

4 Blasphemies From John Stuart Mill on Public Education

On May 20th, 1806, one of the great philosophers of the 19th century was born: John Stuart Mill.

[Known for](#) his promotion of utilitarianism, [a philosophy](#) declaring that “actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness,” Mill also penned a number of thoughts on logic, religion, economics, and education.

His thoughts on the last topic are especially interesting when viewed in light of today’s education arguments. Four of Mill’s [thoughts on education](#) are summarized below:

1. Parents are the Primary Providers of Education

“If the government would make up its mind to require for every child a good education, it might save itself the trouble of providing one. It might leave to parents to obtain the education where and how they pleased, and content itself with helping to pay the school fees of the poorer classes of children, and defraying the entire school expenses of those who have no one else to pay for them.”

2. Public Education Often becomes Propaganda

“A general State education is a mere contrivance for moulding people to be exactly like one another: and as the mould in

which it casts them is that which pleases the predominant power in the government, whether this be a monarch, a priesthood, an aristocracy, or the majority of the existing generation, in proportion as it is efficient and successful, it establishes a despotism over the mind, leading by natural tendency to one over the body.”

3. Public Education Shouldn't be the Only Game in Town

“An education established and controlled by the State should only exist, if it exist at all, as one among many competing experiments, carried on for the purpose of example and stimulus, to keep the others up to a certain standard of excellence.”

4. Teacher Certifications are Unnecessary

“It would be giving too dangerous a power to governments, were they allowed to exclude any one from professions, even from the profession of teacher, for alleged deficiency of qualifications: and I think, with Wilhelm von Humboldt, that degrees, or other public certificates of scientific or professional acquirements, should be given to all who present themselves for examination, and stand the test; but that such certificates should confer no advantage over competitors, other than the weight which may be attached to their testimony by public opinion.”

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