

UNESCO Its Purpose and Its Philosophy – Part 1 – World Evolutionary Humanism, Eugenics and UNESCO

February 8, 2013

“That [fundamental] task [of UNESCO] is to help the emergence of a **single world culture**, with its own philosophy and background of ideas, and with its own broad purpose. This is opportune, since this is the first time in history that the scaffolding and the mechanisms for world unification have become available, and also the first time that man has had the means (in the shape of scientific discovery and its applications) of laying a world-wide foundation for the minimum physical welfare of the entire human species. And it is necessary, for at the moment two opposing philosophies of life confront each other from the West and from the East, and not only impede the achievement of unity but threaten to become the foci of actual conflict.



You may categorise the two philosophies as two super-nationalisms; or as individualism versus collectivism; or as the American versus the Russian way of life; or as capitalism versus communism; or as Christianity versus Marxism; or in half a dozen other ways. The fact of their opposition remains and the further fact that round each of them are crystallising the lives and thoughts and political aspirations of hundreds of millions of human beings. Can this conflict be avoided, these opposites be reconciled, this antitheses be resolved in a higher syntheses? I believe not only that this can happen, but that, through the **inexorable dialectic of evolution**, it *must* happen – only I do not know whether it will happen before or after another war.” – 61

As the first Director of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation), Sir Julian Sorell Huxley (1887-1975) wrote a paper entitled **UNESCO: Its Purpose and Philosophy** (1946) [1] in which he outlined his vision for the newly created international organisation (which grew out of the League of Nations’ Institute of Intellectual Co-operation). According to Huxley, the guiding philosophy of UNESCO should be what he termed, World Evolutionary Humanism. The following article describes this philosophy and its relation to eugenics.

Julian Huxley, an evolutionary biologist, humanist, and ardent internationalist held many titles including: Secretary of the Zoological Society of London (1935-42), first president of the British Humanist Association (1963), Vice-President (1937-44) and President (1959-62) of the British Eugenics Society. He was also a founding member of the World Wild Life Fund, coined the term “transhumanism” (as a means of disguising eugenics) and gave two Galton memorial lectures (1936, 1962). Huxley also received many awards including the Darwin Medal of the Royal Society (1956), UNESCO’s Kalinga Prize (1953) and the Special Award of the Lasker Foundation in the category Planned Parenthood – World Population (1959) to name but a few. He is also the Grandson of Thomas Huxley (Darwin’s Bulldog) and brother of author Aldous Huxley.

UNESCO Philosophy of World Evolutionary Humanism

[*Italicised text* is original emphasis and **bolded text** is added by author.]

“But in order to carry out its work, an organisation such as Unesco needs not only a set of general aims and objects for itself, but also a working philosophy, a working hypothesis concerning human existence and its aims and objects, which will dictate, or at least indicate, a definite line of approach to its problems.” – 6

“Its [UNESCO’s] main concern is with peace and security and with human welfare, in so far as they can be subserved by the educational and scientific and cultural relations of the peoples of the world. Accordingly its outlook must, it seems, be based on some form of humanism. Further, that humanism must clearly be a world humanism, both in the sense of seeking to bring in all the peoples of the world, and of treating all peoples and all individuals within each people as equals in terms of human dignity, mutual respect, and educational opportunity. It must also be a scientific humanism, in the sense that the application of science provides most of the material basis for human culture, and also that the practice and the understanding of science need to be integrated with that of other human activities. It cannot, however, be materialistic, but must embrace the spiritual and mental as well as the material aspects of existence, and must attempt to do so on a truly monistic, unitary philosophic basis.

*Finally it must be an evolutionary as opposed to a static or ideal humanism. It is essential for Unesco to adopt an evolutionary approach. If it does not do so, its philosophy will be a false one, its humanism at best partial, at worst misleading. We will justify this assertion in detail later. Here it is only necessary to recall that in the last few decades it has been possible to develop an extended or **general theory of evolution which can provide the necessary intellectual scaffolding for modern humanism**. It not only shows us man’s place in nature and his relations to the rest of the phenomenal universe, not only gives us a description of the various types of evolution and the various trends and directions within them, but **allows us to distinguish desirable and undesirable trends**, and to demonstrate the existence of progress in the cosmos. And finally it shows us man as now the sole trustee of further evolutionary progress, and gives us important guidance as to the courses he should avoid and those he should pursue if he is to achieve that progress.*

An evolutionary approach provides the link between natural science and human history; it teaches us the need to think in the dynamic terms of speed and direction rather than in the static ones of momentary position or quantitative achievement; it not only shows us the origin and biological roots of our human values, but gives us some basis and external standards for them among the apparently neutral mass of natural phenomena; and it is indispensable in enabling us to pick out, among the chaotic welter of conflicting tendencies to-day, those trends and activities and methods which Unesco should emphasise and facilitate.

***Thus the general philosophy of Unesco should, it seems, be a scientific world humanism, global in extent and evolutionary in background.** What are the further implications, practical as well as theoretical, of such an outlook? We must examine these in some detail before coming down to a consideration of Unesco’s activity section by section.” –*

“Our first task must be to clarify the notion of desirable and undesirable directions of evolution, for on this will depend our attitude to human progress – to the possibility of progress in the first place, and then to its definition.” – 8

*“But once more a new and more efficient method of [evolutionary] change is available. It becomes available to man through his distinctively human properties of speech and conceptual thought, just as Natural Selection became available to life as a result of its distinctive properties of reproduction and variation. Objectively speaking, **the new method consists of cumulative tradition**, which forms the basis of that social heredity by means of which human societies change and develop. But the new method also has a subjective aspect of great importance. Cumulative tradition, like all other distinctively human activities, is largely based on conscious processes – on knowledge, on purpose, on conscious feeling, and on conscious choice. Thus the struggle for existence that underlies natural selection is increasingly replaced by conscious selection, a struggle between ideas and values in consciousness. [...]*

Evolution in the human sector consists mainly of changes in the form of society; in tools and machines, in new ways of utilising the old innate potentialities, instead of in the nature of these potentialities, as in the biological sector. [...] Nor does it mean that man’s innate mental powers could not be improved. They certainly were improved (presumably by [sic] natural selection) in the earliest stages of his career, [...] and they could certainly be improved further by deliberate eugenic measures, if we consciously set ourselves to improve them. Meanwhile, however, it is in social organisation, in machines, and in ideas that human evolution is mostly made manifest.” – 9

Eugenics

In the philosophy outlined above, there is a lot of high sounding idealistic language about equality. For example the quote below.

“Further, that humanism must clearly be a world humanism, both in the sense of seeking to bring in all the peoples of the world, and of treating all peoples and all individuals within each people as equals in terms of human dignity, mutual respect, and educational opportunity.” – 7

Of course, for eugenicists like Huxley, some are more equal than others.

“There are instances of biological inequality which are so gross that they cannot be reconciled at all with the principle of equal opportunity. Thus low-grade mental defectives cannot be offered equality of educational opportunity, nor are the insane equal with the sane before the law or in respect of most freedoms. However, the full implications of the fact of human inequality have not often been drawn and certainly need to be brought out here, as they are very relevant to Unesco’s task. [...]

Still more important, any such generalisations will give us a deeper understanding of the variations of human nature, and in doing so will enable us correctly to discount the ideas of

men of this or that type. [...]

*There remains the second type of inequality. This has quite other implications; for, whereas variety is in itself desirable, the existence of weaklings, fools, and moral deficients cannot but be bad. It is also much harder to reconcile politically with the current democratic doctrine of equality. In face of it, indeed, the principle of equality of opportunity must be amended to read **“equality of opportunity within the limits of aptitude”**” – 18*

“Biological inequality is, of course, the bedrock fact on which all of eugenics is predicated. But it is not usually realised that the two types of inequality have quite different and indeed contrary eugenic implications. The inequality of mere difference is desirable, and the preservation of human variety should be one of the two primary aims of eugenics. But the inequality of level or standard is undesirable, and the other primary aim of eugenics should be the raising of the mean level of all desirable qualities. While there may be dispute over certain qualities, there can be none over a number of the most important, such as a healthy constitution, a high innate general intelligence, or a special aptitude such as that for mathematics or music.

*At the moment, it is probable that the indirect effect of civilisation is dysgenic instead of eugenic; and in any case it seems likely that the dead weight of genetic stupidity, physical weakness, mental instability, and disease-proneness, which already exist in the human species, will prove too great a burden for real progress to be achieved. Thus even though **it is quite true that any radical eugenic policy will be for many years politically and psychologically impossible, it will be important for Unesco to see that the eugenic problem is examined with the greatest care, and that the public mind is informed of the issues at stake so that much that now is unthinkable may at least become thinkable.**” – 21*

*“To adjust the principle of democratic equality to the fact of biological inequality is a major task for the world, and one which will grow increasingly more urgent as we make progress towards realising equality of opportunity. To promote this adjustment, **a great deal of education of the general public will be needed** as well as much new research; and in both these tasks Unesco can and should co-operate.”*

*“It is, however, essential that eugenics should be brought entirely within the borders of science, for, as already indicated, **in the not very remote future the problem of improving the average quality of human beings is likely to become urgent; and this can only be accomplished by applying the findings of a truly scientific eugenics.**” – 37*

“The Age of the Common Man: the Voice of the People: majority rule: the importance of a large population: – ideas and slogans such as these form the background of much of our thinking, and tend, unless we are careful, towards the promotion of mediocrity, even if mediocrity in abundance, and at the same time, towards the discouragement of high and unusual quality.” – 15

Evolutionary Values and the Quest for a Restatement of Morality

*“Of special importance in man’s evaluation of his own position in the cosmic scheme and of his further destiny is the fact that he is the heir, and indeed the sole heir, of evolutionary progress to date. When he asserts that he is the highest type of organism, he is not being guilty of anthropocentric vanity, but is enunciating a biological fact. Furthermore, he is not merely the sole heir of past evolutionary progress, but **the sole trustee for any that may be achieved in the future**. From the evolutionary point of view, the destiny of man may be summed up very simply: it is to realise the maximum progress in the minimum time. That is why the philosophy of Unesco must have an evolutionary background, and why the concept of progress cannot but occupy a central position in that philosophy.*

***The analysis of evolutionary progress gives us certain criteria for judging the rightness or wrongness of our aims and activities, and the desirability or otherwise of the tendencies to be noted in contemporary history – tendencies of which Unesco must take account.**” – 12*

*“Thus Unesco’s activities, while concerned primarily with providing richer development and fuller satisfactions for the individual, must always be undertaken in a social context; and many of its specific tasks will be concerned with the social means towards this general end – the improvement of social mechanisms or agencies, such as educational systems, research organisations, art centres, the press, and so forth. In particular, Unesco must clearly pay special attention to the **social mechanism of cumulative tradition in all its aspects, with the aim of ensuring that it is both efficient and rightly directed** in regard to its essential function of promoting human evolution.” – 17*

“Unesco cannot be neutral in the face of competing values. Even if it were to refuse to make a conscious choice between them, it would find that the necessity for action involved such a choice, so that it would be driven eventually to the unconscious assumption of a system of values. And any such system which is unconsciously assumed is less likely to be true than one which is consciously sought after and studied.” – 39

*“Unesco must accordingly promote the study of philosophy as an aid in the clarification of values, for the benefit of mankind in general. It must also do so in order to **have its own clearly thought-out scale of values** to guide it in its own operations, both positively in what it should undertake or assist, and negatively in what it should avoid or discourage.*

*Here it will be guided by **the philosophy of evolutionary humanism** which I adumbrated in my first chapter. Such a philosophy is scientific in that it constantly refers back to the facts of existence. It is the extension and reformulation of Paley’s Natural Theology and those other philosophies which endeavour to deduce the attributes of the Creator from the properties of his creation. [...]*

*It will accordingly **relate its ethical values to the discernible direction of evolution**, using the fact of biological progress as their foundation, and shaping the superstructure to fit the principles of social advance. On this basis, **there is nothing immutable and eternal about ethics**, yet there are still ethical values which are general and lasting – namely those which promote a social organisation which will allow individuals the fullest opportunity for development and self-expression **consonant with the persistence and the progress of society**.*

The social aspect of this dual function imposes itself because social mechanisms provide the

chief basis for rapid human evolution, and it is only through improvement in social organisation that progress can be secured. [...]

Further, even if there are broad ethical principles which are general and lasting, yet their detailed formulation will and must change from age to age. The ethics of tribal life differ inevitably from those of feudalism or of industrial civilisation. Our ethical systems to-day are still largely predicated on a pre-scientific and nationally fragmented world. We have to relate them to our new knowledge and our new closeness to each other. [...] In general, we may say, it is becoming necessary to extend our personal ethical judgements and responsibilities to many collective and apparently impersonal actions – **in other words to undertake a considerable socialisation of ethics.**

It will be one of the major tasks of the Philosophy division of Unesco to stimulate, in conjunction with the natural and the social scientists, **the quest for a restatement of morality** that shall be in harmony with modern knowledge and adapted to the fresh functions imposed on ethics by the world of to-day.

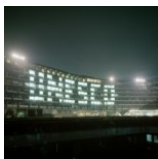
Still more generally, it will have to stimulate the quest, so urgent in this time of over-rapid transition, for a world philosophy, a unified and unifying background of thought for the modern world.” – 39

Conclusion

The next part of this series describes the purpose of UNESCO, as outlined by Huxley, to mentally prepare the world for global political unification under a single world government. The remaining three parts of this series describe the major mechanisms used by UNESCO: education, science and the creative arts, and the mass media.

[1] Quotes from Julian Huxley, [UNESCO: Its Purpose and Philosophy](#) (1946). Preparatory Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

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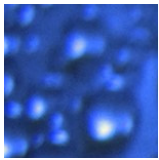
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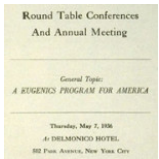
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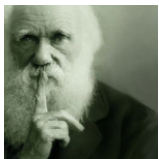
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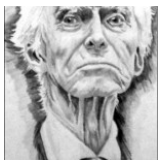
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