

Book Review

Education and the Significance of Life by Jiddu Krishnamurti

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Recommended citation:

Berghout, A. (2022). Education and the Significance of Life by Jiddu Krishnamurti. [Review of the book *Education and the significance of life*, by J. Krishnamurti] *Central European Journal of Educational Research*, 4(1), 166–169. <https://doi.org/10.37441/cej/2022/4/1/10681>

Bibliography of the reviewed book: Krishnamurti, J. (1974). *Education and the Significance of Life*. All India Press.

Review

Jiddu Krishnamurti was a philosopher, speaker, and author. He was a member of the Theosophical organization for many years, during which he was preparing to become a teacher of the New World, though he rejected this fate when withdrawing from the institute. His interests included psychological revolution, the nature of the mind, meditation, research, human relations, and social change. His book, *Education and the Significance of Life*, considers self-awareness and thinking freedom as two key components of maturing into an informed and well-educated individual. It represents a philosophical reflection on education, life's purpose, the nature of education, and the role of education in promoting peace and individual liberty.

The first chapter, *Education and the Significance of Life*, is primarily concerned with self-awareness and autonomous thought. According to Krishnamurti (1974), individuals must first realize and know themselves to be able to think freely. He attributes mediocrity to traditional schooling, arguing that it stifles one's ability to think independently and wreaks havoc on the brain, stating that "conformity leads to mediocrity" (p. 3). He maintains that the person is composed of distinct entities, yet emphasizing the distinctions and encouraging the formation of a particular type results in a plethora of complications and contradictions. This is where education becomes relevant, as it integrates disparate elements and ensures that people do not live in a conflict where nothing extraordinary happens.

The author distinguishes the person from the individual. To him, when we address the notion of "coincidence", we are referring to individual circumstances, such as births and upbringings marked by various factors such as nationalism, superstition, social stratification, and prejudices. He believes that personal and unexpected accidents are transient, even if they span a lifetime. Our current educational system revolves around these temporary, personal, and incidental occurrences, leading to cognitive distortion and the synthesis of self-defense fears.

Additionally, the first chapter highlights the importance of education in the development of human beings. According to Krishnamurti (1974), people may be technically competent without being intellectual. Regrettably, the existing educational system is transforming students into passive and machine-driven individuals. While it delights us consciously, it also leaves us imperfect, ashamed, and unclean. Education requires more than merely acquiring knowledge, remembering facts, and compiling data; it entails comprehending the significance of life as a whole. Thus, education should assist us in discovering lasting principles rather than adhering to formulae or repeating slogans; it should assist us in dismantling national and social boundaries rather than promoting enmity amongst humans.

In the second chapter, entitled *The Right Kind of Education*, the author provides the reader with a clear concept of self-knowledge. For Krishnamurti (1974), an illiterate human being is not one who cannot read or write, but rather one who does not know himself and so self-knowledge is a necessary attribute for all humans. True education necessitates an awareness of one's self, desires, and aspirations because, without an awareness of who we are, what we want, who we want to be, and what we seek, people devolve into machines with human

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qualities. Additionally, contemporary education is described as the process of acquiring information and knowledge via books, which anybody who can read has the capacity to do so. Krishnamurti (1974) asserts that such education is ineffective and only serves to destroy. He elaborates that disagreement and misunderstanding arise as a result of our erroneous relationship with people, things, and ideas and so simple learning, data collection, and skill acquisition will only contribute to our descent into a massive failure. The overemphasis on the teaching techniques that are implemented in the classrooms, according to Krishnamurti (1974), is another reason contemporary education must improve. He feels that by exaggerating, we endanger ourselves and the rest of humanity.

The third chapter, *Intellect, Authority, and Intelligence*, delves into the essence of genuine education and how educated persons think. Krishnamurti believes that a sound education is what stimulates people to think and behave rationally. This requires stimulating the brain and cultivating an integrated way of life that prepares students for real-world situations.

Liberty begins with self-awareness; it comes when individuals see their power for peacemaking. Krishnamurti (1974) asserts that the first stage is to transform people's thinking. To understand how to alter any system, people must first understand themselves and their cognitive processes. He sees that human issues are not straightforward; they are alarmingly intricate. They need time and skill to comprehend, and it is far more vital that specific persons address these issues. According to the author, a self-aware individual is not bound to be swayed by pleasant phrases or slogans that just serve to enhance dissatisfaction. To solve these complex challenges, we need more than a few individuals working in unison as one algorithm. To put it another way, Machiavellianism can't be fully understood without taking into account our own unique psychological makeup. When it comes to making good decisions, Machiavelli believed that public and private morality should be seen as two separate entities. As a result, a leader must consider not just reputation but also being willing to behave immorally at the appropriate moments.

Chapter four, *Education and World Peace*, examines the underlying causes of the current state of instability of world peace, including our desire to remain as human beings and not alter what must be altered. Another factor contributing to this instability, according to Krishnamurti (1974), is our reliance on formal leaders in both personal and intellectual life. According to the author, there is no understanding once we face one another, regardless of how appropriate anxiety and conformity are. This is inherent to the authoritarian state inclination and dogmatism of ready-made religion. Reliance on governments and corporations for peace, which must begin with our inferior position, results only in the escalation of more conflict. This means that there may not be long-term happiness as humans continue to accept a social order characterized by unending conflict and enmity among society's members. The author reaffirms that peace cannot be achieved by way of dogma or legislation, but rather through individuals re-creating themselves, which requires active awareness of their thoughts, behaviors, and emotions.

When powerful institutions recognize that intensifying antagonism between humans not only serves no purpose but also results in uncontrolled destruction. Thus, these institutions are no longer productive, they may be prone to push us to suppress our personal aspirations for the well-being of the human race through legislation and other means of restraint. Ideally, we should be striving to value one another and collaborate for the greater good, just as we are already taught and encouraged to be competitive and cutthroat in our present occupations and pursuits. Our political and ideological beliefs, as well as organized religions, place us against one another; wars develop not just between civilizations, but also between groups within a single civilization. It is our responsibility as well-educated persons to be aware that, while we adhere to dogmas, there will be conflict and suffering both within ourselves and across the world.

Furthermore, the fourth chapter calls into question the concept of patriotism. Krishnamurti (1974) defines patriotism only in terms of the relationships that bind us to our country, including textbooks, newspapers, and other kinds of mass media.

In chapter five, *The School*, Krishnamurti (1974) argues that proper education should enable people to see themselves as free and think without reservation. He states, "the right kind of education is concerned with individual freedom" (Krishnamurti, 1947, p. 62). The objective of education is to help each person in overcoming psychological limits, not impose new patterns of thinking and doing. Such limits will never foster perceptive understanding. Without a doubt, this is what is happening, which explains why individuals' issues continue to worsen. The author contends that true education may occur when we begin to grasp the profundity of human existence. To do this, the mind must be actively liberated from the need for benefit. If parents see their children as personal property or as the fulfillment of their desires, they will foster an environment and social structure

devoid of love and devoted solely to their own selfish ends. A college that is a worldwide success seldom fails as an academic center. A large and flourishing group, with all its attendant display and success, can produce bank clerks and super-salesmen, industrialists or commissars, all of whom are superficially efficient individuals. Nevertheless, hope exists only within the integrated individual, which can be carried around only by small faculties. That is why it is much more important to have schools with a limited number of pupils, and suitable educators than it is to educate pupils in big institutions using the most cutting-edge and finest ways.

By becoming completely aware of ourselves in all of our encounters, Krishnamurti (1974) asserts, people may begin to investigate hidden uncertainty, misunderstanding, and restrictions inside themselves. Moreover, by comprehending this, they will be able to comprehend and so resolve their internal problems. Any reform in education or other professions that is not accompanied by self-awareness will just intensify hate. The accumulation of facts, the development of abilities, and the habits of thinking mechanically all contribute to the growth of large organizations and the employment of teachers more concerned with following the rules than with being attentive and observant in their interactions with students. None of these factors contributes to the student's growth as a fully integrated human being. Krishnamurti (1974) argues that although systems may be very valuable when guided by motivated and knowledgeable instructors, they do not develop intelligence. The author finds it surprising that terms like "system" and "organization" have grown to represent so much to people to the point that they are satisfied with the fact that symbols have taken the place of truth. Reality is an inconvenience, while shadows bring comfort.

According to Krishnamurti (1974), neither the manager nor his senior colleagues should be afraid of each other. A mutually beneficial agreement can only be reached if everyone involved feels we are on equal footing. He argues that this egalitarian spirit must prevail in the schools because true cooperation can only take place in the absence and reversal of authority. When there is a shared belief, any misunderstanding is resolved and trust is restored.

Chapter six, *Parents and Teachers*, emphasizes the importance of both parents and teachers in children's education. On the one hand, he notes that "the right kind of education begins with the educator, who must understand himself and be free from established patterns of thought; for what he is, that he imparts" (Krishnamurti, 1974, p. 74). The author questions how educators can develop a unique style of teaching if we do not completely understand ourselves, and our connection with students. This unique style of teaching cannot be developed, according to the author, if educators are content with overloading them with information and pushing them to take examinations. According to Krishnamurti (1974), pupils are there to be led and supported. However, if the educator is constrained, his students will surely become what he is, and education will become a source of more confusion.

Conversely, Krishnamurti (1974) argues that most parents, whether wealthy or impoverished, are consumed by their own concerns and challenges. Despite the current state of social and moral deterioration, they are only worried about the well-being of their children in the world. They are concerned about their children's future and want to ensure that they receive an education that will allow them to engage in more traditional activities. Parents' lack of self-awareness and self-reflection, according to Krishnamurti (1974), contributes to their children's lack of self-awareness as well.

Chapter seven, *Sex and Marriage*, is where Krishnamurti (1974) emphasizes the misinterpretation of the both words "sex" and "marriage". Due to a lack of full awareness of the whole decision-making process, the didactically formed marriage sequence, whether in the East or the West, is incapable of addressing the notion of love. The latter is not the outcome of the agreement, nor is it entirely dependent on a joyful connection between a couple. All those instruments are intellectual, which explains why love plays such a minimal role in our lives. Love is not reasonable; it is the antithesis of rationality, which is characterized by self-protective desires and reflexes. Intercourse is not a problem when there is love, Krishnamurti (1974) asserts; it becomes a problem when there is no love.

Chapter eight, *Art, Beauty, and Creation*, discusses how conflict cannot exist in a condition of invention. Thus, proper education should empower an individual to address their difficulties, rather than emphasizing means of escape. It should help the individual in resolving conflicts, since only then can this level of the invention be achieved. According to Krishnamurti (1974), art devoid of life is meaningless. When people's efforts to express themselves via paint, marble, or words are removed from their inherent existence, art becomes a superficial reflection of their desire to avoid the inescapable reality. Bridging this gap is far more challenging for professionals and intelligent persons. As an alternative, individuals' personal lives should become entwined, and art shall become a compressed reflection of oneself.

According to Krishnamurti (1974), creativity and invention stem from self-awareness. He explains as follows:

It is only when we know and understand ourselves and know what we desire that we can create and invent the freedom to create comes with self-knowledge, but self-knowledge is not a gift. One can be creative without having any particular talent. Creativeness is a state of being in which the conflicts and sorrows of the self are absent, a state in which the mind is not caught up in the demands and pursuits of desire. (p. 95)

Chapter eight also discusses how the concept of education contributes to the importance of life. The author underlines that a view-based approach to education can never result in the formation of an educated mind that is self-sufficient. That is, educated people need autonomous thinking, and the individuals responsible for teaching this idea are instructors, who must teach youngsters how to think and comprehend what they experience as they mature. Additionally, the author is skeptical of the efficacy of fear and punishment as instructional techniques. Respect for life, he continues, is a necessary condition for self-awareness. As a result, he emphasizes the notion of thought, claiming that we cannot think effectively or independently until we understand ourselves. The author summarizes the relationship between the concepts discussed as follows; “to bring about the right education, we must understand the meaning of life as a whole, and for that, we have to be able to think, not consistently, but directly and truly” (Krishnamurti, 1974, p. 6).

Education and school construction all over the world have always piqued the author’s interest. Therefore, he reviews contemporary education, which places a premium on teaching students “what” to think rather than “how” to think. Thus, the book covers critical themes such as social dimensions and the need for paradigm shifts without losing sight of the central premise that everything is dependent on parents’ and educators’ interactions with children.

Krishnamurti (1974) founded his own educational institutions in order to implement his beliefs about education with his students. The latter is centered on his ground-breaking views regarding education. They may be succinctly summarized as follows:

- In education, self-awareness should take precedence over self-expression.
- Education should be politically and religiously neutral. Therefore, it should never be used to mold a person, regardless of how well-intentioned the system or the educator are.
- The purest kind of education is about assisting someone in maturing and being free so that they can thrive in love and compassion.
- The fundamental goal of education is to foster a child’s mental development in such a manner that he develops self-awareness. Put differently, education should cultivate mental independence and boldness, culminating in societal reform.
- Education, from a religious standpoint, is designed to assist people in developing a genuine religious identity. Such goals cannot be seen only as appealing ambitions, nor can they be attained by going to extremes.
- No system can bring the world back to order or harmony unless each person understands it for himself.
- Parents and teachers should be the kid’s first educators; they are responsible for shaping his early vision of education as he gradually grows a sense of self.
- Not only can the correct kind of education bring about world peace, but it can also bring about the freedom that comes with understanding ourselves in the midst of the complexities and obstacles of life.
- Education and life are intertwined in the sense that adequate education is the true essence of life, guiding us to find and comprehend ourselves while also allowing us to free our thoughts.

In conclusion, Krishnamurti’s work centers on self-awareness, awake intuition, and the crucial importance of creating an environment conducive to understanding in order for proper thinking to flourish.

Acknowledgments: We thank Emma Hák-Kovács, University of Guelph ON, Canada, for the English language editing.

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