Presidential Address

Minds, Politics, and Gods in the Schooled Society: Consequences of the Education Revolution

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The schooled society is a defining component of contemporary society, and with large-scale capitalism and widespread representative democracy is a leading social revolution. Over the past 150 years, a massive regime of education has produced a powerful culture, transformed most individuals in the world, and created far-reaching consequences for all facets of society; yet, the education revolution is intellectually underappreciated in its role in creating contemporary society. Comparative and international scholarship is uniquely positioned to tell the full story of the coming of a worldwide schooled society and the human condition. Following a summary of the dynamics of the revolution and a note on a promising theoretical perspective on education as a primary institution, its impact on social institutions is illustrated through what happens to minds, politics, and gods in the schooled society.

The education revolution is a major transforming cultural phenomenon of contemporary society. Sending ever-greater proportions of successive cohorts of children and youth to attend ever-longer and more sophisticated levels of formal schooling is an astonishingly different approach to formal education from that of past societies. Over a century and a half, this massive regime of education has produced a powerful culture, transformed most individuals in the world, and created far-reaching consequences for all facets of society. Both the demographic and cultural impacts of the education revolution create what can be called a schooled society: a distinctly new social order where the practice and ideas of formal education are a central primary institution (Baker, forthcoming). An advanced version of the schooled society is already fully evident in many nations, and the same trend can be observed across the world.

As described below, some erroneous intellectual assumptions and the ubiquity of the education revolution have, however, worked against a full appreciation of its impact on society. Fortunately, comparative and international analysis of formal education (hereafter CIE) is uniquely positioned for a richer understanding of the full implications of a schooled society.

This presidential address is based on my forthcoming book The Schooled Society: The Educational Transformation of Global Culture (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014). I thank Emily Anderson and Renata Horvatek for helpful comments on an early draft.
society, and its scholarship can also inform political and policy debates about the role of education in spreading social justice and enhancing social, health, and economic development. After a brief description of the dynamics of the revolution and a note on a promising theoretical perspective on education as a primary institution, presented here is a summary of comparative research on the implications of a schooled society. Three major consequences, for which there are rich findings and clear future directions for CIE research, are, first, the primary impact of schooling on cognitive development and psychological characteristics; second, mass education’s transformation of the nature of contemporary political movements; and finally, education’s surprising affinity with religion and spirituality.

These, of course, are not the only major consequences of a schooled society; others include the aggregated impact of mass education on the economy, labor market, and the conditions of work (Baker 2009). Similarly, there is evidence that the education revolution changes childhood, parenting, and demographic transitions, as well as health and mortality trajectories of individuals and populations (Schaub 2010; Montez et al. 2012). And it has come to construct definitions of personal success and failure (Smith 2003), underpin the dominance of formal organizations (Stinchcombe and March 1965), and yields a rising belief in professionalism and scientization of society (Drori et al. 2006). Also, schooling has become a central causal agent in the social and economic development of nations, and it is at the heart of global culture (e.g., Frank and Gabler 2006). Yet, the educational transformation of minds, politics, and religion is particularly illustrative of the education revolution’s remarkable breadth of influence that yields unexpected consequences with far-reaching implications for society. A full theoretical and empirical analysis of each consequence is beyond the scope here, so instead an illustrative sketch is presented along with reflection on implications for the human condition and suggestions for new research and theory development within CIE.

The Education Revolution

The demography of the education revolution is well known. In the past, formal education, particularly beyond just a few years of basic literacy training, was reserved for only small proportions of the population, but starting 150 years ago the schooling of larger shares of children and youth grew rapidly worldwide. Gross enrollment rates have risen consistently, and near-full enrollments were attained in primary school first in wealthier nations and since the middle of the twentieth century spread globally (e.g., Benavot and Riddle 1988; Fuller and Rubinson 1992). As a consequence, 80 percent of all persons age 15 or older worldwide are able to both write and read a short statement about their life—a phenomenon that would have been hard to imagine 50
Throughout the nineteenth century and over the first few decades of the twentieth century in North America and parts of western Europe, enrollment in primary education expanded, and by 1940, enrollment burst into a logarithmic climb. As primary schooling reached large numbers of children 20 years later, enrollment in secondary schooling turned sharply up in the 1960s. And in the early 1970s, enrollment in higher education began a similar ascent of growth. In many developed nations, 70 percent of individuals have obtained at least an upper secondary education degree, and a third of 25–34-year-olds have participated in higher education (OECD 2009). Not stopping at primary and secondary education, the education revolution has recently ushered in mass higher education enrollments. At the turn of the nineteenth century, less than 1 percent of university-aged youth worldwide attended higher education institutions; now 20 percent, or approximately 100 million, attend, and mass graduate training at universities is increasing (Schofer and Meyer 2005). While formidable challenges to access to quality education for all children in low-income nations remain, all regions of the world are following similar trends (Lewin 2009). Over the past 20 years in developing nations there has been significant increase in school enrollments for all children, gender parity in enrollment has increased, repetition and dropout rates have declined, and the out-of-school rate has been halved in South and West Africa (UNESCO 2010).

There are also a number of well-known trends suggesting that with this demography comes an increasing intensity of schooling. The American case is illustrative. The length of the American school year grew by a third in instruction time from just before the beginning of the twentieth century to now (USDoE 1993). Also, the average student/teacher ratio, one indicator of potential intensity of schooling, has fallen steadily from the end of the middle of the nineteenth century so that by 2007 nationwide there were an estimated 15.4 public school pupils per teacher (USDoE 2008). In constant dollars, the average total expenditure on a public school student grew from only $355 in 1919 to an average of $9,518 for every student in fiscal year 2004 (USDoE 2006).

The expansion and intensification of mass education have been apparent for some time; what has not is how much this is a new cultural construction in human society. Ubiquitous core cultural assumptions are more difficult to identify than organizational growth, but CIE research finds a set of institutional values that have deepened over the course of the education revolution (e.g., Fiala 2006). For example, now common, but historically unique, ideas such as “education is a human right,” “educational achievement is universal meritocracy,” “education development of individuals is necessary for the collective good,” “higher-order cognitive skills are essential for all,”

2 Most people who are still illiterate are living in very poor nations, and seven out of ten are women (UNESCO 2008).
and “mass universal knowledge is indispensible for social progress” are embedded within cultural understandings of contemporary society. What is often missed in identifying these and other components of the culture of education is that they have slowly contributed to substantial changes in the nature of formal education over the past 150 years. On average, the school and university of the twenty-first century are distinctly more cognitively demanding, broader in their scope, and more salient in everyday life, and as such generate rising public expectations and belief in their powers (Meyer 1977). For instance, the contemporary pedagogical and curricular intention of schooling is for the personal, emotional, and cognitive development of the future adult more than for a limited version of vocationalism that was so prominent earlier in twentieth century (Schaub and Baker 2013). Similarly, the passive appreciations of elite classicism give way to the demands that all students be active learners and at least imitate scientists, poets, writers, mathematicians, and so forth. The origins of many of these ideas and ensuing educational changes are rooted in the long historical development of the successful western form of the university and its thriving knowledge conglomerate. The university’s core dynamic charters of generating and shaping new knowledge, the creation of educational degrees in these knowledge domains, and the credentialing of people to enact such knowledge in everyday life make the university perhaps the single most dynamic creator of cultural understandings of the schooled society (Geiger 2004; Frank and Meyer 2007).

The culture of education is dynamic and leads to considerable consequences. One salient example is the impact of academic degree attainment on social stratification, which becomes more salient with each generation. Technical analyses of social mobility across many nations indicate that over the past 50 years, the impact of socioeconomic status of the family of origin has precipitously dropped in its direct influence on the adult child’s status, while the direct influence of educational attainment has increased. Consequently, over just several generations in advanced schooled societies, formal education has thoroughly saturated intergenerational mobility, and the educational dominance of social mobility globally is imminent. Before, the schooled society labor market credentials were mostly noneducational in nature but have now shifted to almost exclusively educationally based credentials (e.g., Bills 2003; Baker 2012). Another example is that over the course of the education revolution, an individual’s education level has become, ceteris paribus, the master factor behind all types of demographic changes, such as fertility, marriage and family formation, health, and longevity (e.g., Baker et al. 2010b, 2011; Montez et al. 2012; Smith et al., forthcoming). If demography is destiny, then our destiny is an educationally transformed demography. A final example is that social problems are routinely seen

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3 For example, see Hout (1988); Vallet (2004); Breen and Jonsson (2007); Breen and Luijkx (2007); Brand and Xie (2010); Torche (2010).
through the prism of formal education as a solution (or lack thereof, as a cause). Whether true or not, contemporary culture assumes that virtually any human activity or deficiency is amenable to the effects of formal education. It is thus ironic that the education revolution is so underappreciated by scholars, including those in CIE, as a dynamic force in society.

An Underappreciated Revolution

Formal education is a prominent and expanding component of society, and, along with large-scale capitalism and representative democracy, its historical development is a leading social revolution. Yet, while the dimensions of the education revolution are obvious, its broad impact on society is so ubiquitous that it is often assumed to have had little impact at all, or at most is only a supplemental process to economic and political forces. Past intellectual accounts of the transition from traditional to posttraditional society are virtually mute on the cumulative influence of mass education and expanding norms around achieving educational degrees. This silence devalues the impact of education among new generations of intellectuals and perniciously reduces formal education’s profile among international policy experts working on an array of social problems from economic underdevelopment to combating pandemics and achieving sustainable environments.

There are two chief reasons why intellectuals underappreciate the ramifications of the education revolution. First, the timing of formal education expansion and its creation of a robust educational culture happened after the main theoretical and empirical leitmotifs of nascent behavioral and social sciences were in place (Frank and Gabbler 2006). Founding social theorists, such as Marx, Durkheim, and Weber, cast the theoretical dye before the impact of widespread education: the great modern transformation was hypothesized to be chiefly a function of economic and political revolutions (e.g., Collins and Makowsky 1998). The second reason is related; formal education is misconceived to be a secondary institution that mostly (some argue, only) reproduces economic structure and political regimes. Whether from the realist human capital perspective on skill reproduction or the critical Marxian perspective on social class reproduction, schooling is often thought to be only a secondary institution serving the economy and the state and therefore is assumed not to have much independent impact of its own.

The opposite argument—the education revolution also created contemporary society and in doing so has significant independent impact as a primary institution—is the motivating hypothesis behind what is known as the neoinstitutional theory of education and society. And a substantial body of empirical research, much of it generated from CIE, confirms this hypothesis (e.g., Wiseman and Baker 2006). With the combined weight of all of this research, however, a new central question emerges: If education is a primary institution, what influence has it had on other major social institutions?
other words, what is unique about a schooled society, and where is it likely to bring the human condition in the near future? Three influences illustrate what is also occurring throughout all institutions of contemporary society.

The Schooled Brain

Considerable evidence shows that the schooling experience, even for just a few years under rudimentary conditions, not only transfers manifest numeracy and literacy and other curricula, it also significantly develops underlying neurological structures of cognitive capacities (for a general review, see Baker et al. [2012], and for implications for future CIE research, see Salinas and Baker, forthcoming). Reading, writing, and understanding numbers and basic operations are themselves a transforming set of skills, but in the process of learning these skills, the scope and depth of neurocognitive development are enhanced as well. While this conclusion has been anticipated since the 1930s research of Luria and Vygotsky comparing schooled and unschooled peasants in the former Soviet Union, the scientific methods of the “cognitive revolution” show this to be the case (Luria 1976). Routine mental activities of schooling enhance plasticity of brain regions that in turn enhance components of executive functioning such as working memory, inhibitory control, and attention-shifting processes. Certainly, children enter school with variation in genetically endowed potential for intelligence and differing influences of early parenting; however, they are immersed in a structured curriculum and sustained learning environment that prioritize cognitive abilities. And these are not just abstract enhancements; for example, research comparing schooled and unschooled subsistence-level farmers in Ghana finds that exposure to formal education as a child improves adult decision making and novel problem-solving about health, child-rearing, and other everyday challenges (Peters et al. 2011).

The cumulative cognitive impact of the education revolution is dramatically indicated by the secular trend of rising fluid IQ—known as the Flynn Effect. The means and distributions of un-normed scores from standardized IQ measures have risen significantly across successive birth cohorts of adults since early in the twentieth century in every national society where there is a long history of widespread population testing, such as the United States, northern Western Europe, and Japan (Flynn 1987; Lynn and Meisenberg 2010). For instance, the estimated IQ of the average adult in 1930 was approximately one to two standard deviations below that of the average adult in 2000. The largest intergenerational gains are on fluid IQ tests that measure relational reasoning ability as applied in novel contexts, or specifically the effective use of cognitive executive functions that provide domain-general neurological resources for planning, organization, working memory and integration of experience, spatial reasoning, unique problem-solving, and skills for goal-directed behaviors. It is likely that one main cause, if not the primary
cause, of the Flynn Effect is the expansion of access to formal education and the intensification of its curricular cognitive demand over the twentieth century (Blair et al. 2005; Baker et al. 2010a).

Related to this is the well-known CIE finding from low-income nations in the 1960s that formal education transforms worldviews, attitudes, and the empowerment to “think for oneself.” Early research on the transformational qualities of formal schooling found that schooled men with just some primary education (as opposed to their unschooled peers) exhibited distinctly modern attitudes and preferences such as openness to new experience, independence from traditional authority, belief in the efficacy of science and modern medicine, abandonment of fatalism, interest in rational planning of their lives, and strong interest in civic affairs and national and international events (e.g., Inkeles and Smith 1974). Yet, like many aspects of the education revolution, the implication of this finding went undervalued in favor of the much weaker (50 percent less), but theoretically popular, influence of factory work on such values (Inkeles 1996). And as the narrow economic theory of modernity withered under criticism from economic and social reproductive theories, the findings about robust schooling effects illustrating the coming impact of the education revolution were lost.

Together the metacognitive and metapsychological effects of formal education along with the growing demography of schooling access and exposure suggest a formidable force by which education transforms society. Notably, this “school-enhancement of cognitive-plus” hypothesis is proving valuable in explaining the many associations between formal education and population health. Beyond and often in spite of the material, status, and manifest curricular benefits of schooling, thinking skills and the empowerment to use them are the critical causal factors behind effective decision making and sustained behavior change related to resistance to all kinds of infectious and noninfectious diseases from the HIV/AIDS pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa to growing obesity and risk of rising prevalence of diabetes in middle-income nations of South America (e.g., Baker et al. 2010b; Smith et al. 2012). Indeed, the cognitive-plus effect spread by the education revolution is one major cause, along with economic and political development, behind the unfolding worldwide epidemiological transition away from fatal infectious disease and accidental death to longer and more uniform life expectancy (Montez et al. 2012).

The schooled brain and psychology do not necessarily imply an all-encompassing panacea however; there are clear trade-offs. An obvious example is that the widespread epidemiological transition, caused in part by increasing education, trades significant world population aging and higher rates of morbidity among elderly for ensuing demand for significant shifts of societal resources to treat noninfectious diseases. Another example is the often-made misassumption that the Flynn Effect and hence school-enhanced cognitive
functioning of populations imply that the average cognitive ability of the
prior generation was intellectually limited, while that of the rising generation
will be in the genius range. Obviously the world prior to mass schooling did
not operate on extremely low levels of intelligence nor will mostly the brilliant
populate the future world. What the education revolution has done instead
is to focus large amounts of time of children and youth on specific types of
cognitive skill—abstract thinking—and they reflect this, but there are other
aspects to the development of a mind that are not included and even ex-
cluded. A laser-like focus on cognitive activities along with the growing social
meaning of school achievement creates a culture of what can be called “ac-
ademic intelligence” that passively, yet pervasively, pushes aside, or devalues,
many other kinds of human capabilities (Baker, forthcoming). Furthermore,
should be noted that while these effects are major transformations of
individuals, aggregated they are but two of the many ways that the education
revolution affects other institutions. Finally, like all robust social orders, the
schooled society takes no prisoners: all must compete in the highly cognitized
environment of formal education, and inequality in academic skills becomes
generalized as the publicly legitimate source of social stratification.

The cognitive and psychological impact of formal schooling and its im-
 pact on many facets of society offer avenues for CIE scholarship. First, com-
 parative research on populations with lower levels of access to formal school-
ing is still a fertile venue for understanding how education changes cognition,
general psychology, and worldviews. There is much more to know, particularly
about possible interactions between empowerment and cognition, but with
the pace of education expansion, time to do this research is running out.
Second, we know little about the nature of these effects at higher levels of
education, and the current variable rate of higher education expansion across
nations offers excellent opportunity for CIE research on this. Third, the
creation, maintenance, and impact of a culture of academic intelligence and
its social construction as meritocracy await full scholarly treatment. Finally,
while CIE scholarship has identified some of the cognitive and psychological
processes by which the dominant form of western formal education works
to unhinge the institutions of traditional society, less is known about how
this form is changing institutions into the future—one of which is the new
politics.

Mass Education and the Political Paradox

It is well known that education robustly determines political motivation,
capability, and proclivity to undertake civic involvement; not only is educa-
tional attainment the most salient among all other demographic character-
istics, its effect is also larger than the impact of growing up in nations with
different political cultures and heritages (e.g., Almond and Verba [1963]
1989; Nie et al. 1996; Wiseman et al. 2011). But the usual academic account

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of education and politics in contemporary society runs aground on a paradox. The above association is fully documented for individuals, yet as numbers of people with advanced education grew in populations, the nature of politics did not change in the way many political scientists thought it would given individual effects. Societal levels of voting, expressions of patriotic nationalism, and other traditional citizenship activities and attitudes have remained stagnant or even declined with rising education attainment across nations. Since the 1960s, formal democracy has been “downsized” in the sense of less participation in national political parties in the United States and elsewhere (e.g., Crenson and Ginsberg 2004). Also, there are many observations that a majority of working and lower middle classes have seceded from politics and public life and report not “feeling at home” in the contentious politics of the post-60s era (e.g., Teixeira 1990, 2000; Lane 2001). Together these trends create the widely acknowledged education-democracy paradox: Even though education so powerfully predicts political behavior and competency among individuals, why has this not led to more traditional citizenry in democracies?

The answer is that instead of more educated citizens fitting into the traditional confines of politics, they significantly change and broaden the nature of civic life in the schooled society. Kamens’s thorough analysis of this process finds that as the education revolution moves into higher education, political structures are transformed through intensive mobilization in many directions not experienced in late-modern society, all of which are “turbo charged by rampant individual empowerment of advanced education” (2009, 100; 2012). There are two ways this happens. First, mass advanced education expands the polity by increasing societal capacity for more, and more complex, collective action. Social movements, including advocacy organizations and professional social movement organizations with elaborate organizational and political tactics, occur frequently and become more sophisticated and based on methods and assumptions found in social sciences, thus reinforcing a greater affinity between the effects of higher education and political action (e.g., McAdam 1982; Dobbin and Kelly 2007; Smith and Wiest 2012). Second, the greater capacity for politicized collective action is aimed at ever more topics, meaning that an inexhaustible list of aspects of life become politicized such as sexual identities, environments, scientific innovation, food security, animal rights, and so forth (e.g., Schofer and Hironaka 2005).

As access to higher education expanded, political scientists underestimated how much individuals would be transformed not into quiet compliant citizens but into highly motivated civic participants that are responsible for the seemingly incongruent change in politics worldwide. With greater educational attainment, people do not lack interest or motivation to take political action; instead, they are considerably more capable and inclined to be po-
political about ever more aspects of life, but they do this in less conventional ways that are often misperceived as apolitical or even as antipolitical. A world awash in nontraditional civic mobilization and group formation at every level of civil society is precisely in parallel with the influence of higher education on the political behavior and capabilities of individuals that considerable comparative research indicates (e.g., Pascarella and Terenzini 2005; Wiseman et al. 2011). In addition, education does not necessarily make for a more conservative or liberal populace. Instead, it raises political capacity for all ideologies to the degree that there is the potential for extensive collective action from a variety of ideological sides of an issue, and thus competitive contentiousness is ever more present. So too, the schooled society produces a culture of individualized-identity political mobilization with considerably more cosmopolitan ideas and international similarities and less formal nationalism. Finally, it is the less educated in many national societies who express alienation from the new political processes of the schooled society (e.g., Cahn and Carbone 2010).

Like everything the education revolution causes, the effect of educated polities comes with trade-offs. The most obvious is the decline of large monolithic sources of political power such as trade and labor unions, national parties, and even ethnic groups, and political agendas are less organized around the monumental ideological battles of the past century. Also, many may find the unrelenting politicization of everyday life disconcerting, yet it cannot be denied that the schooled society dynamically boosts the democratic transformation of contemporary society. And while this is an obvious benefit, educationally charged new democracies also increase the chances of incurring well-known costs of democracy, such as tyranny of the majority, governmental inefficiency, and proliferating contentions. Ironically too, even though the nation-state has been a major political and financial sponsor of mass education, an educated world polity pulls away from nationalism, opening this relationship to potential change in the near future.

The political transformation of the world at the hands of the education revolution offers rich possibilities for CIE scholarship. While there are useful literatures on the historical evolution of the nation-state and mass schooling, and on comparative analyses of political socialization through schooling, the new transformation of politics in the schooled society awaits intensive scholarship (e.g., Ramirez et al. 1987; Torney-Purta 1995; Meyer et al. 1997). For example, comparative research is needed on the role of education in a number of political struggles occurring worldwide. It is not extreme to suggest that the political dimensions of the schooled society represent a new significant intellectual challenge to political science, and scholarship in CIE could be a major partner in answering this challenge. Another example is the need for more description, synthesis, and analysis of the evolution of national funding and control of education shaped by educated polities. In general,
the education revolution’s impact on the nature of politics has so far been mostly neglected, and the phenomenon promises a broad range of scholarly possibilities. Perhaps an even more neglected and promising phenomenon for CIE research is what has happened to religion and spirituality in the schooled society.

The Affinity between Education and Religion

It is widely assumed that with advanced education, belief in the supernatural and religious practice declines. Similarly, the decline of religious authority, or especially the desacralization of social institutions, is a major cornerstone of the usual intellectual account of the transformation from tradition to modern forms of society. Yet religion has proven to be ineradicable worldwide even in the face of robust secular cultures, such as in the heavily schooled US American society, which is among the most churched and religious of developed nations in the world today, more now than at the nation’s founding. Just after the birth of the American nation in the late eighteenth century, only 17 percent of the total population adhered to a religion, but by the end of the twentieth century, church membership has grown to 60 percent, and a full 95 percent of Americans claim to believe in a god (Finke and Stark 1992; Froese and Bader 2010). Even when monopolistic state churches and government authorities of educated secular national societies of western Europe have hindered diversity and expansion of formal religion, there is still significant belief in the supernatural. In highly educated Iceland, where weekly church attendance is very low, 80 percent believe in life after death, the human soul, and frequently pray to a supernatural being, while only 2 percent claim to be convinced atheists (Stark and Finke 2000).

Religion worldwide has not died with the unfolding of the education revolution; in many ways it thrives. What is emerging from renewed research is the conclusion that contrary to what so many intellectual accounts predicted, formal education changes beliefs in a direction compatible with many of the central ideas of the education revolution. While it is true that advanced education is a driving force behind the removal of religious authority from social institutions, there is significant evidence that the education revolution actually increases the potential for new types of religious activities and organizations to flourish. Among this growing body of research on the topic, two examples illustrate the surprising affinity between the two institutions, one psychological and the other theological and organizational.

Perhaps the main reason that education and religion are frequently thought to be incompatible is because much of the curriculum of mass education is based on a worldview of science, rationality, and the human construction of society, while religion is based in revelation, leap of faith, and the existence of a supernatural being. As nonreligious ideas take on powerful meanings in society, they can devalue religious ones. Since the
highly educated are exposed to secular ideologies more than the less educated, they should be the most likely to turn away from religion. Instead, recent research shows that the educated tend to believe in a god that is not incongruent with many parts of an educated worldview. For example, those with at least a BA degree are twice as likely to believe in a "distant God," who is more abstract, cosmic, sexless, mysterious, forgiving of human weakness, and who started the universe yet is mostly, if not entirely, inactive in everyday affairs. Belief in a supernatural being of this nature presents little contradiction with the ideas promoted by the education revolution: society can be humanly constructed, science is a rational method to understand the world (God’s world included, as was the case in early universities), and unexplained phenomena need not be considered supernatural acts but will eventually be explained by rational, scientific inquiry (e.g., Froese and Bader 2010). In contrast, a sizable majority of people without higher education worship a God who is perceived to be an animated authoritarian father-like supernatural being, concrete, active, and wrathful, and who can directly intervene in individuals’ lives and will even cause bad things to get the attention of humans. Spirituality may change in the schooled society, but it does not become marginal or irrational for many individuals.

A lack of a strong psychological dissidence between advanced education and spirituality opens ways in which education revolution contributes to mass religion. First, before the advent of the modern world, societies tended to have one dominant religion intertwined with their core cultural ideas, but in the process of developing and disseminating the ideas validating desacralization, as well as social justice, and societal, racial, and religious equality, the education revolution also lays the foundation for extensive religious pluralism—many faiths existing at once, more or less, equally—which sociological research finds leads to greater overall religious adherence for a number of reasons, including open competition for followers (e.g., Smith 1998; Stark and Finke 2000). Second, much as an educated polity turbocharges civics, an educated laity increases the organizational capacities of religions. For example, ceteris paribus higher educated Christians are more likely to participate in the organized activities of their churches and bring the organizational and conceptual skills, such as public speaking, proclivity to challenge authority, abilities to organize people and resources, autonomy of action, and self-efficacy, that make them effective members to build religious organizations, even if at times being rebellious (e.g., Schwadel 2011).

This is just a brief sketch from a wealth of evidence suggesting that religion and spirituality do not decline in the schooled society, and may even thrive. At the same time though, undoubtedly the education revolution has been a major social force in desacralization leading to powerful secular cultural dimensions of the contemporary world. With the education revolution, growth of both a secular worldview and religious organizational activity occurs,
but the later is highly dynamic, less the basis for many aspects of society including conquest and warfare, and has less authority throughout other institutions. Therefore, the trade-off in this case is complex. Certainly, for the irreligious position that a fully secular society is best for human collectives, the affinity suggested here is alarming. There are many historical examples of tragic interreligious conflict, violence, conquest, and bigotry that make a case for more secularization. But there is also much counterevidence that both organized religion and spirituality are positive for health, psychological well-being, social integration, and moral development, and it is likely that the proclivity for belief in the supernatural is a highly ineradicable evolutionary human quality (e.g., Levin 1996). Given religion’s sustainability and its benefit to millions of believers around the world, it is unlikely that a fully secular world is possible—even the twentieth century’s massive political attempts to suppress religion mostly failed (Jenkins 2007). The schooled society and its educated spirituality will likely grow into the future.

This relationship holds great potential for new CIE scholarship, which has been virtually mute on the topic. Heretofore all of the research has been done by social scientists interested in religion, not particularly in education. It is now obvious that educated elites do not necessarily bring about secular societies, nor does the evitable ensuing mass education make societies fully secular. But at both the individual and institutional levels we know little about what actually lies behind the many relationships that have been found, and the whole field is dominated by American and western European findings, so it cries out for more systematic comparative study. As all regions rapidly shift to a schooled society, what this will mean for the transforming of religions in societies with significantly less initial desacralization is a central future topic for CIE scholarship.

Conclusion

The point of these three examples of the consequence of the education revolution is not that education is the single most influential institution of contemporary society; obviously, it is joined by others. Rather, the point is that as a historical process, the education revolution transforms many other institutions with similar impact as that of large-scale capitalism and representative democracy (Parsons 1971). Also, like these other foundational social revolutions, education’s broader impact is not necessarily intentional. Mostly the education revolution intensifies the schooling process, and in doing so its cultural robustness tends to minimize other cultural ideas and processes. Although only alluded to here, this is perhaps best seen in the deepening cultural impact of the long historical trajectory of the Western form of the university. In the schooled society, the university’s knowledge production capacity and sociological form spreads out to many other institutions, such
as workplaces and jobs, the production of science, and many aspects of everyday culture (Baker, forthcoming).

Whether or not the coming of a worldwide schooled society is good for the human condition is ultimately a moral and political question that will continue to be asked with many nuances. While CIE scholarship cannot answer this question, it can and should inform the debate. Beyond research on educational expansion, the origins and consequences of the education revolution offer a wide array of promising topics for CIE. In demographic reach and cultural scope, it is the most spectacular educational phenomenon of human history; it should be our field’s defining theme.

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