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## **Markets Versus Monopolies in Education: The Historical Evidence**

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**Abstract:** A common point of contention among educators and economists is the likely effect a free market would have on modern education. Most supporters of public schooling maintain that the field would either be adversely affected by competition and choice, or that the effects would be insubstantial. Conversely, a significant number of critics argue that education, like all other human exchanges, would respond to market incentives with improved performance, increased attention to the needs of families, and greater innovation. Historical evidence is presented indicating that teachers and schools are indeed affected by the financial incentives of the systems in which they operate. In particular, the data show that economic pressures have forced schools in competitive markets to meet the needs of families, through methodological advancements and diversity in curriculum, while centralized bureaucratic systems have generally been coercive and pedagogically stagnant.

### **Introduction**

The debate over educational funding and administration is an old one. Writing to his friend Tacitus almost two thousand years ago, the Roman lawyer Pliny the Younger described his plan to establish a secondary school in his home town, but added that he had decided to pay only one third of the total cost.

I would promise the whole amount were I not afraid that someday my gift might be abused for someone's selfish purposes, as I see happen in many places where teachers' salaries are paid from public funds. There is only one remedy to meet this

evil: if the appointment of teachers is left entirely to the parents, and they are conscientious about making a wise choice through their obligation to contribute to the cost. (Pliny, 1969, p. 277-283)

Over the last decade, proposals for introducing a degree of parental choice and inter-school competition into education have abounded, particularly in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. In some cases, such plans are already in place. With few exceptions, though, current choice programs pose barriers to the entry of new schools and to the exit of unpopular ones, exclude religious and/or profit-making institutions, restrict admissions and staffing policies, and otherwise control the supply and demand for education. Though private schooling exists in most industrialized countries, there is only limited competition at the primary and secondary levels. The comparatively heavy burden of tuition, when compared to the "free" status of tax-supported schools, greatly limits the clientele for private education. This in turn keeps the density of private institutions to a much lower level than if government did not provide schools. As a result, there is no nation currently offering a truly free and competitive market in education.

### **The Case Against**

As market-inspired reform has gained in popularity, it has been subjected to a great deal of criticism. Attacks have been directed at the possible ill-effects of parental-choice, of for-profit schools, and of market systems as a whole. The most often heard argument against a market is that parents cannot be expected to make sound educational choices for their children, and must instead leave the key decisions to experts. A significant number of parents, it is assumed, would either fail to inform themselves about competing schools, or would base their choices on the "wrong" criteria. This contention has been directed at the population as a whole (Carnegie Foundation, 1992; Wells & Crain, 1992), and also at specific groups such as the poor or the poorly-educated (Payne, 1993; Levin, 1991; Kozol, 1992). A related criticism is that racial and economic isolation might be increased if families selected their schools based on race, ethnicity, or social status (Cookson, 1994; Kozol, 1992).

On the supply side, skeptics argue that for-profit schools with bold promises, flashy advertising, and special programs would lure customers away from academically superior institutions (Krashinsky, 1986). Murnane (1983), and others have noted the possibility of fraud in voucher systems, in which corrupt principals could offer kick-backs to parents who chose their institutions. Profit-making schools are also expected by some critics to reject difficult-to-educate children, e.g. those with disabilities or serious discipline problems. According to Shanker and Rosenberg (1992), these children would be more expensive to teach and hence would either be expelled more readily or refused admission entirely.

All these objections have in common the idea that education is fundamentally different from other human exchanges, and that as a result, the natural checks and balances of the market would fail to operate as they normally do. There is a second line of argument that takes the opposite position, namely, that an educational market would fail precisely because it would operate in the same way as other markets (Krashinsky, 1986). Education, so the argument goes, benefits not only the students and their families, but their fellow citizens as well. These indirect benefits are said to include social harmony, political stability, and a thriving economy. According to Levin (1991), public school systems are capable of producing the aforementioned benefits, while a competitive market of private schools could either not produce them at all, or do so only at prohibitive regulatory expense.

The remaining criticisms are based on the results of "limited choice" or "public school choice" programs, which place many restrictions on schools and families, and generally do not

allow the participation of private or parochial schools. Smith and Meier (1995), for example, argue that since programs allowing parents to choose from among different public schools have failed to substantially increase student learning, the same should be expected of an unregulated market. The experience with heavily regulated parental choice in the Netherlands (Brown, 1992; Elmore, 1990) is also cited in arguments against the effectiveness of competition. In the United States, comparisons between existing public and private schools have led Cookson (1994) to conclude that a market would not improve education. The same author also reasons that since private schools have rarely been included in choice programs, there is insufficient evidence to support free market educational reform.

## **The Case in Favor**

Virtually all of the criticisms discussed above have been disputed by proponents of parental choice. Members of the minority groups assumed to be incompetent or uninterested in their children's education are foremost in defending their ability and prerogative to choose. State representative Polly Williams (1994), herself an African-American single parent, championed a private school choice plan in Milwaukee Wisconsin on the grounds that public schooling had failed the urban community and that competitive private provision offered a superior education. Similar arguments have been made by Native- American educator Ben Chavis (1994). Empirical studies have shown that poor parents with limited formal education, from Massachusetts (Fossey, 1994) to the mountain villages of Nepal (Pande, 1977), can and do choose schools on rational grounds (see also U.S. Dept. of Education, 1995; Martinez et al, 1994).

Arguments that racial segregation would increase under a free market have been challenged from two different perspectives. The late James Coleman (1990) observed that racial segregation within the American public school system was greater than that among private schools. So, while the percentage of African-American students in the public sector is greater than the percentage in the private sector, public schools are more likely to be all-white or all-black than their private counterparts. Opposing the very essence of the segregation claim are educators such as Derrick Bell (1987), who believe that the freedom to create separate schools for African Americans would be a boon rather than a hardship.

The assertion that private schools might defraud parents is commonly countered with the argument that such problems exist everywhere, including public schools. The cases of East St. Louis (Schmidt, 1995) and Washington D.C. are notorious examples. Rinehart and Lee (1991) note that a competitive market would at least exert pressure on a school to deal honestly and fairly with parents in order to maintain a healthy reputation, while the public monopoly offers educators no such incentive. Along the same lines, John Coons (1991) has observed that public schooling has not engendered the external benefits of social harmony and effective democracy assumed by its defenders. The American experience of Protestant bias in the education of immigrants at the turn of the century, as well as government-enforced racial segregation, are presented as evidence of this claim. Coons also contends that by removing the coercive element from school selection and allowing parents to choose for themselves, the goal of effective democracy would be strengthened.

To resolve the issue of difficult-to-educate children, Myron Lieberman (1991), investigated the current practices among private institutions. He found that rather than focusing on easy-to-educate students, the single largest group of for-profit schools actually serves the disabled. Studies have also suggested that urban private schools are able to maintain a higher level of discipline than their public counterparts with few if any admissions requirements, and only infrequent student expulsions (Blum, 1985).

For the supporter of free markets, objections based on public school choice programs are seen as misguided. To function effectively markets require significant competition, the lure of

profit-making, and a minimum of restrictions on buyers and sellers. Few if any of these criteria hold among existing choice programs (OECD, 1994), and as a result it is argued that they cannot be expected to show any significant benefits (Lieberman, 1989).

The above rebuttals aside, the economic case for an educational market rests on two main presumptions: that monopoly control of education leads to coercion, indifference to the needs of families, and stagnation in the form and content of instruction, while competition and the profit motive would lead to greater quality and efficiency. The first case has been made at both national and school levels. While inflation-adjusted per-pupil spending in U.S. public schools tripled between 1959/60 and the present (U. S. Department of Education, 1993), test scores either held constant or declined (Sowell, 1993; Boaz, 1991). Comparisons between public school administrations and those of the private Catholic sector have shown the public bureaucracy to employ as many as thirty times the number of administrators per-pupil (Boaz, 1991). On a school by school basis, Eric Hanushek (1986; 1989) studied correlations between spending and student achievement only to find that the relationship was not statistically significant. Similar results have been reported by Childs & Shakeshaft (1986). Because of the absence of any truly competitive market in education, little direct contemporary evidence is available to demonstrate its effects on efficiency or achievement. In those cases where a limited degree of competition does exist, however, Hoffer et al. (1990), Borland and Howsen (1993), and others have found small but significant positive effects. Outside the field of education, the superiority of markets to monopolies is widely accepted, and Winston (1993) has demonstrated that reductions in regulation are generally associated with lower prices and better services for consumers, and even yield higher revenues for producers.

## **The Present Work**

As can be gleaned from the arguments cited above, the debate over a market in education has drawn almost entirely from the limited body of contemporary evidence. With the exception of E.G. West's (1994) analysis of 19th century England, the historical evidence regarding market vs. monopoly provision in education has been largely ignored. Education, however, is not a recent invention. Two and a half thousand years of schooling, from the informal to the regimented, from complete parental freedom to totalitarian domination, have preceded current practice. The study of educational history thus offers a wealth of insights into the effects of monetary incentives and centralized administration on the actions of parents and educators.

The next section looks at the educational experiences of four historical periods and places: classical Greece, Germany at the Reformation, England during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and France after the Revolution. This selection is a more or less representative sample from a larger survey of the subject currently in progress. The most valuable lessons these histories have to teach us concern the relationship between school governance and school quality. In particular, they highlight the differences between markets and centralized bureaucratic school systems on three important measures of school performance: how well they respond to and satisfy the demands of parents and students (e.g. through innovation and diversity in curriculum), the degree to which they benefit their students directly (e.g. higher literacy, job/life skills), and their indirect benefits to the rest of society (e.g. thriving economy, social harmony).

## **Educational Choice: Over Time and Around the World**

### **Greece**

Formal education made perhaps its earliest appearance in China, well before the first millennium B.C., but the most suitable starting point to our study lies half a world away, in

Greece. Unlike the uniform system of the Chinese, ancient Greek education developed along disparate and conflicting lines. This contrast, between parental freedom and state control, was best represented by the city-states of Athens and Sparta. By the fifth century B.C., schooling in both of these societies had become a general preparation for citizenship and adulthood, but the content and delivery of that preparation differed dramatically. It is with this organizational juxtaposition that we begin.

With the exception of requiring two years of mandatory military training, the government played little or no role in Athenian schooling. Socrates is said to have described the practice of the day as follows:

When boys seem old enough to learn anything, their parents teach them whatever they themselves know that is likely to be useful to them; subjects which they think others better qualified to teach, they send them to school to learn, spending money upon this object. (Freeman, 1904)

Anyone who wished might open a school, setting whatever curriculum and tuition they deemed appropriate. The schools were operated as private enterprises, and so the subjects taught and fees charged were established by what parents wanted their children to learn, and how much they were willing to pay for that learning. Choosing a teacher was considered an important decision, and it was expected that a person would consult with friends and relatives, deliberating for several days on the matter (Plato, 1937). Competition to attract parents and students seems to have held costs to a relatively low level, since even the poorest families are thought to have sent their sons to school for a few years, despite the absence of state funding (Cole, 1960). It should be noted, however, that most girls and much of the slave population received little or no education in Athens, as in so many cultures up to modern times.

Schooling began at the age of six or seven, but wealthy parents likely sent their children to school earlier and kept them there for longer than did parents with limited means. This occurred not only because of the need to pay school fees, but also because poor and middle class families could not afford to support their children indefinitely, and so had to ensure that they learned a trade or craft through apprenticeship; an experience quite distinct from schooling. Even in this time-honored tradition, however, the Athenians were innovators. When a boy was apprenticed to a tradesman other than his father, his parents would draw up a statement indicating which skills they expected him to be taught and the tradesman received payment only if he provided the stipulated training (Freeman, 1904).

At the elementary level, Athenian parents sought three general categories of education for their children: gymnastics, music, and literacy. Competence in each of these areas was of great practical importance. Stamina, strength, and agility meant the difference between life and death at a time when wars were a constant threat, and every able bodied male citizen was expected to serve in the army. To understand the importance of musical instruction it must be remembered that Greek culture had been orally transmitted, largely in song, for centuries prior to the rise of Athens. Just as a grasp of reading and important works of literature are crucial to modern education, so was the knowledge and appreciation of epic poetry important in the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. Even as the social mores embodied in the oral tradition were codified and written down, the value Athenian citizens placed on music and poetry remained high. Writing began to rise in significance in the 5th century, as a tool for improving the political and judicial systems, for accurately recording the works of scientists, playwrights, and philosophers, and for making economic transactions more reliable. In the minds of the city's more philosophically oriented citizens, this combination of physical, musical, and intellectual development also satisfied an appreciation for harmony and balance in the human character.

While music and reading were probably taught in the same school, the study of gymnastics was carried out at a special location, called a palaestra, which consisted of changing

rooms and an exercise field. The gymnastics teacher was expected to have an organized method of instruction which would improve stamina, strength, and agility, while keeping the risk of injury to a minimum. Physical trainers also seem to have provided their students with nutritional advice (Plato, 1937). Children began their gymnastics training by performing aerobic exercise routines to build stamina and flexibility. As their bodies and skills developed, they were taught javelin and discus tossing, a variety of ball-games and other sports, and also wrestling and boxing.

At writing school, then as now, the child was first taught to recognize and write the letters of the alphabet. For the youngest children, this was done through song, and there is even a fragmentary play that survives from late in the 4th century B.C. in which the actors represented letters and formed syllables by pairing up with one another in the appropriate poses (Freeman, 1904). Once the child had learned his alphabet, he was taught to write on a folding wooden tablet covered with wax, into which he would etch letters with the pointed end of a stylus, and rub them out with the wide end. At first the writing teacher would lightly trace the letters, and the student would then scratch his pen over them in order to learn how to draw their shapes. Once he had mastered this step, the child would begin to write on his own (Plato, 1937).

As Athenian culture broadened and developed, the elementary school curriculum developed with it. More and more parents began to seek drawing and painting instruction for their children, and by Aristotle's time this had become a common option. Several generations later, these arts were considered a fourth core subject area, being studied by virtually all pupils (Marrou, 1965). Adaptation to the changing demands of parents and students was in fact a hallmark of Athenian education. Each step in the evolution of the society was matched by a corresponding change in the offerings of educators. The philosophers and scientists of the day were continually pushing forward the frontiers of human understanding, establishing in their wake a demand for a deeper and more comprehensive level of education. At the same time, the democratic franchise was extended to an ever larger segment of the population, and the powers of the assembly were growing apace. In order to win popular support in this vibrant democracy, it became necessary for would-be statesmen to not only offer compelling policies, but also to deliver them with clarity and elegance. Training in oratory was thus an important political asset. Together, the emerging educational demands of politics and science made higher-level teaching an economically viable endeavor. Athenians not only wanted to become better educated, they were willing to pay for it. This market niche was quickly filled by a new entrepreneurial class of teachers, known as sophists, anxious to earn a living from their scholarly pursuits.

At first, when the demand for higher-learning in any one community was still limited, the sophists traveled from city to city, holding forth on whatever topic they felt confident to teach, and for which there were eager pupils. When the flow of students had ebbed at a given location, they would once again resume their journey. Recruiting new pupils was always an important task for the sophists, since their livelihoods depended on it. The most common technique used to this end was the presentation of free public lectures in the town square, which allowed them to demonstrate their talents and whet the intellectual appetites of prospective students. Fortunately for the sophists, the spread of learning served not to diminish but rather to increase the demand for their services. As more and more people became better educated, the value of an education increased. It became necessary for anyone with hopes of public office or success in law or commerce to expand their educational horizons. This trend was not lost on elementary school masters who eventually began to diversify into the new secondary and higher education markets by offering advanced classes to adults and children over the age of fourteen. For many years, however, the bulk of higher-education was still carried out by the wandering professors.

While rhetoric and the sciences were the most common fields of study, the range of subjects taught by the sophists was astonishingly diverse. The curious student might choose from "mathematics (including arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy), grammar, etymology, geography,

natural history [i.e. biology, horticulture, etc.], the laws of meter and rhythm, history..., politics, ethics, the criticism of religion, mnemonics, logic, tactics and strategy, music, drawing and painting, scientific athletics." (Freeman, 1904). Lectures were held in open spaces outdoors, in the homes of the teachers, and occasionally in buildings borrowed or leased for the purpose. There appear to have been no age restrictions on these lectures, and so any student both interested and capable of participating was permitted to do so.

Gradually, as the higher educational market matured, a few fixed schools were established in Athens. In addition to Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum, neither of which charged a fee due to the wealth and preferences of their founders, several for-profit secondary schools were in existence by the turn of the fourth century B.C. Only a few of these were sufficiently famous to come down to us by name, and of these the best known is the school of Isocrates. Contrary to Plato, Isocrates argued that knowledge without application was useless. He said, "I hold that man wise who can usually think out the best course to take and that man a philosopher who seeks to gain that insight." (Hamilton, 1957) Though reportedly too shy to become prominent in public life, Isocrates was extremely successful—both financially and by popular acclaim—in teaching the art of public speaking to others. This, coupled with his pragmatic lessons on applied philosophy and mathematics, attracted a significant body of students to his lectures. A greater number, it seems, than was to be found at the Academy. More remarkable though, and in a way more emphatically Athenian, was the school of Aspasia.

Defying the norms and prejudices of the day, this Milesian-born woman set up shop in Athens teaching philosophy and rhetoric, and unabashedly advocated the liberation and education of the city's women. According to Plato, her lectures attracted such towering figures as Socrates and Pericles, the latter of whom eventually became her lover and life-long companion. When asked of his ability to improvise a speech (in Plato's dialogue "Menexenus"), Socrates avowed that he was up to the task, and referring to Aspasia, added "I have an excellent mistress in the art of rhetoric—she who has made so many good speakers." (Plato, 1937) The philosopher goes on to suggest that one of the most famous speeches in ancient history, the funeral oration by Pericles, was actually written by her, and though there is little substantiation of this claim in the historical literature it certainly implies a healthy respect for her abilities on the part of Plato. Demonstrating the breadth of her appeal, Aspasia's school also attracted a large number of girls from well-to-do families, an emancipatory innovation that drew harsh criticism from many in the older generation (Durant, 1939). What is perhaps most significant about this case is the fact that, despite the intensely sexist climate of the city, the majority was not able to prevent Aspasia from opening her school and reaching out to the disenfranchised female population.

In stark contrast to the freedom and diversity of Athens, the central idea of Spartan society was that individuals and families should not be left to make their own decisions in matters of importance such as education, marriage, or employment. Instead, Spartans were called upon to second their own interests to the collective will of the people, as interpreted by their part aristocratic, part democratically-elected government. Supporting this sweeping centralization of authority was a monolithic educational apparatus run by the state, to which all citizens were compelled to send their sons (here again, the education of girls received less attention than that of boys). At age seven, all the male children were separated from their families and brought to live in school dormitories. The nature of their learning environment is well-captured by the terms used to describe them. A troop of boys was referred to as a "boua", the same word used for a herd of cattle, and from each herd, a dominant boy was chosen to act as herd-leader. With satisfying consistency, their head teacher was called "paidonomus", or boy-herdsman. This individual was chosen from the aristocracy, and granted the authority to train the boys, and to harshly discipline them if any failed to follow his instructions. In his efforts, he was assisted by two "floggers" armed with whips (Xenophon, 1988).

The children were administered an education consisting almost exclusively of sports,

endurance training, and fighting. When questions were posed to the students, a prompt reply was expected, and those who failed to answer to the teacher's satisfaction were regarded as incompetent, and given a bite on the thumb or some similar punishment. Arithmetic is not mentioned as a part of the curriculum by any of Sparta's chroniclers, and few people could count beyond the smallest numbers. Students were perhaps introduced to letters, but certainly "no more than was necessary," (Plutarch, 1988) and since books and written law were virtually non-existent in Sparta, this could not have been much at all. Isocrates did not hesitate to observe that the Spartans "have fallen so far behind our common culture and learning that they do not even try to instruct themselves in letters." (Isocrates, 1982) Speech and writing were further discouraged by an outright prohibition on learning rhetoric, the violation of which was a punishable offense (Sextus Empiricus, 1987). Educational innovation, whether it involved additions to the curriculum or the adoption of new techniques in the existing wrestling and military training, were strictly forbidden.

At dinner time boys were fed simple hearty meals, but were served deliberately small portions so that they would constantly be hungry if this were their only source of sustenance. To supplement this meager fare, children were encouraged to steal. Theft was in fact a central feature of Spartan education. The city's leaders believed that, if you want an army that thinks nothing of pillaging neighboring states, it is exceedingly helpful to have citizens accustomed to robbing their neighbors. While those caught stealing were severely punished, it was for failing to get away with the crime, rather than for attempting it in the first place. Skill in theft was considered a noble accomplishment, and, according to Isocrates, it paved the way to the highest political offices (Isocrates, 1982). Of course, students were encouraged to steal primarily from the subjugated peasant and slave populations rather than from other citizens.

By the time they had reached the age of eighteen, Spartan youths were tough, fit, ruthless, but also inexperienced. The missing element in their training was provided by an institution known as the "krypteia." Young men were gathered into bands and dispatched to the countryside where they would have to hunt and steal to survive. Their primary mission, however, was to attack their own peasant population whenever the opportunity arose, killing those who had the audacity to defend themselves. This savagery apparently seemed criminal even to the Spartans, for the elected officials would annually declare war on their own serfs, giving the bloodshed at least a veneer of legality.

Having described the different approaches to schooling in Athens and Sparta, we can look to the conditions of their people for a reflection of the effects of those systems. We cannot, of course, attribute all of the differences between Athenian and Spartan civilizations to their schools, but formal education clearly played an influential role.

To the classical Greeks, Athens was the "school of Hellas" and the "metropolis of wisdom." Of the three most influential philosophers in Western antiquity-Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle-the first two were Athenian citizens, and the third a resident alien, studying and teaching in the city for much of his life. The greatest Western historian of the period, Thucydides, was Athenian, and his successor, Xenophon, though an ardent admirer of Spartan militancy, was born and raised just over fifteen miles from Athens. Sophocles and Aristophanes, from whose minds flowed the most profound tragedy and biting satire in the literature of ancient Greece, were also natives of the city of Athena.

But what of the public at large? One particularly useful indication of the general level of learning in the city is the proportion of citizens who were literate. A variety of techniques have been used to estimate Athenian literacy, primarily centering on the reading required for participation in public life, the archeological evidence of writing on pottery fragments and the like, and references to reading in contemporary plays and prose works. By all accounts, Athens was the most literate society in the Western world at that time. William Harris, the most skeptical and influential recent writer on the subject, is at great pains to demonstrate that literacy was not



as widespread in ancient times as had been previously thought, but even he relents somewhat in his discussion of Athens. He writes that "among the well to do, practically all males must have been literate" (Harris, 1989, p. 103). Harris neglects to offer an estimate of literacy among urban Athenian citizens, saying only that at least 15% of the male population as a whole, including the surrounding areas, was literate. Using his own data and arguments, it is fair to say that perhaps twice that percentage of city-dwellers were able to read, and most of these would have been able to write as well. Conversely, literacy among the rural population was probably at about half the overall level. This difference was due in large part to the greater frequency with which farming families required the labor of their children, thus leaving them fewer years during which to attend school. Similar constraints affected the urban poor, who had to apprentice their children to a craft at perhaps the age of 11 or 12.

Pedagogical freedom and market pressures both allowed and encouraged Athenian educators to make great strides. Independent Athenian schools were the first to introduce games as a pedagogical tool, and to reduce the use of corporal punishment-ubiquitous in Egypt and Sparta-to the exception rather than the rule. Elementary schools altered their curricula to meet changing parental demands, and an entirely new educational institution, secondary schooling, was brought into being as a result of market forces. In the words of Adam Smith:

The demand for such [higher] instruction produced, what it always produces, the talent for giving it; and the emulation which an unrestrained competition never fails to excite, appears to have brought that talent to a very high degree of perfection. (Smith, 1994, p. 837)

These achievements, so far ahead of contemporary practice, went hand in hand with the spirit of freedom and community that pervaded Athenian society. Without resort to government intervention or coercion, Athens enjoyed not only an explosion of artistic, literary, and scientific work, but also a thriving economy. The depth and breadth of Athenian commercial life was by far the greatest of any city in Europe at the time, comparing favorably even with cities that existed centuries later. By allowing youths and adults to pursue a wide range of studies, the Athenians fostered a labor-market of exceptional diversity. The existence of skilled apprenticeships ensured a talented pool of craftsmen, while training in writing and mathematics made possible ever larger and more complex business transactions. Isocrates observed that "the articles which it is difficult to get, one here, one there, from the rest of the world, all these it is easy to buy in Athens." (Durant, 1939) In support of its vigorous shipping industry, Athens even offered a variety of financial and insurance services, which required both literacy and numeracy. As economic historian Rondo Cameron points out:

Some cities, such as Athens, concentrated a number of commercial and financial functions within their boundaries in much the same way as Antwerp, Amsterdam, London, and New York did in subsequent eras. Banking, insurance, joint-stock ventures, and a number of other economic institutions that are associated with later epochs already existed in embryonic form in classical Greece (1993, p. 35).

The picture which comes down to us of Sparta in the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. is a very different one. Parents had no direct say in the education or upbringing of their children, having to cede their responsibilities and desires to a single, monolithic system. Innovations in language instruction and even physical training were suppressed by central control, leaving teachers without autonomy or flexibility. Sparta had virtually no science or literature, and little art. Her legacy to modern times is negligible, apart from being a beacon to totalitarians at the time of the French revolution and the rise of the Third Reich in Germany. Social stability, the result of voluntary association in Athens, was maintained by innumerable forms of government coercion

and regulation, particularly in education.

Though one or two historians have attempted to show the existence of literacy among the common people in Sparta, there is a dearth of evidence to support their claims. Apart from the kings and perhaps a few generals and magistrates-who communicated with one another on "code sticks"-the Spartans were an illiterate people. Their economy was basic, and far more dependent upon slave and serf labor than that of Athens. The citizen class was allowed only to train for war in the state schools, and could neither acquire a broader learning nor apprentice themselves to skilled tradesmen. Trade was in fact actively discouraged by the Spartan government, in an effort to keep its people focused on an ascetic military lifestyle. In this, they were eminently successful.

## **Germany and The Reformation**

In a bustling German town, in the year 1500, a public notice proclaimed that "Everybody now wants to read and to write" (Schwickerath, 1904). Though this was still something of an exaggeration, it captured the spirit of the time. With the invention of the printing press, books became cheaper and more widespread throughout Europe, making literacy in the common languages of its people a practical and valuable skill for the first time in a thousand years. It also came within reach of a larger segment of the population, thanks to the diversification of the economy and the appearance of a small but growing middle class who could afford both books and teachers' fees.

Since the fall of the Roman Empire, education in the West had been the prerogative of the Catholic clergy, and Latin had been their language of choice. Naturally, as the demand for literacy grew, the middle classes turned first to this traditional seat of learning for instruction. Two factors soon changed this practice. The most notable was that an increasing number of citizens wished to learn German rather than Latin, and the church had little inclination to oblige them. As a result, the demand for German literacy was met by entirely private schools that introduced both children and adults to the perennial basics for a small fee. These popular independent schools spread rapidly in the larger towns, but were less numerous in villages and rural areas. The second cause of change in the provision of education was the desire of the public for greater control over the schools. As townspeople still favoring an education in Latin contributed more generously to their local parish educational funds, building new schools and retaining more teachers, they sought proportionately greater control over school staffing and curriculum. This did not sit at all well with the clerics who had until then been responsible for such decisions, and they often resisted any circumscription of their authority. Many considered it the fundamental right of the Church to control education. In the majority of cases, however, the citizens eventually won out, and city councils became the primary authorities over the schools formerly run by the clergy. Because clerics made up the vast majority of those capable of giving Latin instruction, most teachers in "city schools," as they came to be called, continued to be members of the clergy. School costs at these quasi-public institutions were paid for with a combination of tuition fees and taxes, broadening access, while still leaving some incentive for the students or their parents to ensure that they were receiving value for their money. The new trends towards private schooling and local community control were derailed, however, by one of the largest social upheavals in European history.

The Reformation threw German schooling into chaos. Schools staffed or run by the clergy closed down as monks and nuns abandoned their conventual lives in droves. The process was accelerated by the nobility, who seized the opportunity to close all the monasteries that remained, excepting those that had adopted Protestantism. Finally, after several decades, new schools started to appear. Free enterprise elementary schools, which had been the least affected by the turmoil, were the first to recover. The printing industry had been central to the success of Protestant reform, and the demand for instruction in reading and writing that it had helped to

spread remained strong. The efforts of private citizens to educate themselves were once again cut short, however, by one of Luther's close associates; a scholar named Melanchthon. Apparently believing that he knew what was best for the people, Melanchthon called for the creation of a government-run school system. With the help of Luther and the nobility of various German states, he was successful, and soon the existing private elementary schools were joined by state institutions. Because they were paid for by taxes rather than tuition fees, the new schools tended to make private instruction financially burdensome. Parents who wished to send their children to a private school had to pay both for it and for the state schools as well. Private schools were further discouraged by the attitudes and actions of the new state educational authorities, who derided and persecuted them (Paulsen, 1908). Attempts were even made to legislate private instruction out of existence (Cole, 1960), and in response they were sometimes forced to carry on their classes clandestinely. Though these "hedge schools" survived into the 17th and 18th centuries, they were marginalized by the growing state educational system.

Melanchthon's vision for mass education was inspired by the guiding principle of the reformation: the direct interpretation of the bible by individuals. The practice, however, was substantially different from its inspiration. If scriptural analysis was left to laymen, so the argument went, "incorrect" interpretations might result. The definition of what was incorrect was of course established by the leaders of the Reformation. As a result, reading, writing, and religion were taught using a pair of elementary catechisms composed by Luther. While he genuinely wished to improve the lot of children, Luther's views on what sort of education was acceptable were narrow and authoritarian. He felt that secular schools would lead to moral bankruptcy, and believed that parents should be compelled to teach their children according to his own views. Despite the spread of independent schools, he wrote to the reigning political authorities that: "It is to you, my lords, to take this task [education] in hand, for if we leave it to the parents, we will die a hundred times over before the thing would be done." (Chartier, 1976) Education once more became religious indoctrination, only this time it was legally mandated by the state. Fortunately for the majority of students who would not go on to a life in the clergy or government service, elementary instruction was given in their mother tongue.

The fate of Germany's city-schools was much the same as that of its private elementary schools. Political authorities at the state level were only slightly less hostile to local government institutions than they were to private enterprises. Pushed and squeezed by the state bureaucrats, city-schools found their curricula and attendance ever more limited. At the same time, new state-run institutions were created and given special privileges which the city-schools were not permitted to offer, such as the right to send their graduates on to university or into particular professions. Occasionally, city-schools were simply taken over by the state out of hand. In the late 16th and early 17th centuries, their pupils were mostly hand-picked by local lords, with the remaining openings allotted to the children of townspeople. Turning away from the popular movement towards education in German, and back to the classical languages so dear to the hearts of reformers, school regulations typically ordained that the new state secondary schools would teach in Latin. Their curriculum, too, culminated in the study of classical literature and scripture. Graduates were expected to converse fluently in Latin and have a passing acquaintance with Greek. In this end they were quite successful, but their achievement came at a cost to German culture and society.

Just prior to the Reformation there had been significant overlap in the education of the nobility and the training of at least the more avid youngsters from the middle classes. Education had been in the mother tongue for all but the clergy, and literate families in the towns and villages could and did share in the prose of their countrymen. Legal proceedings had also been held in German, allowing citizens to participate directly in any court actions which affected them. Once the strictly Latin secondary school system of the reformers was imposed, however, German gradually disappeared as a language of law and culture (Paulsen, 1908) This caused an ever

greater rift between the uneducated masses and the learned elite which persisted for hundreds of years.

### **On the Eve of the Modern World: England**

After the civil wars of the mid 17th century, England was a country without a King. To cement their victory, the Puritan rebels abolished the House of Lords, withdrew the political powers of the bishops, and executed King Charles I on the grounds that his continued existence might encourage royalist revolt. They had little time to enjoy their new-found authority, however, as they were themselves deposed only eleven years later. In 1660 the monarchy was restored, and all its political and religious trappings with it. To forestall any further Puritan uprisings a host of restrictive laws were put in place against them. The Corporation Act of 1661 restricted public office to Anglicans, and it was quickly followed by the broader Act of Uniformity. Under this new legislation, educators at all levels were forced to sign a declaration of conformity to the Church of England's liturgy, and to give their oaths of allegiance to the crown. Nonconformists were thus prohibited from teaching in public and private schools, and their ministers were forbidden from coming within five miles of where they had once preached.

As political winds shifted over the next hundred years, the repressive religious and educational laws were at times ignored and at others reasserted. Having been forced to retreat from public life, the Puritans focused their energies on trade and commerce, expanding the middle class and thus the market for innovative schools. To satisfy this growing demand, a few private, fee-charging academies began to appear, founded illegally in many instances by non-conformist ministers who had been ejected from the teaching profession. In an effort to attract both dissenting and Anglican families, these schools offered an updated, predominantly secular curriculum with an emphasis on English, mathematics, and the natural sciences. One such school, operating in Tottenham in the 1670s, taught "geometry, arithmetic, astronomy and geography, with gardening, dancing, singing and music" in addition to English and some Latin (Lawson & Silver, 1973). Traditional endowed grammar schools, on the other hand, assured of a steady income independent of their ability to attract students, continued to provide the same classical Latin training they had offered since the Middle Ages. The polarization of these two forms of schooling, and their respective fates, clearly illustrate the role of market incentives in the educational process.

The continued growth and diversification of the economy dramatically widened the disparity between the content of traditional education and the needs of the commercial and professional classes. Together with the decline of the Church as an employer, this shift diminished whatever economic advantage the old syllabus might have conferred. Critics denounced the grammar schools as moribund and irrelevant, while parents increasingly sought more practical alternatives. As a result, the conservative endowed schools began to lose middle class pupils to the few private academies that had sprung up in the late sixteen-hundreds. Within a few decades this burgeoning change had solidified into a steep recession for traditional education, and a proliferation of new private academies. In the 18th century, grammar schools continued their descent, as few new ones were opened, some closed, and the rest saw their enrollments drop significantly. When Nicholas Carlisle conducted his multi-year investigation of hundreds of endowed schools in the early 19th century, he found many of them had lost touch with their prospective customers, and showed visible signs of decay. In Stourbridge, for example, he found that the school had taught only a trifling number of students over the preceding forty years, "as Classical learning is in little estimation in a commercial town." (Carlisle, 1818, v. II, p. 773) Despite the fact that Stourbridge's grammar school sometimes had no pupils at all, both its head and assistant masters continued to draw their full salaries. This was in fact not unusual, as masters, once awarded tenure and assigned a fixed salary, were virtually impossible to remove,

even in cases of serious neglect (Lawson & Silver, 1973).

Endowed grammar schools were not entirely beyond the reach of market forces, however. In the many cases where the endowment was low, schoolmasters generally took the financially expedient steps of recruiting private pupils or taking on outside employment to increase their income, necessarily reducing the time they had for their endowment students. Others, such as those at Donington and Cuckfield, taught only one or two "free" (endowment) students, while conducting private lessons with scores of paying students on the foundations' premises (Carlisle, 1818, p. 345, 597). Finally there were masters who simply converted the school buildings into private residences, took no pupils of any kind, and continued to draw their stipend. Despite these systemic problems, there were schools led by dedicated masters able to make do with their allotted salary, that continued to instruct their pupils on the language and literature of ancient Greece and Rome. To the extent that endowed schools modernized their curricula to attract students, however, it was due primarily to the financial imperative.

In direct proportion to the decline in health and popularity of endowed grammar schools, private institutions grew and flourished. Subjects long ignored by the grammar schools began to appear, and soon entirely new ones were added. Arithmetic and geography were among the first, and these were joined by anatomy, biology, bookkeeping, economics, surveying, naval studies, and many others. While sometimes maintaining vestiges of the traditional curriculum, private institutions usually allotted them less time and importance than the new subjects. At St. Domingo House School, for example, Latin instruction was given but only after the children had received several years of training in French and German (Roach, 1986, p. 127). Not only were the subjects new, but the methods were often innovative as well. In keeping with the applied scientific nature of many of the courses, experiments using telescopes, microscopes and other devices complemented the familiar teaching methods. The teachers of Hill Top School conducted lessons with marbles to give children an intuitive grasp of arithmetic before introducing them to numbers and word problems. Physical surveying was used to teach trigonometry at the same institution (Roach, 1986, p. 124). One of the most concrete signs of the different attitude of the private schools was that many catered to girls, while grammar schools did not. Though the curriculum for girls was sometimes less academically ambitious, and always included ample emphasis on morals, manners, and domestic skills, it was at least a step forward.

For the very poorest families, who usually had no interest in a classical education and who could not afford the tuition at the better private institutions, two options remained; religious charity schools and private Dame schools. Though charity schools generally taught basic reading skills, they suffered from the same conflict of goals as the grammar schools. Just as the wealthy donors who endowed grammar schools generally insisted on a traditional Latin curriculum, the middle-class religious societies that funded charity schools had ideas all their own as to what the poor should learn, and these only rarely took into account the interests of the poor themselves. The central purpose was always to inculcate the moral and religious views of the sponsors. A widely held view among religious societies was that "Reading will help to mend people's morals, but writing is not necessary." (Smith, 1931, p. 53) An additional problem with religious charity schools was that the teachers were appointed and supported by religious authorities, rather than by the educational marketplace. Since those overseeing charity schools rarely had children attending them, there was little incentive for them to ensure the teacher's competency. Sometimes sound selections were nonetheless made, but in the worst cases masters were appointed who would never have been able to draw paying students. In Yorkshire, for instance, a "very deaf and ignorant" teacher was appointed by the parochial authorities "that he may not be burdensome to them for his support." (Lawson & Silver, 1973) Not surprisingly, the appeal of these schools was limited. Despite the fact that private schools charged tuition, "the subsidized, endowed and charity schools of Manchester attracted only 8 percent of all those attending schools and there were empty places available." (Royle, 1990)

The ubiquitous Dame schools, usually located in the home of an elderly local widow, also varied widely in quality based on the knowledge and skills of individual teachers. Competition generally kept the fees for such schools at a minimal level, however, and the freedom of families to choose among different teachers ensured that those who failed to meet their client's expectations could remain in business for only a short time. Despite their many shortcomings, Dame schools taught far more students from even the poorest classes than did charity schools, and, as we shall see below, they succeeded in most cases at conveying the rudiments of the English language.

The major religious denominations were not entirely beyond the reach of competitive incentives, however, as is evidenced by the rise of the monitorial system. Monitorial schools, in which the brightest students taught all the rest, drew enormous interest around the turn of the 19th century due to their ability to reach far greater numbers of children at a lesser cost. A single schoolmaster, after imparting the day's lessons to his core of "monitors", could simply sit back and supervise as they carried out the bulk of the instruction. Of course, the quality of instruction depended on the presence of sufficient numbers of bright and capable students, and in some cases was probably only a small improvement over no education at all. Financially, however, the case was clear. The economy of having only one teacher for an entire school meant that formal education could reach even the poorest families. This ability to reach a much larger audience quickly caught the attention of the Church of England, in large part because the first monitorial schools had been run by a Quaker, Joseph Lancaster, along nondenominational lines. The prospect of having so many children educated in what was a predominantly secular environment was anathema to the Church, and so it set about creating its own monitorial system with the elephantine title of "The National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church." Wherever Lancaster had founded a school, the National Society created one of its own with which to compete. Soon the Church of England's network had grown vastly larger than that of its adversary. In keeping with its other educational efforts, the Church's monitorial schools were "instituted principally for Educating the Poor in the Doctrine and Discipline of the Established Church." (National Society, 1972, p. 50) These schools were not intended to provide children a stepping stone to higher studies, but rather to fit them to their positions at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchy. In strictly regimented lessons the pupils were taught to be satisfied with their subservient role in life. Due to this doctrinaire style and the curricular limitations imposed by the Church, monitorial schools failed to transform English education. Dame schools and other private ventures continued to reach a greater number of children than the religious charitable institutions (Royle, 1990).

By the second half of the 19th century, the governmental role in education had increased substantially. The main religious educational societies were now subsidized by parliament in an effort to improve the opportunities of the poor, and state inspectors visited their schools. Friction was high between Church and state over the proper distribution of regulatory and funding powers, and many within the government felt there was insufficient emphasis in the schools on basic subjects and younger grades. In 1862 a "Revised Code" for education was passed into law with the well-intentioned goal of bringing competition and the profit motive into education. The "Payment by Results" program, as it came to be known, stipulated that schools should be paid based on a combination of attendance and student performance on tests administered by state inspectors. What the Council members failed to understand was that by placing the financial strings in the hands of state inspectors instead of families, they would pull the attention of teachers and administrators away from the pupils and towards the government. Failing to satisfy the inspector meant a significant loss in funding, perhaps even forcing the school out of business, while receiving a positive review increased the institution's income. Student learning, insofar as it was not measured by the inspector, was of little financial consequence. The results were tragic.

Even before the legislation was passed a few observers warned that payment based on a few simple tests would encourage teachers to curtail their instruction in other subjects. In the

event, these fears were fully realized. Years after the system had been put into practice, T. H. Huxley observed: "the Revised Code did not compel any schoolmaster to leave off teaching anything; but, by the very simple process of refusing to pay for many kinds of teaching, it has practically put an end to them" (Lawson & Silver, 1973). The testing system consisted of six separate levels, and since children could not be tested at the same level twice, or at a lower level from any previous attempt, schools held back older students so that they could be made to progress through all six levels, bringing in the maximum amount of cash over their educational lifetime. To ensure top scores at inspection time, teachers adopted frequent testing and memorization sessions. Often the children were made to learn their entire reading texts by rote so that they would have the least chance of failing. While some inspectors attempted to subvert these ploys by supplying an altered text or by asking the student to read backwards, others simply passed them: "I consider it to be my duty according to the letter of the Code, to pass every child who can read correctly and with tolerable fluency, whether he or she understand or not a single sentence or a single word of the lesson" (Smith, 1931). Reports from inspectors repeated the same criticism time and again, namely, that students were simply being made to memorize words without understanding their meaning. After years of experience with the system, the Cross Commission confirmed these views, faulting the teaching of reading under the Revised Code for being "too mechanical and unintelligent" (Vincent, 1989). Matthew Arnold (1972), the best known of the inspectors, summed up the consensus among his colleagues:

I find in [English schools], in general, if I compare them with their former selves, a deadness, a slackness, and a discouragement... If I compare them with the schools of the continent I find in them a lack of intelligent life much more striking now than it was when I returned from the continent in 1859.

Not only the education but even the welfare of many children was sacrificed under this system. If a child was absent on the day of the inspection, even if gravely ill, the school would lose his or her attendance allocation. As a result it was not unheard of for school masters to compel children stricken with serious, even infectious, diseases to attend. One inspector observed that:

To hear paroxysms of whooping-cough, to observe the pustules of small-pox, to see infants carefully wrapped up and held in their mothers' arms, or seated on a stool by the fire because too ill to take their proper places, are events not so rare in an inspector's experience as they ought to be. The risk of the infant's life, and the danger of infection to others, are preferred to the forfeiture of a grant of 6s. 6d. (Smith, 1931)

Teachers, forced by financial necessity to provide only the narrowest education to their students, lost all spirit and enthusiasm for their work. Their vocation had been reduced to a game of cat and mouse between the school and the inspector, in which teachers had to learn how to manipulate the system in order to be successful.

Despite its significant impact on schooling, the Revised Code was not the government's most lasting intervention into education. In 1870, W. E. Forster's Education Act added state provision of schooling to its existing roles in funding and inspection. Local school boards were created across the country to fill perceived gaps in the existing network of private and subsidized schools. Over the next several decades, state authority was progressively increased, attendance was made mandatory for children between ages 5 and 13, and tuition fees were gradually reduced to zero by 1918.

Analyzing the changes in literacy and student enrollment that occurred in the 19th century provides additional insight into the relative roles of independent and state schools. The most

systematic evidence on literacy during this time period, both in England and elsewhere, is the frequency with which newlyweds signed their marriage documents—as opposed to simply making a mark. A strong argument can be made that this measure is more accurately described as a negative indicator of illiteracy, since the level of writing ability necessary for signing one's name is minimal, but its usefulness in the absence of other reliable statistical evidence is widely accepted. What these data show is that literacy increased steadily from 67.3% in 1841 to 93.6% in 1891, reaching 97.2% by 1900 (West, 1994). In interpreting this evidence it must be kept in mind that the difference between the mean school leaving age and the mean age of marriage was approximately 17 years. In other words, the 67.3% literacy rate already existing in 1841 cannot be attributed in any way to the initiation of state subsidization, which took place only 8 years earlier. Furthermore, the achievement of 94% literacy in 1891 was accomplished almost entirely before the Forster Education Act of 1870 had had time to generate an effect on the adult population. West has also shown that literacy was on the rise well before 1841.

The trend in school enrollment was substantially similar to that in literacy. The number of children in schools rose "from 478,000 in 1818 to 1,294,000 in 1834 without any interposition of the government or public authorities." (West, 1994, p. 172) Between 1841 and 1850, the number of unsubsidized private schools grew from 688 to 3,754, while subsidized and endowed schools only increased from 415 to 616. Given the rapid rise in enrollment already under way prior to 1870, and the fact that subsidized Board Schools drew many of their customers away from existing private schools, West observes that it is difficult to discern any additional growth in enrollment that could be reasonably attributed to the Forster Education Act.

These figures, particularly for the early years of the 19th century, bear witness to the willingness of even the poorer and less well-educated parents to see to the education of their children, without state compulsion or supervision. Not only were poor parents sufficiently responsible to send their children to school, they also demonstrated a commendable level of selectivity among their various options. The relative failure of subsidized charity schools to attract parents, as compared to Dame and other fee-charging schools, indicates that parents were not only able to choose, but were willing to incur a financial burden in order to do so.

The behavior of teachers in private and subsidized schools is also telling. For more than a hundred years, the private academies of England were the only option for parents seeking a modern curriculum in language, technology, and science. The demand for practical instruction in accounting, surveying, applied sciences, naval skills, and other disciplines key to economic diversification and a higher standard of living were met almost entirely by private teachers. Tenured grammar school masters hung onto their limited Latin and Greek curriculum well beyond its period of usefulness, while religious charity schools often down-played the teaching of writing. Under the Revised Code, the incentive for subsidized-school teachers to satisfy the needs of families was further reduced, while a powerful new incentive to satisfy the baseline requirements of the inspectors was created, with dire results.

## **France After the Revolution**

French education, even more so than that of other European nations, was the battle ground for an epic religious and political power struggle. From monarchy to republic and back again, the revolutionaries strove to use the schools to shore up their position, vying for control with the firmly entrenched Catholic Church. It seems natural to suppose that on the eve of the revolution, with its emphasis on human rights and freedoms, the manipulation of education for political and religious ends would have lessened substantially. This, however, was not the case. The government that eventually emerged, while revolutionary in many respects, continued the age old tradition of using schools as a tool. In order to undermine the power of its primary opponent, the Catholic clergy, parliament severed all ties between education and religion. Nuns and priests



were ordered to sign a constitution restricting their freedom to teach according to their faith. Since compliance with this order was difficult to achieve, the government soon resorted to a more direct approach: outlawing the clergy entirely. In one of history's more remarkable contradictions, the revolutionaries argued that a truly free nation could suffer no religious or secular societies amongst its citizens, and so abolished them (Chevallier, 1969). Simply wearing religious garb became a crime (Gontard, 1959).

Without a well-organized transitional strategy, schooling quickly began to collapse. Like Emperor Nero fiddling as Rome burned, the French parliament continued to debate exactly what the new system should look like as the old one crumbled around them. A genuinely revolutionary minority defended the right of families to choose their schools, whether sectarian or otherwise, but their voices were lost amidst a majority who believed the only choice was between moderate and absolute state control over education. So fervent was the belief in the power of the state and of the value of forced equality, that proposals for a totalitarian system much like Sparta's were put forward, in which children were to be taken away from their parents and educated in government communes. According to the delegate Le Pelletier, "The totality of the child's existence belongs to us [the state]; the clay, if I may express myself thus, never leaves the mold." (Ponteil, 1966)

Eventually a school law was passed, making attendance mandatory and requiring instructors to sign a "civic certificate" restricting their right to provide sectarian religious instruction. In place of the old catholic teachings, a new "natural religion" was imposed on the youth of France. Students were issued catechisms which admonished them to "worship Reason and the Supreme Being," in the deistic republican fashion (Barnard 1969). Having stripped away the traditional religious aspects of schooling, parliament had made teaching decidedly unattractive to the priests and nuns who comprised the vast majority of educators. The supply of willing teachers was thus reduced to a trickle. Even where teachers were to be found, many families resented both the intrusion of the state into their lives, and the ouster of Catholicism, and so kept their children at home. Though government policy had interrupted the existing supply of education, demand remained largely undiminished. So, in the gap created by the failure of state schools, independent religious institutions began to reappear. Unsurprisingly, these new schools were viewed by the republican parliamentary majority as strongholds of fanatics and royalists, to be "struck down" and "annihilated." The continued affinity of many citizens for traditional institutions was itself viewed as a sign of ignorance and lack of learning.

Ten years after the revolution the French educational scene looked like precisely what it was; a battle field. The general consensus of local officials and national observers was that an already weak system had been made worse. Report after report flowed into Paris, each lamenting the sad condition or complete absence of elementary schools. In the midst of this bleak educational landscape, a small group of philanthropists perceived what they thought might be an oasis. Having encountered and been impressed by English monitorial schools on a number of occasions, these men believed the system could help to circumvent the teacher shortage from which their country was suffering, while also replacing the outdated individual instructional technique with more effective group teaching. So, in June of 1815, the first French monitorial school was opened in Paris.

From its original handful of students the new school rapidly grew to an enrollment in the hundreds. Its success was widely praised and by the fall several other monitorial schools had appeared. Beyond the cost-effectiveness of the method, several of its pedagogical innovations attracted significant attention. Monitorial schools cast aside the existing practice of teaching reading and writing as entirely distinct skills, with excellent results. They furthermore grouped students by aptitude in each particular subject rather than strictly by age, allowing the children to progress through the curriculum at their own pace. Finally, in what seems an obvious move to modern readers, they taught to entire groups of students at once, rather than individually to each

child in succession. The one-on-one method, wherein most of the class would devolve into chaos as the teacher focused his or her attention on a single student, had persisted in most church and state schools until the advent of the monitorial system. Of course critics aptly pointed out that the system tended towards excessive regimentation, but the problem was at least less severe than in the monitorial schools of England's National Society. In practice the advantages of the approach seem to have outweighed its weaknesses, for mutual instruction, as it became known, soon spread through France. By January of 1819 there were already 602 monitorial schools. Later that same year the number had increased an astounding 50%, to 912, and continued growing at that rate, reaching 1300 schools by February of 1820 (Gontard, 1959). Not only did the system succeed in opening more schools faster than any previous approach, it was in such great demand that many existing schools were forced to adopt its techniques in order to compete. "Instructors following the old method, seeing their pupils desert in order to run to the new one, are hurrying to adopt it themselves," observed a speaker at the general assembly in Paris (Gontard, 1959).

Unprecedented in their popularity with the citizenry, monitorial schools were nonetheless resented by the state and loathed by church. Managed and funded as they were by either secular private charities or municipal authorities, they enjoyed a significant measure of independence, making them difficult to manipulate by the established powers. The two most invidious characteristics of the system, as seen by Church and state, were its secularism and its meritocratic nature. Supporters of mutual education lauded the fact that it taught children "to obey merit... no matter who its repository may be," (Fouret & Ozouf, 1982) i.e. to disregard notions of social class, but the clergy argued that this would subvert the social order (Moody, 1978). The assembly and the University of Paris also feared they were losing their hold on education, and so set out to regain it.

In the years after its founding, the University of Paris had seen its role in primary and secondary schooling marginalized, and its influence atrophy. With education legislation pending in the assembly, its governors saw an opportunity to reassert their authority. This task proved somewhat easier than might be expected due to the fact that most of those drafting the legislation were prominent members of the University, committed to its control over all schools. The church was still a powerful force, however, and its lobbying won several compromises in the final law. The legislative patchwork thus created had bits to suit everyone, except, perhaps, the people of France: The University won a monopoly for granting the newly required teacher certifications; the Catholic Church was appeased by the requirement for thousands of regional supervisory committees, which its priests would head; and municipalities, due to their limited political influence, ended up with a few places on the Church's committees.

Though nominally meant to ensure the competence of candidates, teacher certification was entirely divorced from instructional practice. The examiners, usually local college professors selected by the University, had little knowledge of a primary school environment they had neither experienced themselves nor perhaps even observed (Ponteil, 1966). Usually too easy and sometimes too difficult, the uneven certification process was of little help in improving the quality of instruction.

Far more damaging than the haphazard certification of teachers was the requirement for regional school committees. Though headed up by local priests, these committees officially reported to the University, putting the Church in a subservient role. The clergy chafed at this limitation of their authority, and fought it with every technique they could devise. In a vast number of cases they simply refused to convene meetings, preferring to assume personal control over their local schools and school-masters. In those cases when the members did meet, internal squabbles were the norm, with the Catholic traditionalists and liberal defenders of mutual education locked in unswerving opposition to one another. Thanks to their organization and influence, the priests usually emerged victorious, picking whichever instructor best suited their needs. It was common for pious and acquiescent school-masters to receive favorable treatment,

being freed from any legal requirements which might disqualify them from teaching, while those educators with strong individual wills, or with more liberal views, were persecuted and criticized in the priests' reports.

Committee members drawn from the local community were generally of little help in improving the process. Virtually all were otherwise employed and were neither willing nor able to spend a significant amount of time on the unsalaried position. With neither the experience nor the incentive to spur them on, their motivation quickly ebbed. Even proponents of the original law admitted its failure. In addressing parliament (*Archives parlementaires*, 1879), one of its founders, Guizot, made the following pronouncement:

There are 2,846 cantons [in France]... For many years we have expended considerable effort organizing cantonal committees, but we have managed to create only 1,031; moreover, these still exist only on paper, there are hardly 200 that have taken any real action.

The final nail in the coffin of independent schools was the resurgence of Catholic political power. In the early 1820's the Church won an important victory, having bishop Frayssinous appointed Grand Master of the University of Paris, and Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs and Public Education. From this new position of influence the Church was able to push through legislation granting it wide-ranging powers over teachers and schools. Classes were made to begin and end with prayers, its catechism was to be learned in daily lessons, and teachers were made increasingly answerable to the local priest. Due to their generally secular nature, and the fact that their origins lay in English Protestantism, monitorial schools were singled out for the fiercest attack. Priests leveraged their pulpits, demonizing mutual-teaching and its supporters in sermon after sermon. After only a few years of this new regime, monitorial schools were all but extinguished: their numbers were reduced from 1500 in 1821, to 258 by 1827 (Ponteil, 1966).

For the rest of the nineteenth century, the battle for control of education waged on. Though primary schooling reached an ever larger segment of the population, its nature at any given time continued to be decided by the faction with the greatest political clout. The degree of politicization and centralization of French schooling was well captured by the attitude of Hippolyte Fortoul, Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs and Public Education from 1851 to 1856. Drawing a watch from his pocket he boasted that "At this moment, all the students of the lycees [secondary schools] are explaining the same passage from Virgil." (Moody, 1978, p. 59) Under Fortoul, the hours, methods, and content of teaching were all codified. Teachers were forced to swear an oath of loyalty, support official candidates, and were even prohibited from growing beards or mustaches.

Though the more liberal regimes of the eighties and nineties sought to make state education accessible to the entire nation, they stopped short of letting citizens decide exactly what kind of education was appropriate. Jules Ferry, nominated minister of public instruction in 1880, believed that all French children had the right to an education, but that the awarding of degrees must remain the prerogative of the state. This tool, coupled with the government inspection of all schools, was necessary in his eyes to maintain national unity and a common morality, and to regulate access to public office. Two national teachers' colleges, founded in 1883, insured a new generation of educators free from the conservative royalist views of the clergy. (Ponteil, 1966)

The traditional view of French educational history describes the 19th century as a period in which increased state intervention led to the expansion of schooling and the wider dispersion of literacy and culture. Certainly it has been shown that both state schooling and literacy grew significantly during the 1800's. Grew and Harrigan go somewhat further, concluding that since the correlation between enrollment and later literacy is larger than the correlation between literacy and later enrollment, state schooling must have been responsible for some of the growth

in literacy (1991, p. 72). Even this cautious conclusion is subject to question, however. While Grew and Harrigan based their conclusion on the literacy figure for a single year, a study conducted by Furet and Ozouf (1982) looked at the literacy data at several points during the 19th century. Among their findings was that literacy was widespread in many Northern and Eastern districts in the 1700s, well before the appearance of state elementary schools. They also found that in general, areas that had high levels of state school enrollment already had high levels of literacy before that enrollment could have had an effect. Enrollment of 8 to 12 year olds in 1850, for example, was already strongly correlated with adult literacy in 1854. In other words, high levels of literacy and state school enrollment tended to be contemporaneous. Furet and Ozouf concluded that the relationship between literacy and schooling was to a great extent circular; literate parents were more likely to seek education for their children, and educated children were more likely to become literate. The entire process stemmed from a growing demand on the part of the public for literacy, spawned by the spread of written material and the increasing economic value of reading and writing. They wrote that:

In the long term, [schooling] is nothing but a product of the demand for education. Of course, a school founded purely out of individual generosity or at a bishop's initiative may produce a temporary improvement in education in a parish; but its chances of enduring and of generating far-reaching changes in cultural patterns are slim, unless it is not only accepted but actively wanted by the inhabitants. (p. 66)

The truth of this assessment is attested to by the success of the independent monitorial schools, which not only flourished in response to popular demand, but led existing institutions to emulate their innovations. In many cases, these innovations were subsequently discarded by the state schools. The practice of grouping students by ability, for instance, though supported by modern research (Kulik, 1992), is rarely seen in schools to this day.

The battles over control of French schooling did have a significant impact on social stability, however. In the very area in which many educators tout the superiority government schooling over competitive market provision-fostering understanding and social harmony-the outcome appears to have been quite the opposite. Whether by republican parliamentarians or Catholic monarchists, the state schools were used as a weapon with which to bludgeon their opponents. In their time in office, the revolutionaries cut the clergy's ties to education in order to weaken their influence on the people. As the Church rose once again to power, Catholic teachings were legally forced on the state schools and private secular institutions came under heated attack. In contrast to this state compulsion, the independent monitorial schools placed no religious restrictions on their pupils or teachers. They were also the first to integrate children of upper and lower classes, but far from being supported in this by the educational bureaucracies of clergy and government, they were fiercely opposed.

## **Conclusion**

Having described the history of schooling in these four different contexts, it is useful to see what commonalities present themselves. In particular, it is fruitful to look back at the three measures of quality listed in the introduction, namely: responsiveness and innovation, direct benefits, and indirect benefits.

There is no question that competitive educational markets have been more responsive to the needs and demands of parents than centrally controlled, subsidized systems. This has held true whether the monolithic systems have been run and paid for by governments, as was most commonly the case, or by religious societies. In Athens, changing public demand resulted in changes to the elementary curriculum, and even led to the creation of secondary education.

Spartan schooling, both due to implicit features of its organization and to the explicit wishes of its rulers, kept all innovation and progress at bay for hundreds of years. In pre-reformation Germany, it was the small private school that was first to offer instruction in the vernacular, both to adults and children. The state-run schools fostered by Luther and Melancthon often ignored the wishes of the public, insisting on a classical course of studies useless to the common man. The same was true of England's endowed grammar schools. English Dame schools, by contrast, taught only what parents were willing to pay for, even attracting families away from the subsidized schools run by religious societies. For centuries, the most sophisticated and modern instruction in England was to be had at private secondary schools, which introduced the sciences, practical engineering and surveying techniques, naval skills, and living foreign languages. Before they were squeezed out of existence by tax-subsidized public schooling, there was simply nothing that could compare to them. In France, monitorial schools led the way in pedagogical innovation and in meeting public demands--so much so that other schools were forced to adopt their methods in order to avoid losing pupils.

In looking at the direct benefits bestowed on students by different approaches to educational organization, the clearest distinction to be found is between the practical and the pointless. Privately financed and operated schools have tended to offer programs of practical benefit to their clients, while centralized systems have taught only those subjects chosen by their founders or administrators--in most cases subjects of little value to the average member of the public. While private schools have consistently taught literacy in the vernacular of their clients for thousands of years, this has only rarely been the case in state or charity-run schools. When it was finally taught by the religious societies in England, they often deliberately omitted teaching writing. Similarly, practical training in mathematics and science has been ignored by bureaucratic school systems until quite recently, while their history dates back to the 5th century B.C. in private schools.

Perhaps the most glaring contradiction between the beliefs of modern public school advocates and the historical evidence is in the area of indirect or social benefits (also called positive externalities). Defenders of public schooling argue that only it can preserve social harmony and a sound economy, while a competitive educational market would lead to social strife and presumably economic deterioration. Nothing could be further from the truth. Government-run schools have in fact been far more coercive, and far more likely to lead to social discord than their private counterparts. Tying themselves to a single religion or ideology, public schools have often alienated all those who did not share the chosen views. When French monitorial schools encouraged the intermingling of children of different social classes, and respecting intellectual merit no matter what its source, they were actually criticized for it by the ruling powers of public schooling. When English law forbade non-conformists to teach, they taught nonetheless, privately and illegally, and generally admitted students irrespective of their religion. Because private schools allowed families the option of pursuing the particular kind of education they value, conflicts were avoided.

Whenever the state chooses one world view over all others, it places its own people into conflict with one another. This has been happening for centuries, and it continues to happen today. As for indirect economic benefits, there is simply no question. By offering more practical preparation than their government-run counterparts, private schools have contributed far more, per capita, to bolstering their national economies.

One area in which both private and public schools have performed poorly throughout history, at least by modern standards, is the provision of education for the poor. While it is possible to trace an historical desire among wealthy individuals to contribute to the education of the poor, this desire has rarely been effectively translated into action. Government-subsidized schools, as well as private religious charities, provided easier access to educational services than unsubsidized private institutions, but these services were not generally based on the needs and

demands of the families they served. This is evident from situations such as the one in Manchester where free and subsidized schools held only a small share of the market, and, despite having empty places available, still lost potential customers to their unsubsidized competition. To a certain extent, poor parents have thus had to choose between the private schools that met their needs and the subsidized schools they could more readily afford, with little intersection between the two.

The import of the historical evidence for modern schooling is clear. Competition and the profit motive must be reintroduced into education so that teachers and school administrators will once again have a powerful incentive to meet the needs of the children and parents they serve. It can also be expected that the elimination of existing educational monopolies will alleviate many of the ongoing battles over curriculum and religion in the schools, by allowing families to pursue an education in accordance with their own values, without the need to impose those values on others. What remains to be resolved is the question of how to integrate the reintroduction of market forces with the subsidization of families with limited financial means. Vouchers and tax-credits no doubt offer a viable approach to the problem, though the need for more work in the design and application of these plans is paramount.

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Andrew J. Coulson is an independent scholar based in Seattle, WA. Determining how schools can best be structured in order to serve the needs of families and communities has been the focus of his work over the past three years. He has written articles on the organization, condition, and history of education. His most recent publication, "Schooling and Literacy Over Time: The Rising Cost of Stagnation and Decline," appeared in vol. 30, no. 3 (October 1996) of the journal *Research in the Teaching of English*.

At present, he is completing a manuscript for the general public on the organization of schooling, tentatively titled *On the Way to School*. This book will address the educational problems currently confronting parents by clearly explaining what people want from their schools and how they can get it. It will do this by comparing school systems throughout history and showing which have worked, which have not, and why.

Prior to entering the field of education several years ago, Andrew Coulson was a systems software engineer with Microsoft corp. So, while Bill Gates quit school to form Microsoft, Andrew Coulson quit Microsoft to reform schools. He received his B. Sc. Degree in Mathematics and Computer Science from McGill University in Montreal, Canada (Andrew, that is, not Bill).

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**Contributed Commentary on**  
**Volume 4 Number 9: Coulson *Markets Versus Monopolies in Education: The Historical Evidence***

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17 July 1996

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*Markets Versus Monopolies in Education: The Historical Evidence* is a well written and clearly argued polemic. In it, Andrew Coulson puts together a rather lengthy chain of stories about the place of "market forces" in the delivery of educational services from the time of the Greeks forward. It is understandable that his observations are limited to social and political systems that were large and well organized since his aim is to discuss education in the context of schools. A quite different picture would appear if one considered "education" in less complex and technological societies, but such education differs in its aims as well as in its substance from the kinds of academic program that is of interest to Coulson in this work. The paper is presented as a history and it may seem unfortunate that it relies so frequently on secondary sources; however, Coulson's aim seems not to be to shed new light on history but to draw implications from known history so the secondary sources do not present a serious problem.

The history presented is stimulating reading, but the author's conclusions are perhaps too amply foreshadowed by the evaluative language used throughout. An early example occurs in Coulson's description of "the case against" parental choice and inter-school competition: "A significant number of parents, it is assumed, would either fail to inform themselves about competing schools, or would base their choices on the 'wrong' criteria." The author's preferences are revealed in this statement in several ways. First of all, most writers would be inclined to describe the case in favor of an innovation first so that the arguments against might be understood in context. Coulson prefers to write first about the case against so that the "the case in favor" may serve as rebuttal and, I would presume, to gain the benefits of the recency effect in the reader's memory. Second, the use of scare quotes around "wrong" seems to imply that the criteria that would be chosen are indeed **NOT** wrong. Finally, the choice of "it is assumed" as opposed to "it is claimed" or "it is argued" presents this proposition as an ideological presumption rather than as an empirically testable claim.

It seems to me too that there is something crafty in Coulson's use of references to minority groups advocates for an educational free market as the opening paragraph of the case in favor. Even reading from outside the United States, I recognize Ben Chavis as a very conservative writer whose own Horatio Alger life experience leaves him inclined to expect that individual hard work and determination invariably result in just rewards. While I do not know the other parties Coulson cites, this one is enough to suggest that he has been exceedingly selective in his choice of representatives for a minority point of view.

The effects of such a presentation can be powerfully persuasive and I expect that this article will prove persuasive to many readers. As I said earlier, it is a well written and clearly argued polemic, but readers should bear in mind that from the outset, the author is taking a stand and seeking to persuade. This is not simply "the historical evidence" as the title claims. It is **some** of the historical evidence presented in the context of the author's unshakable faith in free market forces as a basis for educational reform. As such it is both a good read and a good exercise for a critical intellect, but the reader should really be alerted to the author's intentions at the beginning rather having his conclusions appear as if they arose from the data presented. The conclusions are, I think, far too strong for the data. I appreciate the paragraph dealing with the inadequacies of market systems in providing for the education of the poor, Coulson could go a lot further in making clear **exactly** who was educated in each of the historical systems he presented. Not only was much of the education he discusses limited to males, it was also often limited to "citizens" which frequently meant landowners. Great masses of children would not likely have been covered by any of the education the author speaks of but would have been left to fend for themselves without benefit of education. Moreover, the author's recognition of this problem does not prevent him or her from asserting that "Competition and the profit motive must be reintroduced into education so that teachers and school administrators will once again have a powerful incentive to meet the needs of the children and parents they serve." The conclusion assumes that schools do not now address the needs of children and parents, a proposition about which a **charitable** assessment (from any political view) might be that the evidence is mixed.

I will not attempt to treat each of the historical periods that Coulson discusses, but I would like to illustrate how the facts of his presentation might lend themselves to alternate interpretations. Take, for example, Coulson's passing comment: "...Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum, neither of which charged a fee due to the wealth and preferences of their founders..." While it introduces a section on for-profit schooling in Athens, it also makes a point about the role of generous benefactors in providing schooling. Such claims are often part of the rationale of contemporary private schools that seek scholarships to support the tuition of able but needy students. This happens, of course, and students no doubt benefit. But the generosity of Plato or Aristotle might also be seen as a precedent for the generosity of today's elite. Suppose, for example, that in a school system given over to the free market, Ross Perot or Ted Turner were to offer free schooling to some large number of students. Would we be prepared to have those schools become vehicles for the promulgation of a particular set of political principles? On the other hand, the American Communist Party in the 1930's was very generous in support of a variety of charities--suppose communist interests, domestic or foreign, wanted to establish private schools with little or no tuition. Would we be prepared to impose severe regulations on the ownership and operation of private schools to insure that they did not serve narrow political interests or would we be prepared to take it as an article of faith that market competition would address such problems?

An alternate interpretation might also be given to Luther's concern that "if we leave it (education) to the parents, we will die a hundred times over before the thing would be done." Coulson clearly sees this as simply wrong-headed thinking--it is an article of faith for him that parents will in fact make good choices for their children. But if we allow that Luther may have known something of the people he was talking about, it is not unreasonable to consider that the child's labor for the family farm or business might have been far too valuable to sacrifice for an education. The "good choice" for most peasant families might well have been to choose food over literacy. Given the availability of low-paying jobs in the service industry today, families could just as readily decide that a sixteen year old's income is a better bargain than paying for schooling. Are we prepared to

either decrease the school leaving age or to accept higher dropout rates? My point is only this: however clear the facts of history may seem to be, its lessons are invariably ambiguous.

Finally, while there is certainly ample food for thought in the historical antecedents, Coulson would do well to inform readers about the differences between contemporary democracies and the states that supported the public education systems described in this piece. We ought not minimize the differences in social ecology that make simple generalizations from the past inappropriate.

This article is informative and provocative. I would not want readers to be left with only Coulson's interpretation of the "the historical evidence," but I think both his perspective and his arguments merit consideration.

**Contributed Commentary on  
Volume 4 Number 9: Coulson *Markets Versus Monopolies in Education: The Historical Evidence***

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8 July 1996

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Hopefully it's not too late to respond to Coulson's 'Markets Versus Monopolies in Education'.

1. It's an interesting and clearly written paper.
2. He has chosen interesting examples, though I question the relevance of examples from Sparta and Athens.
3. My main point: It is possible (and I think wise) to read his paper as an argument for 'decentralization' rather than 'privitization'. Decentralization is, after all, one of the many forms of privatization (see Bray, Mark (various recent years)). Decentralization is not a market response, rather it is about delegating authority to the local level. It is possible to decentralize curriculum decisions (thereby presumably making the curriculum more relevant) without privatizing the finance of education. This may be the best solution. In fact, there is generally more local control of education in the US than elsewhere in the world. For example, there is no national curriculum and local school boards have genuine power to effect change.

The concern I have about market solutions to education is of the danger that ability to pay will determine the quality of education one receives. Of course, already in the US, income clearly determines educational choice at all levels (see 'Savage Inequalities'). Further, I worry about the hidden agenda of market solutions which I believe is to break teacher unions. Have we collectively forgotten why teacher unions (and unions generally) arose? Does anyone believe that the world has changed since then in such a way as to obviate the need for organized labor in response to organized capital?

Rather, it seems that as capital has become more organized (resulting, inter alia, in GATT, the EC, and NAFTA), labor has become less so (see Freeman, Richard). We seem to have arrived at a very unhealthy level of political inequality between capital and labor. Not surprisingly, this seems to have resulted in the majority of people working more with less security and for a declining share of total income, with consequent societal effects.

Broadly, it seems to me that the 'market solution/privitization' agenda that has dominated the US since, say, 1980 has had numerous, rather ugly side effects. Among these are:

1. The dramatic rise in income inequality to historically record levels.
2. The stagnation of average wages.
3. The marked real decline in the minimum wage and social welfare benefits.



4. The rise in violent and drug-related crime, in response to which the US has imprisoned a higher proportion of its population than any other country in the world.

These seem obviously related to each other and to have obviously resulted from privatization and market solutions. Certainly, they have coincided with the rise of the privatization/market solutions agenda.

Are Americans satisfied with these results? Has the American society become a 'better society' (however that is defined)? It seems to me that as the increasingly privatized American society has become qualitatively worse (in my view), so too will increasingly privatized education become worse. This is not to say that greater decentralization of educational decision making is anything but good.

**Contributed Commentary on  
Volume 4 Number 9: Coulson *Markets Versus Monopolies in Education: The Historical Evidence***

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**Editor's note: The following commentary is an excerpt from the EDPOLICY Listserv. It is a general comment about vouchers and is not directly connected to Andrew Coulson's EPAA article.**

30 May 1996

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Proponents of vouchers frequently point to higher education as a model of how vouchers might work on the K-12 level and, more importantly, cite it as evidence that vouchers need not degrade the quality of education. On the contrary, they would legitimately point out, the GI Bill allowed American universities (or multiversities, as Clark Kerr declared) to expand and become a leader in higher education throughout the world. In other words, voucher proponents invite us to consider a *gedanken* (or thought) experiment: what would K-12 look like if it were like American higher education?

I'm going to skip here the responses one might make about whether we like the shape of American higher education, what happened when federal loan and grant money started going to beauty schools and other proprietary institutions, and so forth. Let's grant for the moment that the shape of higher education is a reasonable best-case scenario, and that it probably would not be worse to end up with something like that compared with the current configuration of K-12. Instead, I have a different question: can we identify today what would be a worst-case scenario for vouchers, what Herb Gintis called "fatal compromises" that would make K-12 much worse than the admittedly flawed status quo?

I assert that day care as currently exists in the United States is a very good example of what the worst-case scenario might be for K-12 education if privatized. Currently, most states have some subsidies available for day care for poor families. These subsidies cover only a fraction of children across the state who need child care, and they cover only a fraction of the cost of good child care. A number of corporations have sprouted across the country providing child care either as franchises appealing to parents (e.g., KinderCare) or as subcontractees of corporations (e.g., Corporate Child Care). Standards for child care are spotty across the country. When the Tennessee commission on child care standards recently suggested mild revisions to existing standards, it got bottled up because it would have made the governor's welfare proposal much more expensive. (It would have required such unreasonable things as having someone on site with CPR/rescue training, a 6:1 toddler:teacher ratio, and the elimination of a vast loophole which allowed child care centers essentially to ignore the ratio standards which currently exist.) (I should also mention that there are no standards in Tennessee for child care provided in private homes.)

In other words, child care is a pretty lousy privatized system with poor public subsidies and weak standards. This despite the growth of professional organizations such as NAEYC. I would argue that, if K-12 is privatized, it might turn into the equivalent of child care. Not necessarily, but it's a possibility.

Moreover, child care conditions in most states demonstrate the avowed hypocrisy of politicians who support vouchers. Many of those supporting vouchers are the same ones who refuse to support more subsidies for child care. NO ONE is arguing, to my knowledge, that child care is satisfactory or that child care centers waste money. (Putting about 80% or so into salaries for teachers, they're probably among the most efficient places around.) Politicians just don't want to spend money on child care, and the thousands of parents who need it haven't changed the behavior of state legislatures. I suspect that, if K-12 is privatized, the same instincts will govern political behavior. Political rhetoric will put more downward pressure on school funding, more pressure than currently exists, and there will not be the countervailing influence of funding structures that we now have. To any politicians supporting vouchers, I'd say, "Put your money where your mouth is. Support increased subsidies and standards for child care in your state, and I'll believe that you're serious about having a good privatized system. Because we should make the privatized system we have good before we think about privatizing K-12."