

## 275. The Value of Study for Its Own Sake

SAFS Newsletter, #85, April 2020

<https://www.safs.ca/newsletters/article.php?article=1063>

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Frank Furedi wrote of the late Roger Scruton, “He taught that art and education must be appreciated in their own right.” <https://www.spiked-online.com/2020/01/12/roger-scruton-and-the-burden-of-non-conformism/>

Certainly, each of art and education *can* be appreciated in its own right, or, as I would put it, valued, enjoyed, or loved for its own sake. There is, though, a difficulty in the idea of enjoining people to value art or education for its own sake. When I am directed to value something, I might ask why I should value it. The answer why I should value it, if that answer is to be at all capable of moving me to value it, will necessarily point to something else. To value something for its own sake, though, is precisely not to value it because of or for the sake of something else.

I happen very much to value art for its own sake and study for its own sake. (I'll explain my quibble with the word “education” in a moment.) I would that others also valued art and study for their own sakes. But *how* can I advocate that others value art or study for its own sake?

Does it make any sense at all to advocate appreciating something in its own right?

I prefer the term “study” to “education” because I cannot help but hear in “education” reference either to a means or to a result. Education is certainly a means to something. It's a means to being educated. Its end, then, is outside education itself; being educated is an end to be attained through education. That end, being educated, is best understood as a state or a thing.

Education cannot be loved for its own sake, then, for it is means. Further, while its product, being educated, can be loved for its own sake, it would be loved as an entity or an accomplishment. (It also seems self-centred, to love one's being educated, as one might love one's figure or athletic prowess.)

Study, on the other hand, is an activity, something in which one engages. To love study for its own sake is to love engaging intellectually with the world's phenomena.

Loving study for its own sake is loving the processes of intellectual engagement: reading, writing, considering, observing, experimenting, surveying, calculating, discussing, critiquing, hypothesizing, theorizing. The central process of study is, of course, thinking, thinking critically, encouraging the conflict of ideas. The love of study encompasses the love of thinking.

The love of study is also the love of understanding, of holding in thought an accurate account of the phenomenon to which one is attending. Holding an account in thought is a form of contemplation, and contemplation is more a state than an activity, but in study moments of contemplation, profound and satisfying as they are, pass quickly, for always one will notice a

weakness or a problem, if only the problem how one's account fits with accounts of nearby phenomena.

Loving art for its own sake involves loving some particular works or instances of art (and disliking others). But moments of contemplative appreciation are only part of the story, as loving art for its own sake involves loving the processes of attention, comparison, and thought through which one comes to love (or not) particular works or instances of art.

That education or study can be valued for its own sake does not imply that it cannot or should not be valued as a means. Education or study might well efficiently serve things we value and, thereby, ultimately serve things we value for their own sakes. Study generates information and understandings that industry, business, medicine, and government can use to promote well-being and prosperity. Universities educate students to be skilled and knowledgeable and even, sometimes, to be thoughtful and independent.

Indeed, when we listen to what universities say about themselves, either to themselves or to the world, we hear nothing but how education or study promotes one or another other thing we value. (My university's Faculty of Arts promotes itself as "Arts with Impact.")

One reason for loving study for its own sake might be that unless those who engage in it engage in it for its own sake, study will not produce what we want from it, or at least not efficiently.

Consider a sports league, a league either for professionals or amateurs (or even for kids). Sports leagues provide all sorts of wonderful products: for the participants, money and adulation, fitness, training in team work and hard work, an alternative to vagrancy; for those not participating, they provide economic benefits or exciting evening at the rink. But a team on which none of the players loves the game, but each seeks merely wealth or health or their parents' approval, will not likely be a good team. A league of such teams would be a farce. If we're going to enjoy the goods that a sports league can produce, most of the players had better be in it simply for the love of the game.

Same with a university. Whatever those outside the university want from it, and are willing to pay tax dollars to get, it won't come from the university unless those inside it value study for its own sake.

That argument, though, is not an argument that you or I should value study for its own sake. I'm afraid that there can be no such argument. Given any person and anything that can be valued for its own sake, there can be no good argument that that person should value that thing for its own sake. As I said above, an argument that someone should value something must be based on the usefulness of valuing it for expressing or promoting something else that that person values. An argument that one should value life or love or art or study for its own sake can, at best, be circular.

This result does not imply that either one values something for its own sake or one doesn't, and that that's that. A person can go from not valuing something for its own sake to valuing it for its own sake, and a person can go from valuing something for its own sake to not valuing it for its own sake.

Psychologists warn us of the over-justification effect, when increased extrinsic motivations dampen a person's intrinsic motivation. We're happy to help out when we can, and we're happy to enjoy the prestige helping out brings us. But our enjoyment of that prestige tends to lessen the degree to which we value helping out for its own sake. The lesson is to be careful with one's use of incentives. Paying a child who likes reading to read more might indeed get her

to read more, but now reading is for her is a means, perhaps a chore, no longer an activity she loves. Selling study as useful tends to decrease the love of study.

We who love study for its own sake can promote our love by creating conditions in which people can find and maintain their own love of study. We can, for instance, let our example be seen, by both our colleagues and our students. We can consciously and conscientiously put our love of the process at the centre of our discussions of research and scholarship. We can make our classrooms places in which we and our students engage intellectually with the matters at hand. And we can stand against changes that threaten the ethos of or institutional commitment to the love of study.

Roger Scruton could not have taught that study must be appreciated in its own right. What he might have taught is that one can enjoy study for its own sake. He would have taught this mainly by example, by showing what it is like to enjoy study for its own sake.

Scruton might also have taught that unless we are actively striving to make our institutions hospitable to study for its own sake, we will not only lose our students, those who would love study for its own sake if only they were aware of the possibility, but even our own opportunities to honour our love.