

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

Education, Liberation, and Freedom From the Known:

The Philosophy of J. Krishnamurti

A Thesis submitted to the
University Honors Program
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Baccalaureate Degree
With University Honors

Department of Philosophy

by

Donna Lundstrom

DeKalb, Illinois

May, 1988

Abstract

In studying the philosophy of J. Krishnamurti, I will be focusing on his ideas on education. Krishnamurti insists on educating without fear, without authority, and without competition. He suggests that rather than a hierarchical relationship, the educator and the educated should meet on the same level, questioning and counter-questioning. He promotes the idea that the mind must become incredibly sensitive, alert, and aware in order for real learning to take place. A mind in this state is alive and innocent, ready for learning. Keen observation and self-knowledge should be main goals in education, so that the students can form clear pictures of themselves and the world around them. The concepts of freedom, discipline, and order are also very important in the understanding of right education. One purpose of this education is so that students will not conform and simply fit into society. To change society, which Krishnamurti feels is in dire need of change, one must start by changing oneself. Education, which he agrees must include the gaining of knowledge, must more importantly create intelligent human beings; therefore, education is of the utmost significance in the bettering of life, and indeed, in the very survival of it.

Outline

I. The state of education today

1. Fear
2. Conformity-security
3. Discipline
4. Authority
5. Competition/Success
6. Violence

II. What education should be, what true learning is

1. Knowledge/Intelligence
2. Self-knowledge
3. Sensitivity, Observation
4. Revolt
5. Freedom, and order
6. Love

III. Implementation

1. "New" school
 - a. teachers
2. Into Northern's Honors Program

**Education, Liberation, and Freedom From the Known:
The Philosophy of J. Krishnamurti**

Donna Lundstrom

PHIL 491H

Richard Quinney

May, 1988

"In oneself lies the whole world, and if you know how to look and learn, then the door is there and the key is in your hand. Nobody on earth can give you either that key or the door to open, except yourself.

Krishnamurti, from You Are The World

Education, Liberation, and Freedom from the Known:

The Philosophy of J. Krishnamurti

This essay begins with a brief history of Krishnamurti. Section I is a discussion of the state of education today, focusing on the issues of fear, conformity, discipline, authority, competition, and violence. Section II deals with what Krishnamurti believes education should be. This involves the difference between knowledge and intelligence, along with the concepts of self-knowledge, sensitivity and observation, revolt, freedom and order, and love. The last section involves the possibility for the implementation of these suggestions.

Born in 1895 in South India of poor Brahmin parents, he was adopted by Mrs. Annie Besant when he was barely twelve years of age. He was to be fitted into the role of a world teacher in line with Krishna, Buddha, and Christ, and was actually proclaimed to be such a Messiah by Charles Leadbeater of the famous Theosophical Society. An order of the Star of the East was set up with Krishnamurti as its head to propagate the teachings of the Messiah. However, after the death of his brother in 1925 in California, Krishnamurti dissolved the Order of the Star in 1929, underwent a radical psychological change and repudiated all claims to be a Messiah. These early experiences must have left an indelible imprint on Krishnamurti's mind. They partly account for his rejection of all dogma and authority—whether secular or sacred, thus setting him on the path of total independent thinking. Ever since then Krishnamurti has evidenced rare courage in thinking for himself and stimulating his audience to do likewise during the course of his well-organized and tightly-knit lectures. Without adopting any orator's gimmick he often

thinks aloud in a fresh manner leading his hearers step by step to follow him in analyzing topics of basic human concern (Mathur, 1983).

I

Krishnamurti realizes the pressing need for change in educational methods today. He thinks of our society as mad, and evidence definitely supports him. We need only look at the world around us, at the violence, stupidity, and callousness, to realize that we are in a state of chaos. People starve to death, murder, terrorism, and a host of other atrocities abound, and war threatens our very survival. His argument is that our educational system is educating our children to fit into this madness, rather than teaching in ways that might help to correct or alleviate it. In order for our world to be saved, literally, a revolution must take place in the way in which we educate our children, and indeed, in how we educate ourselves. What Krishnamurti is calling for is not only a radical change in education, but a radical change in the minds and lives of all people. There are definite steps that we can take, he argues, to begin to create a sane society.

Although he puts great emphasis on several unconventional ideas, Krishnamurti believes there is a place for many of the existing educational practices. The educational basics of reading, writing, math, history, geology, geography, biology, etc., must be taught in order for students to be equipped to function in the world. He does

not argue that one should not be knowledgeable, only that one should also be intelligent. He even concedes vocational training; after all, one must support oneself if possible. But he asserts that we need to ask questions such as, "What is the point of just getting a good job and making a lot of money if in the process your mind becomes dull and stupid?" (see 1974:84). Though part of the task of education is to train, it must go far beyond that. While training produces efficient citizens, it does not create ~~not~~ holistically complete persons.

The process of being educated is no longer a holistic experience, but rather, a technical training exercise. So much emphasis is being placed on specialized departments, each person being trained to fit into his or her little niche, that education really has very little meaning except to be trained for a job. If we are being educated only to be scientists, scholars, and specialists, then we may be outwardly intellectual, but incomplete and uncreative inwardly (see 1953:15). Our educational system in general produces mechanical, thoughtless people, which in turn furthers the thoughtlessness and mechanization of society. School prepares us for only certain aspects of life, when it should be preparing us for the entirety of life.

We have to go beyond the teaching of factual knowledge if we are to help create intelligent people. As Krishnamurti says, "...a mind that has merely been trained in factual knowledge is incapable of meeting life in its variety, its subtlety, its depths and great heights. When we train our children according to a particular system of thought or a particular discipline, when we teach them to think within depart-

mental divisions, we prevent them from growing into integrated men and women..." (1953:24). Modern education teaches us to learn from books, memorize facts, and pass examinations, but it doesn't teach how to observe, how to listen, how to really be in direct touch with the world. Education offers endless theories and facts, but it does not help to bring about an understanding of the total process of human existence. Though we are highly cunning and intellectual, we are rarely creators. While we are taught to quote what others have said, we are not often taught to do original thinking. We fill our minds with knowledge, information, and very often, arrogance. To merely cultivate intellect, which is to develop capacity or knowledge, does not result in intelligence (see 1953:63). What, then, is the present educational system preparing us for?

The present system, which is based on exploitation and fear, leads to the inculcation of self-defensive fears. We are being trained by education and environment to seek personal gain and security, and to fight for ourselves (see 1953:12,13). This fear, which will be discussed at length subsequently, creates psychological barriers which separate people. We are educated into an endless routine—we pass examinations, we get a job, get married, have children, pay taxes, etc. Rather than something to help us with every aspect of life, education is thought of as something to help us achieve distinction, get a better job, and have greater power over others. Though education may equip us to make money, it leaves us shallow and uncaring and does not help us out of this endless conflict. One of the biggest problems that lies at

the heart of ineffective education today is fear.

As Krishnamurti points out, most of us learn through fear. We are taught through authority and obedience, and at the heart of both of these lies fear. Two main institutions that inspire and promote fear are authority and competition, along with the innate human desire for security. We need only think about the authority/obedience relationship to realize its implications. "What happens to you when you obey? You cease to think. Because you feel that the authorities know so much, are such powerful people, you begin to obey, and become a slave to an idea, an impression, to influence" (1974:52). We need to ask then, whether or not it is possible to learn without authority. Authority breeds fear, and can a fearful person learn? When there is fear, no true learning can take place. A very mechanical sort of knowledge gathering might occur, but a true understanding is not likely to come about. The question for the educator is how does one teach without authority, and therefore, without fear? The function of education is to eliminate fear, and at the same time, give knowledge.

How can one be completely free of fear? Krishnamurti suggests that if we understand fear, we will no longer be afraid of it. We need to try to find out what we are afraid of and see if we cannot go beyond that fear, not simply in theory, but in practice. If we really come to understand something, we are no longer afraid of it. Krishnamurti gives an example of understanding fear:

Suppose I am afraid of [death]--now what is that fear? Is it actual or is it merely a thought, in time?...Thinking about

something which I do not know creates fear. But if it were actual, if death were there immediately and I were going to die now, there is no fear. Thought in time creates fear. But if something has to be done immediately there is no fear, because thinking is not possible...To eliminate fear you have to consider thought as time and then inquire into this whole process of thinking....My thinking about what might happen projects fear. So can I...look at that fear now, not ten days later?...There are two kinds of time: time by watch,...[and another] which is created by the psyche inside one, by thought—"I shall be a great man", "I shall have a job"...—that is the psychological future, in time and space. Now to understand chronological time by the watch and to understand time as thought and to go beyond both, is really to be free of fear (1974:58,59).

We know from experience that we cannot get rid of fear through discipline or suppression, or by wishing it away; it follows that to actually get rid of a fear, its causes have to be searched out and understood. This requires tremendous patience and awareness. However, this effort is very important because if we are fearful, we will almost surely not develop to our potential. Being fearful makes one lose one's sense of adventure, and becomes a limiting factor throughout life. If one is fearful, it is very easy to fall into the ruts of society--being afraid to be different, to think otherwise than the established pattern of society, to not question authority or tradition. One of the most troubling aspects of all is that our whole upbringing and education now point us in this fearful direction. One innate problem in the dilemma of fear is the human need for security.

Human beings, like most animals, instinctively crave security. Very often, people do not care what happens to others as long as they are safe. We are fearful when we are insecure. One way to fulfill this need is through conforming, which is of course a very secure thing to do. It is safe and easy to conform, to fit into a groove. It can be very comfortable and satisfying, but in this life of conformity are fear and decay. The desire to imitate is a very strong factor in our lives. This imitation breeds fear, and fear kills creative thinking (see 1964:11, also 1953:56, 57). Conformity leads to mediocrity; but mediocre people are not troublemakers, they are more prone to be productive, law-abiding citizens. Therefore, society would much rather see people conform. This is not to say that it is bad to be a productive, law-abiding citizen, but simply that it is insufficient; as capable people, we have the responsibility to at least try to better society. (This is also not to say that trouble-making is necessarily good.) Our educational system is being used to turn out people who will conform and to fit into society, but is that what education should be? Couldn't we educate in a way so that students would be excellent in biology and writing and so on, and still refuse to conform into the madness of society? Surely, this must be the role of education. "Merely to implant existing values in the mind of the child, to make him conform to ideals, is to condition him without awakening his intelligence" (1953:25). Children, while they do have some superficial freedoms, are being taught through our schools to accept all the old values of money, power, and prestige. Society wants us all to conform nicely

into this pattern of values. "We have been taught to conform to the authority of a teacher, of a book, of a party, because it is profitable to do so" (1953:35, see also 1974:15). Isn't the educational system and society today turning out people whose main interest is to find security, to become somebody important? To continue to condition children to accept the values of money and position and to accept the present condition of the world is stupidity. This conditioning does not bring about happiness or intelligence. Education can help to produce a different human being—one who cares, who has affection and loves people, as we will discuss later. In our hopes to force children to conform and obey, we often resort to various forms of discipline.

Discipline has become an important factor in the present social structure, and it is because of our desire to be psychologically secure that we accept and practice various forms of discipline. There are many dangers involved in discipline. It can become a habit as an easy way to control a child, it can become a substitute for love, and often, it can develop into a routine that becomes more important than the human beings who are entrapped by it (see 1953:31,32). Though discipline may bring about a quick answer to monitoring a child's behavior, it does not help them to understand the problems of living. Discipline is not conducive to understanding--it breeds animosity, prejudice, and resistance. It can also build a tremendous pattern of fear. Innate and conditioned fears and the need for security promote the acceptance of authority, which is yet another great problem with

today's education.

One of the results of fear is the acceptance of authority. Authority is created by our desire to be right, to be secure, and to feel comfortable. Submitting to authority can be seen as a self-protective reaction (see 1953:58). When we blindly follow a belief or certain traditional ideas, we are avoiding our own problems and difficulties by not working them out for ourselves. The acceptance of authority may help us temporarily to cover up our difficulties and problems, but to avoid problems only intensifies them in the long run. In a sense, freedom is denied by the acceptance of authority. Krishnamurti feels that we should not accept authority because acceptance of authority is obedience which, as we have seen, only breeds further fear. The problem with this idea is that man, as an individual, can only do and learn so much. If man did not accept any authority, almost nothing in society would get done. Certain decisions require the knowledge of an expert, and in these cases, ordinary people need to rely on the opinions of authorities in specific fields. For example, almost everyone must rely on the authority of a doctor at some point in their lives. However, what Krishnamurti is putting emphasis on is the hierarchical structure in education.

Our present teacher/student relationship assumes that there is a teacher who knows and students who don't know. Krishnamurti asserts that this traditional approach is failing, as it promotes fear and obedience. His suggestion is that it be replaced by a situation in which the student and teacher meet at the same level; where the educator

and the educated, through questioning and counter-questioning, are both participating in the act of learning. If we all think back to the class in which we learned the most, in which we still remember much of what we learned, it was probably a situation in which the students had tremendous input, and discussion and essay writing were emphasized rather than lectures and objective tests. A good working environment, and consequently an environment conducive to learning, is only feasible if there is mutual respect, consideration, and cooperation between the teacher and the students. These conditions sound almost absurd when placed in context with present day situations. We might ask, "How can there be affection and genuine cooperation between those who are in power and those who are subject to power? (1953:36).

First of all, many teachers today demand respect from their students, but do not respect their students in return. This obviously makes the students feel indifferent and disrespectful toward their teacher. Certainly anyone who has felt the horrible humiliation of being labeled "class dunce" is not going to feel anything but animosity toward their teacher. If mutual cooperation and affection are to come about, it is this sort of authority/obedience routine that must be discarded. This is not to say that the student should be given the impression that the teacher is not capable of answering any questions or providing guidance; it simply means that the teacher is not the final authority on matters, to be obeyed at all costs. If authority is not discarded, the teacher is only continuing to encourage fear and

imitation. If the student is accepting authority, he or she is submitting to domination and denying intelligence. To really come to an understanding of life, we have to think for ourselves, independent of any authority. Therefore, we can see that conformity and obedience have no place in right education. Fear, which is inherent in authority, obedience, and conformity, is also found at the heart of competition.

Krishnamurti puts forth that competition must be eliminated from education because it brings with it the desire to succeed and in turn, the fear of failure. The urge to be successful, which is conditioned in all of us from a very early age on, puts an end to spontaneity and breeds fear. When competing, the student, instead of concentrating on what is happening, is worrying about whether or not he is better than his classmate; he is concerned about whether or not he will get a prize and be elated, or come in last and be humiliated. We have all almost certainly experienced the anxiety of waiting to be picked for a team in gym class, or the sinking feeling of being the first one to spell a word wrong in a spelling bee. Competition breeds ambition which in turn breeds anxiety and fear; therefore, to be best able to learn, the mind should be free of ambition. However, all competition may not necessarily be bad in that it may give the child incentive to learn in certain situations. On the other hand, this same competitive situation which encourages one child may discourage another. However, it is obvious that the competitive process can be quite destructive. Most of us are after security and success, but as long as we crave success, we will not be able to learn with a clear, open,

and intelligent mind. "As long as success is our goal we cannot be rid of fear, for the desire to succeed inevitably breeds the fear of failure, and this desire leads to competition, envy, animosity, and finally to war" (1953:43). This realization brings us to our next subject, violence.

There is obviously a tremendous amount of violence in the world today. Our society is based on a long tradition of violence. Though we tend to blame others for the violent nature of the world, i.e. governments, organizations, terrorists, in actuality, violence is inherent in all of us. After all, "circumstances can be controlled by us, because we have created the circumstances" (1954:183). Often, human beings are outwardly educated, cultured, and clever, but inwardly, they are violent. "We are aggressive, brutal, competitive, and we build a society which is equally competitive, brutal, and violent" (1972:31). If inwardly we were loving, considerate, and caring, there would be no wars. Though some may think violence is necessary at times, nothing can really be achieved through violence. Though one violent act might temporarily appease a particular circumstance, it breeds further violence and misery in the long run. Violence leads to violence. As a popular saying declares: you can not simultaneously prevent and prepare for war. Or put another way by A. J. Muste, "There is no way to peace, peace is the way." Education is supposed to help us go beyond this violence, but our educational systems are not yet doing that. Indeed, some schools still practice the questionably effective act of paddling. Each of us as individuals has to choose

deliberately to either follow society in its violence or to stand up against it. Consequently, education has the responsibility of preventing conflict whenever possible. A more subtle, elusive sort of conflict is image-making.

In our minds, we all have images of ourselves and other people. Sometimes these images of ourselves do not accurately reflect who we are, but rather who we want to be. They are images of where we think we should be and what we think we should be doing. Often, the older we get, the stronger these images become. In these cases, the disparity between who we think we should be and who we actually are causes great sorrow and conflict. Since it is highly unlikely that any learning can take place when one is in conflict with oneself or others, part of the function of education is to see that the student does not form an illusory self-image, but instead has a clear picture of him or herself. If the student realizes the dangers of image-making, he or she is less likely to have problems in relationships with others. Often, difficulties in relationships are caused by a person relating to the image of who they think they are dealing with instead of the actual person. Quite often, we form images of people, but do not update them sufficiently as the person changes. Therefore, education needs to be sensitive not only to the more obvious forms of violence, but also to its less evident manifestations. When viewed simultaneously, the problems facing education today seem overwhelming.

As we have seen, education today is perpetuating practices that do not allow our children to truly learn. The hierarchical structure

found in most schools inspires fear and promotes obedience. The use of competition as a learning incentive is also widely used, along with violent means of discipline and reprimand, which in turn breed further violence in the students. When added together, these obstacles to learning are turning out students who are fearful, close-minded, mediocre, and dull. In light of this situation, what practices would comprise "right education"?

II

The function of education is to help create knowledgeable, intelligent human beings who have a greater understanding of themselves and the world around them than their predecessors. In speaking on right education, Krishnamurti proposes that we must make a fresh start on an entirely different basis. Can we afford to continue in this culture based on consumerism and industrialization? (see 1974:18). Can we bring about, through education, a mind that is completely different, a mind that is not greedy, envious, or ambitious? A mind that is alert, active, and aware; perceptive, efficient, and intelligent? Isn't the real meaning of education to help create people with these qualities? If we are made aware of our conditioning, we will be able to better understand ourselves and our actions. Therefore, right education will not place emphasis on any ideology, methodology,

or system, because all of these are attempts to further condition the child, and in so doing, hinder true understanding. Conditioning the individual only builds more barriers, whether they be national, social, or individual. The cultivation of an open mind that is able to see things clearly should be a high educational priority.

"Education has no meaning unless it helps you to understand the whole vastness of life with all its subtleties" (1964:10). To understand this vastness, we must have an integrated understanding of ourselves; and in order for this to happen, our minds must be alert, aware and open so that we may come to know ourselves. Right education, while conveying information and offering technical training, should create an atmosphere in which this maturing process can take place. Education is very significant in that it has such a great capability to transform a child--make them aware of their own processes of thinking, feeling, and action. When a child becomes sensitively aware of him or herself, they become much more alert to their surroundings. This produces a keen sense of observation which promotes true understanding. Right understanding will help the child to develop right relationships between himself and others and his surroundings. "Education is not merely acquiring knowledge, gathering and correlating facts; it is to see the significance of life as a whole" (1953:34). This distinction can be seen as the difference between knowledge and intelligence.

Krishnamurti offers an interesting analogy for the relationship between knowledge and intelligence: "Wisdom is infinite, it includes knowledge and the way of action; but we take hold of a branch and

think it is the whole tree" (1953:65). To be intelligent, one must have knowledge; but one can be very knowledgeable without being the least bit intelligent. The implications of this latter combination could prove to be quite dangerous. Simply being knowledgeable does not give one the capacity for understanding. In this way, we may think of knowledge as the grouping of data that we accumulate through books and other sources, as an instrument that allows us to gain technical skill. Knowledge, which can be scientific, collective, or personal (see 1974:28,29), is not comparable with intelligence. Knowledge alone is not wisdom; wisdom, unlike knowledge, cannot be accumulated, memorized or simply found in books.

What we now call education is a matter of accumulating information and knowledge from books...Such education offers a subtle form of escape from ourselves...Does the cultivation of a technique enable us to understand ourselves?...Present day education is a complete failure because it over-emphasizes technique. In over-emphasizing technique, we destroy man. To cultivate capacity and efficiency without understanding life, without having a comprehensive perception of the ways of thought and desire, will only make us increasingly ruthless... (1953:17,18).

Indeed, in our educational system today, we seem to worship knowledge. It is this lack of emphasis on intelligence that leads Krishnamurti to use phrases such as "freedom from the known." We are too busy filling our heads with information to leave any room for

intelligence. This situation is representative of the famous Zen anecdote about a scholar of Buddhism who was anticipating meeting a Zen Master for the first time. Sitting down to talk with the Zen Master over tea, the excited scholar talked on at a furious pace about Zen Buddhism and related topics. When he looked down, he saw that the Zen Master had filled his tea cup, but continued to pour the tea. Horrified, the scholar said, "Stop! Stop! What are you doing?" The Master replied, "Just as the cup can not hold any more tea, how can I teach you anything when your mind is already full?" So we see that right education must take care to find the right balance between the cultivation of knowledge and intelligence.

While Krishnamurti does place emphasis on the necessity to have a sharp, analytical and precise mind, he lays far greater stress on critical awareness and a harmonious balance of intellect and sensitivity. True intelligence is the integration of reason and love (see 1953:64,65). Acquiring knowledge is a rather mechanical process, but learning requires a mind that is clear, fresh, and sensitive. Intelligent, direct understanding requires a mind that is capable of clear, objective judgment. "...Learning is not the accumulation of knowledge; learning is a movement from moment to moment" (1972:19). As so many people profess, the best way to learn is through experience.

This is your life, and nobody is going to teach you, no book, no guru. You have to learn from yourself, not from books. There is a great deal to learn about yourself. It is an endless thing, it is a fascinating thing, and when you learn

about yourself from yourself, out of that learning wisdom comes (1974:19).

A knowledge and understanding of oneself, then, is the gateway to an understanding of all life.

All living things are interconnected; the biological and spiritual base of all life is universal. Since there is no existence outside of relationship, we can only end conflict and suffering when we understand the relationships between ourselves and others. "To understand life is to understand ourselves, and that is both the beginning and end of education" (1953:14). Coming to a deep understanding of oneself, of one's total psychological processes, is an extremely difficult process. It is much easier to simply fall into the existing pattern of society. However, as we have found, this lifestyle generates fear, conformity, and unhappiness. Without an understanding of ourselves, merely following an occupation leads to frustration and triviality. Self-knowledge not only creates wisdom and eliminates fear, but also can be seen as the beginning of freedom; for only when humankind comes to understand themselves can there be tranquility and happiness, peace and order. Life today is becoming so complicated that self-knowledge is really a prerequisite for dealing with life's complexities. "Without self-knowledge, surely, one has no basis for any real, serious action, no foundation upon which to build clearly" (1972:109). If self-knowledge is the key to understanding, then what are our tools for obtaining self-knowledge?

To develop the capacity to think both deeply and clearly, one

must be incredibly sensitive. This means being intensively alive, alert and perceptive. In this state, we are able to observe what is, not what we project to be. If one wishes to understand, one must observe directly, with choiceless awareness. In speaking on awareness, Krishnamurti states, "Awareness is observation without condemnation... If I want to understand something, I must observe, I must not criticize, I must not condemn, I must not pursue it as pleasure or avoid it as non-pleasure" (1954:173). In order to change society, to better our lives, we must come to understand ourselves. To understand ourselves, we must understand our thoughts. The opening lines of the Dhammapada state, "We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts. With our thoughts we make the world." In order to see our thoughts, to understand them for what they are, we must have great concentration and keen powers of observation. This is the meditative mind, the keenly sensitive mind. It is necessary to cultivate such a mind for self-knowledge to come about. To see clearly what is requires a meditative mind. Right education helps to develop your whole being, the totality of your mind. It gives your mind and heart a depth, an understanding of beauty. In coming to a greater understanding of ourselves and the world, we see that we can not sanely chose to fit into the existing order of society. Some sort of intelligent revolt is called for.

Krishnamurti believes there are two kinds of revolt: the first is violent revolt, lacking understanding, which is a mere reaction against the present order, and the second is a deep psychological revolt of

