

American Government & Politics: A Christian Worldview– Article:
“The Fallacy of ‘Public’ Education” (15–20 Minutes)

TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS/KEY

Goal

In this article, author Lew Rockwell explains how government involvement in education corrupts and attempts to control individuals.

Instructions

1. Instruct students to read the article and answer the review questions. (Give them 10–12 minutes.)
2. Have students discuss their answers in pairs or small groups (if time).
3. Ask for volunteers to share their answers as a class.

Key

1. How does the free market produce what consumers want? How does this relate to the “government involved in education” issue?

The profit motive ensures that goods or services that consumers want are produced to meet that need or want—including education. Governments are absolutely unnecessary in providing education, because it is an important need/want for parents to have for their children, and for adults to have for themselves.

2. If you were a parent, how would you rank your child’s education on a list of priorities? How would this (a) influence your diligence in trying to provide this, and (b) influence those who would provide assistance for a profit?

AWV, but if it were important, it would goad parents into doing whatever they needed to do to provide it for their children, and the desire/need would be automatically provided for by those seeking profit from it.

3. How could you answer someone who claims, “We can’t just let *money-makers* take control of education—we have to think of the *children!*”

AWV, but this is an absurd argument—like saying we can’t allow surgeons or physical therapist or homebuilders to do things for profit. The profit motive ensures better quality education at a lower cost, as it has throughout human history.

4. What is the danger of government’s providing “vouchers” for education?

It guarantees eventual government control of curriculum, standards, etc. in exchange for the privilege of taking money from others to pay for it.

5. Why is the solution to education *not* “to get good/Christian people in charge of it”? What *principles* about the Biblical, proper roles of government that we have studied this year apply to education?

It sidesteps the principle that taking money from some to give to others to pay for their children’s education is plunder. The Bible says that one of the government’s legitimate purposes is to REMOVE spoil/theft, not to participate in it!

6. Imagine yourself as a government official giving out “vouchers” to families to spend on education. Eventually, once you get parents used to accepting government money, what might you require that the schools teach in order to keep receiving this money?

AWV, but it’s no stretch to imagine ordering that schools use a curriculum that glorifies the state and expansive government, as well as keeping students ignorant about the shenanigans that governments often engage in. (Thank goodness that would never happen today....)

The Fallacy of “Public” Education

Mises Wire

Llewellyn H. Rockwell Jr. • December 23, 2025

Many people today are upset, and rightly so, about programs that promote “woke” values and “tolerance” for degeneracy. To counter this, some people support efforts to purge the schools of such programs and replace them with better ideas. It’s easy to understand why people support such efforts, but this approach ignores the root cause of the problem.

So long as the government controls the “public” schools, there are bound to be conflicts over what should be taught there. Only if all schooling is supplied by the free market will the problem end. In a free market, parents can get schools that supply them with the sort of education they want for their children. As the great Ludwig von Mises pointed out, the dollar votes of consumers guide production. So long as a number of parents want a particular kind of school, free market entrepreneurs will supply it. Here is what Mises says: “The direction of all economic affairs is in the market society a task of the entrepreneurs. Theirs is the control of production. They are at the helm and steer the ship. A superficial observer would believe that they are supreme. But they are not. They are bound to obey unconditionally the captain’s orders. The captain is the consumer. Neither the entrepreneurs nor the farmers nor the capitalists determine what has to be produced. The consumers do that. If a businessman does not strictly obey the orders of the public as they are conveyed to him by the structure of market prices, he suffers losses, he goes bankrupt, and is thus removed from his eminent position at the helm. Other men who did better in satisfying the demand of the consumers replace him....”

Mises recognized the free market solution to education, and he responded to a common objection to the idea, i.e., some parents might not have enough money to pay the school fees. Here is what he says in his great book *Liberalism*: “There is, in fact, only one solution: the state, the government, the laws must not in any way concern themselves with schooling or education. Public funds must not be used for such purposes. The rearing and instruction of youth must be left entirely to parents and to private associations and institutions....”

In addition to Mises’s response, private charity can help poor parents to pay school fees. And once children enter the work force, they can enroll in adult education courses. But we need to avoid falling into a trap. Some people, including economists like Milton Friedman, have proposed that the government provide education vouchers for poor families. But this is a dangerous idea, because it allows the government to set up requirements on how the families must spend their vouchers. When we say that government and schools must be separated, we mean completely separate. As I said in 1998, “Control follows tax money, so vouchers guarantee that the whole system of private education will eventually be absorbed into a gigantic government-funded propaganda machine, with the only pockets of diversity being schools that refuse any subsidies at all, though they will then be frequently outcompeted.”

This is precisely what happened on the university level, with a disastrous homogenization [uniformity] and dumbing-down....As Mark Brandly of Ball State University has pointed out, compulsory attendance laws not only violate parental rights, they allow government to define what a school is, and therefore to outlaw such developments as small, informal neighborhood schools, held in homes, where one mother teaches arithmetic, another reading, another Christian doctrine, and so on....Vouchers do nothing to end that oppressive situation, and, in fact, go in the opposite direction: toward more draconian regulation and attempted abolition of religious education. Vouchers reinforce the twin evils of public education: involuntary funding and compulsory attendance.”

The great Murray Rothbard made a characteristically important point about education, one that puts into context the worry that poor children might not be able to attend private schools that require admission fees: “Every child coming into the world comes into a certain environment. This environment consists of physical things, natural and man-made, and other human beings with whom he comes in contact in various ways. It is this environment upon which he exercises his developing powers. His reason forms judgments about other people, about his relationships with them and with the world in general; his reason reveals to him his own desires and his physical powers....This entire process of growing up, of developing all the facets of a man’s personality, is his education....It is clearly absurd to limit the term ‘education’ to a person’s formal schooling. He is learning all the time....This is a continual process, and it is obvious that formal schooling constitutes only an item in this process. In a fundamental sense, as a matter of fact, everyone is ‘self-educated.’”

But even granting the truth of this, don’t children require at least some formal schooling? Yes, they do, but all that they need are the “three R’s.” Schools confined to the basics, with no frills added, can be provided at very low cost....Rothbard, as always, is on target: “...There is clearly no need for formal instruction in ‘how to play,’ in ‘getting along with the group,’ in ‘selecting a dentist,’ and the multitude of similar ‘courses’ given in ‘modern education.’ And, since there is no need for formal teaching in physical or directly spontaneous areas, there is no need for instruction in ‘physical education’ or in finger-painting.”

Let’s do everything we can to promote genuine free market schools, with no compromises!

Questions for Review:

1. How does the free market produce what consumers want? How does this relate to the “government involved in education” issue?
2. If you were a parent, how would you rank your child’s education on a list of priorities? How would this (a) influence your diligence in trying to provide this, and (b) influence those who would provide assistance for a profit?
3. How could you answer someone who claims, “We can’t just let *money-makers* take control of education—we have to think of the *children!*”
4. What is the danger of government’s providing “vouchers” for education?
5. Why is the solution to education *not* “to get good/Christian people in charge of it”? What *principles* about the Biblical, proper roles of government that we have studied this year apply to education?
6. Imagine yourself as a government official giving out “vouchers” to families to spend on education. Eventually, once you get parents used to accepting government money, what might you require that the schools teach in order to keep receiving this money?