

Another Sort of Learning by James V. Schall

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James V. Schall's *Another Sort of Learning*, first published in 1988, addresses students who sense that something may be missing from the education they are receiving but cannot yet identify the problem. The book does not reject universities, teachers, grades, or formal study. It argues that institutional education can become narrow when it trains students for credentials, employment, or ideological conformity without helping them seek truth, wisdom, and a well-ordered life. The original essay correctly identifies several recurring subjects in Schall's work—reading, teaching, lectures, grades, truth, discipline, and personal libraries—and recognizes that these subjects are connected. They concern what education is for and what students must do when formal schooling does not provide everything needed for intellectual freedom. (Schall, 1988)

Schall writes from a Jesuit and classical philosophical perspective. He assumes that truth exists and that education should help the mind become capable of recognizing it. This places him against forms of skepticism that treat every claim as only a product of power, culture, or personal perspective. His concern is not that students should accept every authority uncritically. On the contrary, he wants them to read widely, compare arguments, and cultivate judgment. Yet he believes inquiry becomes empty if it begins with the conclusion that truth is impossible. The possibility of truth gives reading and teaching their seriousness.

The Feeling That Education Is Incomplete

Many students complete courses successfully while remaining uncertain about how the subjects connect or why they matter. They may know how to satisfy assignments but not how to pursue a question independently. Schall writes for the student who notices this gap. The problem is not simply poor teaching. Modern education can be fragmented by specialization, career pressure, constant media, and the assumption that useful knowledge is only knowledge that produces an immediate practical result.

The original essay describes rumors about the insufficiency and ideological narrowness of university teaching. Schall often criticizes institutions that exclude certain questions before inquiry begins, particularly questions about truth, goodness, God, and human nature. His criticism should not be generalized into the claim that every university or professor is intellectually corrupt. It is better understood as a warning: an educational institution can possess excellent facilities and expertise while failing to encourage students to ask what kind of life knowledge should serve.

Teaching as Leading the Listener Beyond the Present Position

The original essay states that teaching begins where the listener is but should lead the listener toward a clearer and more complete truth. This is a strong description of education. A teacher must understand students' existing knowledge, language, interests, and errors. Beginning too far from the learner makes instruction unintelligible. Remaining only with what the learner already believes, however, abandons the purpose of teaching.

Good teaching therefore combines respect and challenge. The teacher does not manipulate the student or demand agreement through authority alone. The teacher presents evidence, distinctions, questions, and texts through which the student can see more. Schall's view assumes that the mind can be drawn by truth rather than merely conditioned by reward. The teacher's responsibility is to create opportunities for recognition, while the student must decide to attend and respond.

Public Debate and Intellectual Formation

The original discussion says teaching is not mainly about preparing a person to speak before a large crowd. Schall values conversation and argument, but he distinguishes rhetorical performance from genuine thought. A student may speak confidently in public while possessing little understanding. Modern education can reward visibility, rapid opinion, and debate technique, even when participants have not read deeply enough to know the issue.

Intellectual formation requires silence as well as speech. Reading a difficult book, reconsidering a position, and admitting uncertainty are less visible than winning an argument. Public discussion becomes valuable when it emerges from disciplined preparation. Schall's emphasis does not oppose civic debate; it asks that debate be grounded in truth-seeking rather than applause.

Truth and the Possibility of Knowledge

The original essay connects Schall's thought with the classical definition that truth involves saying of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not. This formulation is associated with Aristotle rather than Plato's *Republic*, so the attribution should be corrected. The basic idea is correspondence between judgment and reality. A statement is not made true merely because it is useful, sincere, popular, or approved by authority. (Aristotle, 1984)

Schall worries that students may be trained to doubt the possibility of truth while being expected to accept certain ideological conclusions without examination. Genuine skepticism should apply to itself. If every truth claim is only power, that statement must also be treated as an exercise of power rather

than knowledge. The alternative is not naïve certainty. It is intellectual humility: confidence that reality can be known in part, combined with willingness to correct error.

Reading as Another Sort of Learning

Reading allows a student to encounter minds beyond the immediate institution, generation, and culture. A teacher selects material and helps interpretation, but books permit an independent conversation. Schall encourages students to read works that are not assigned because the most important questions may not fit the official curriculum. A personal reading life protects learning from ending when a course ends. (Pieper, 1952)

The original essay mentions rereading. This practice is important because the reader changes. A book read at eighteen may reveal different questions at thirty or sixty. The text remains available while experience alters the reader's attention. Rereading also tests whether an early interpretation was shallow or mistaken. Teachers benefit because they discover elements they did not see when first preparing a work.

The Personal Library

Schall presents the personal library as one practical foundation of intellectual freedom. A library does not need to be large or expensive. Its value lies in access to books that deserve repeated consultation. Ownership allows annotation, comparison, and return. The books become a record of questions and development rather than decorative evidence of education.

Digital books and public libraries can serve many of the same functions, particularly when cost and space are limited. The deeper principle is to maintain a stable relationship with serious texts. An algorithmic feed presents what is new or engaging, while a personal library preserves works selected because they remain worth thinking about. The student should choose books carefully and avoid equating accumulation with reading. (Schall, 2014)

Self-Discipline

The original essay identifies self-discipline as the second essential beginning. Learning requires control of attention, time, appetite, and habit. A student who intends to read but responds to every notification may remain informed about many fragments while understanding little. Discipline creates the sustained period in which difficult thought becomes possible.

Schall's account of self-control is connected with freedom. Desire is not always a reliable guide because immediate pleasure can prevent the achievement of deeper goods. Choosing to read, practice, or reflect may initially feel restrictive, but it expands capacity. The disciplined person

becomes able to do what an undisciplined person merely wishes to do. This does not require contempt for rest or enjoyment. It requires ordering them rather than allowing distraction to determine the entire day.

Grades and Personal Grading

Formal grades measure performance according to course criteria, but they do not measure the complete value of learning. A student can earn a high grade through short-term memorization and forget the material quickly. Another may struggle with an assignment while developing a question that influences life. Schall's idea of personal grading asks the student to evaluate learning by a deeper standard: whether the study changed understanding, exposed error, and awakened further inquiry.

This does not make institutional assessment unnecessary. Teachers need ways to give feedback and certify competence. The danger is allowing the grade to replace the subject. When students ask only what will be on the test, education becomes a transaction. Personal grading restores responsibility by asking what has genuinely been learned even when no external reward follows.

Lectures

A lecture can be valuable when it presents a coherent argument, introduces a difficult text, or reveals connections that students would not discover alone. It can also become passive when students merely copy information. Schall appreciates the presence of a teacher who has thought seriously about a subject and can invite students into that thought. The lecture's success depends on intellectual substance and attentive listening.

Students should not confuse listening with absorption. Notes, questions, later review, and reading are needed. A good lecture often functions as a map rather than a complete journey. It points toward books and problems that the student must explore independently.

Teachers and Gratitude

The original essay observes that teachers owe students many things and may also remain grateful to them for years. Teaching creates reciprocal learning. Students ask unexpected questions, reveal unclear explanations, and bring experiences that alter the teacher's understanding. When a class ends, the teacher may return to books with new attention because the act of teaching exposed what was previously unnoticed.

Gratitude does not require treating every teacher as correct or every educational experience as successful. It recognizes that another person's labor can open a path. The best teacher makes the

student less dependent on the teacher by developing the ability to read and judge independently.

Faith and Reason

Schall's Catholic perspective treats faith and reason as distinct but compatible. Reason investigates reality through evidence and argument, while revelation addresses truths that reason alone may not discover. Conflict can arise from misinterpretation, but truth cannot finally contradict truth. This position challenges both anti-intellectual religion and secular assumptions that religious questions are inherently irrational.

A university committed to inquiry should allow religious claims to be examined seriously rather than accepted uncritically or excluded automatically. Students should learn the difference among theological reasoning, philosophical argument, historical evidence, and personal testimony. Schall's aim is not to replace thought with faith but to prevent education from defining reality so narrowly that transcendent questions are ruled out in advance.

Right and Wrong

The original conclusion states that right and wrong, truth and falsity, and faith and reason are not simply interchangeable. Moral judgment requires distinctions. If every value is reduced to preference, criticism of injustice becomes difficult. Schall argues that the good is not created entirely by desire; desire itself must be educated. (Weil, 1950)

This claim has practical consequences. Education should not produce clever people who can justify any action. Knowledge increases power, and power without moral order can increase harm. A technically skilled person must still ask what should be done and why. Liberal learning provides historical, philosophical, and literary resources for this judgment.

Media and the Monotony of Education

The original essay notes that students cannot escape schooling, culture, and media. Today this influence is even more continuous. Digital platforms deliver news, entertainment, advertising, and opinion throughout the day. They can broaden access to knowledge, but they also reward speed, emotional reaction, and repetition. A student may consume an enormous volume of information while rarely remaining with one argument long enough to evaluate it.

The personal library and self-discipline are therefore not nostalgic suggestions. They are methods for recovering attention. Choosing a book, turning away from the feed, and following an argument for several hours creates a different kind of mental life. "Another sort of learning" is not necessarily located outside technology; it is defined by intentionality rather than constant interruption.

Possible Criticisms of Schall

Schall's confidence in classical and Catholic traditions may appear insufficiently attentive to voices historically excluded from formal education. A personal library built only from one canon can reproduce narrowness rather than escape it. Students should therefore read the classics while also reading women, colonized peoples, minority traditions, contemporary science, and critics of the inherited order.

His criticism of universities can also be romanticized. Independent learning requires resources, literacy, time, and guidance that institutions often provide. The solution is not to abandon professional education but to integrate it with broader inquiry. A doctor, engineer, or business professional needs technical competence and philosophical judgment. The two should strengthen one another.

My Assessment of the Book

The book is valuable because it makes the student responsible for education. It does not allow disappointment with a school to become an excuse for remaining uneducated. A student can begin with discipline, a few books, and the decision to seek truth. This idea is liberating because it separates learning from the possession of perfect institutional conditions.

At the same time, the book is demanding. It asks students to accept that some books deserve effort before they become enjoyable and that freedom requires self-control. It also asks them to question fashionable skepticism without becoming arrogant. The aim is neither passive acceptance nor permanent disbelief, but a mind capable of recognizing reasons.

Conclusion

Another Sort of Learning addresses students who suspect that education has become incomplete. Schall connects reading, teaching, lectures, grades, self-discipline, personal libraries, faith, and truth through one central question: whether education leads the person toward reality and wisdom or only toward credentials and social conformity. Teaching begins with the listener's present position but should not leave the listener there. Reading creates access to minds outside the immediate institution, while rereading deepens understanding across time.

The original essay's emphasis on self-discipline and a personal library remains especially useful. These practices give students a degree of intellectual independence in a culture of distraction. Schall's perspective should be expanded by reading a diverse range of traditions and by recognizing the real value of institutions, but his challenge remains important. Education is not complete when a person can perform a profession. It becomes fuller when knowledge is ordered toward truth, virtue, and the freedom to judge what is worth doing.

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