he discusses first, how to build superior faculties and administrations, and second, how best to design a curriculum. He rightly points out that the elevation of standards

is in some respects dependent on greater professionalism at all levels of education. He thus calls for a change in perception and practice which would result in the incorporation of schoolteachers and administrators (and their instructors in education colleges) into the mainstream of academic life. He also underscores the importance of substantive enrichment over more pedagogical or instrumental approaches to teacher training. His message is, simply, that more than money (although this is not inconsequential), good teaching and administration require "vision and the will to bring it to fulfillment."

Although he makes constant reference to actual schools and concrete practices, Delattre's work is as much a moral and philosophical plea as it is a serviceable guide to the perplexed. This is not to imply that he does not offer practical recommendations—there is, for example, a list provided of some fifteen questions for prospective students and their parents to ask before choosing a school in which to invest their hopes and money. It is to say that he is more interested in the larger issues of intellectual integrity, moral purpose, and courageous leadership, which must inform decisions regarding personnel, curriculums, institutional forms, physical plant, extracurricular activity, and the like.

The larger issues come up again in the chapter devoted to undergraduate curriculum reform. Curricular change has been a central, and, in some cases, highly controversial question on many campuses. Delattre cites reports by The National Institute of Education, the Association of American Colleges, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and others, documenting the "devaluation in college curriculums" and the sense that "the bachelor's degree has lost its potential to foster the shared values and knowledge that bind us together as a society." There are numer-

ous demographic, financial, political, and even technological explanations for the deterioration of undergraduate studies. But as William J. Bennett has argued, the curriculum crisis in American higher education reflects nothing short of a basic loss of purpose. Many institutions suffer such loss because “they no longer understand what constitutes an educated person.”

Delattre notes that national debates about curriculums have a long history and “tend to be unproductive, tendentious, and repetitive.” Since the early nineteenth century, battles have been waged “about the ideal core curriculum, distributive requirements, and electives; about breadth versus specialization; about knowledge for its own sake versus knowledge for some social or economic purpose; about relevance, cultural narrowness, methods, and content; about great books and textbooks; the classical and the topical, and the past-looking and the future-looking; about intellectual and moral ideals; about science, technology, and the humanities; about students’ expectations and society’s needs.” These debates are unresolved and repeated generation to generation because there is no such thing as *the* ideal curriculum. The real challenge for institutions is to create “programs of study that, in the hands of able and devoted teachers and their students, lead to intellectual discipline, knowledge of subject matter, and seriousness of purpose.” Different curricula can be effective in different ways, and the critical challenge is to identify criteria for judgment regarding soundness. One other point needs to be stressed. A sound core curriculum is no substitute for superior teachers, and good teaching can usually overcome or cleverly circumvent rotten cores, *to a point* (!)—and as long as text adoptions are left to individual instructors.

There are also examples to guide us. St. John’s College in Annapolis and Sante Fe is one about which Delattre has intimate knowledge, having served as its president from 1980 to 1986. Every student at St.

John’s studies “mathematics for four years; takes one year each of biology, inorganic chemistry, and physics; participates in chorus and studies music in the first two years; takes two years of Greek and two of French; and participates in four years of seminars based on great books in literature, philosophy, history, religion, and other disciplines.” As is noted by the author, few colleges could or would necessarily want to adopt this plan. Cited earlier in the book, Henry Bragdon’s quip in *Woodrow Wilson: The Academic Years* that it is an “academic truism that changing a curriculum is harder than moving a graveyard,” is particularly apt here. Nevertheless, the St. John’s curriculum embodies principles that are broadly applicable:

First, the liberal arts are taken to include the natural sciences and mathematics, in the tradition of the Trivium and Quadrivium. Inquiry in these areas is taken to be intimately connected to inquiry in the rest of the liberal arts, and by it a sense of the wholeness of human intelligence is conveyed.

Second, while the exclusion of all but great books from the curriculum limits acquaintance with current works it eliminates trivial texts . . .

Third, students begin to study demanding texts on their first day at St. John’s; [the faculty] come quickly to expect all students to prepare for class so that all can contribute. . . . Because the work of freshmen is as important as any other, and because coherence is sought through the four years, freshmen gain ready access to the most experienced faculty members.

Notre Dame’s three-year “Program of Liberal Studies” is yet another instructive example. “Anchored in the Western and Catholic traditions,” it tries to teach students “how to go about seeking a solution to a question and communicating the solution to others. . . . The intent of this wide reading is not cultural relativism, but a clear recognition of the universal values and the common problems of perennial interest to human beings.”

The “Plan II Program” at the University of Texas at Austin, which admits approximately 150 students per year and boasts a genuinely interdisciplinary major,

illustrates how the benefits of a liberal arts college and the resources of a great university may be enjoyed simultaneously. "Faculty are chosen from throughout the university and often include the most distinguished teachers and scholars. Courses require a full year, larger classes are supplemented by smaller discussion groups. . . . The curriculum is rigorous, with substantial work in the sciences, including six hours in biology. . . . Proficiency through the fourth semester of foreign language study is required. Philosophy, literature, and history are emphasized."

The recent "common experience core requirement" adopted at Brooklyn College is a final example of a coherent curriculum. Ten core courses are required of all students:

Every student studies the classical origins of modern culture; fine arts and music; American social organization and European and American history since 1700; mathematical reasoning and computer programming; literature from Dante and Chaucer to a nineteenth- or twentieth-century American novelist, including one work from a non-Western tradition; basic concepts and laboratory in chemistry, physics, biology, and geology; African, Asian, and Latin American cultures; and perennial philosophical questions about knowledge, existence, and values. There is a foreign language requirement from which students with three years of high school study in a language are exempt. Because the college insists that the ability to write well is a mark of an educated man or woman, writing exercises are part of every core course.

Whether located in the Northeast or Southwest, private or public, diverse or fairly uniform in student population, a small liberal arts college or a large research university, institutions of higher learning, indeed at all levels, can create a sound program (there is no dearth of successful models). They can do this if they have a clear sense of mission or common purpose, administrators willing and able to articulate and pursue it forcefully, a strong commitment to faculty development, and the support and loyalty of those who, after all, constitute the "institution."

Education and The Public Trust ends with a short exhortation for greater parental involvement in the nurturing of the young. Delattre notes that the public should be able to trust its educational institutions; but, he adds: "They must also earn their own trust as mothers and fathers, as citizens." One might add that the crisis in American education, particularly in inner city schools where it is felt most acutely, grows out of both parental and societal abdication. If schools are failing their mission, it is because that mission continues to grow in proportion to the failings of the broader social environment in which they must operate. Schools cannot effectively concentrate on curriculum or educational policy when forced to take on functions traditionally assumed by families, religious and community organizations, and, most importantly, police departments. Where they once served as an intellectual beacon and an avenue for advancement, schools in many urban areas now serve as a shelter from the harsh world of broken homes and brutalizing neighborhoods. And this they must do with armed personnel guarding entryways and patrolling halls. Many suburban schools face similar problems. All grapple with a dizzying assortment of social issues that place enormous burdens on already overextended resources.

The crisis confronting all too many of our schools is symptomatic of broader social dislocations which must be addressed if these institutions are to have a fighting chance at fulfilling their educational mission. This requires the same clarity of vision, courage, and commitment to high moral purpose in civic affairs as is rightly called for in education. Inattention to needs in either realm will invariably have a deleterious effect on their common destiny.

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