

Kelvin Orduna

Dr. Kostopulos

Composition I

10 November 2023

Summary Critique of “The Case Against Education”

Is society becoming too educated, and should we reconsider the value of education? “The Case Against Education” Q&A offers some insight into what Bryan Caplan, an economics professor at George Mason University, believes education should be. In James Pethokoukis’ “The Case Against Education: A long-read Q&A” Bryan Caplan boldly challenges that college and high school diplomas have become fortified stamps of approval, increasing the country’s education level does not lead to faster economic growth, and advocates that skills should be taught on the job rather than in school. Although Caplan makes some jarring claims about education, a closer examination reveals truth to his challenge to conventional wisdom, but at times relies on fallacious reasoning

Looking closely at Caplan's argument that employers see higher education credentials as stamps of approval, he claims that diplomas and degrees have become a symbol of approval that an employee has been vetted to work. In essence, he is explaining that employers see people with degrees are ready to begin work, but not necessarily for what the degree is for. For instance, Caplan in the article says, “hey I will at least give this guy an interview and won’t throw out his application” when referring to a candidate with a college degree. He also claims that jobs are no different then they were in the past, yet employers have increasingly raised the amount of education needed to become qualified for a job, saying “employers raise their expectations of how many stickers you need to be worthy of employment”. Caplan also notes that many of the

skills taught in schools, such as foreign languages, are not used in the workplace. Alongside this argument, Caplan claims that increasing the country's education level does not lead to faster economic growth. In addition, Caplan iterates that the effect of education has played a bigger role in personal prosperity, but does not lead to national growth.

In Caplan's closing, he advocates that skills should be taught on the job, rather than in school. Caplan sees that jobs could be taken by students once they graduate from high school and those people could start their lives sooner. He cites that schools are so separated from the workforce that when students do eventually enter, they are confused as to what they're actually going to do. Caplan also argues that in some instances, college degrees aren't viable and employers should train employees on the job without requiring them to have a higher level of education. Furthermore, Caplan believes that employers have stuck to a false idea that only people who do well in school are easier to train and therefore result in lower fallout rates. He further goes on to say that employers don't care why college graduates are easier to train, but that if they decide to interview everyone, they'll likely interview people who are less likely to work out.

In reading Caplan's responses to questions, many questions were formed considering that he used many fallacies throughout many of his responses. In many of his responses he offered only two solutions, either: keep education the way it is or unfund and remove it. Many of these fallacies make Caplan's arguments weak and open to criticism. Although many of his points are true, the abundance of vagueness and far-fetched statements leaves his points open to interpretation.

In Caplan's argument about college degrees and high school diplomas becoming "stamps", Caplan sees credentials as simple documents that don't show an employer what they

can do, but rather that they're easier to train. In an article regarding micro-credentials, the author argues that employers are not content with the skills employees are bringing (Gauthier). Employers then, are not expecting or have lowered their expectations of having these students start on day one with their degrees. Instead, to Caplan's point, employers are seeing that if they did well in school, they would also be easier to train than someone who did not do well in school. Caplan also argues that jobs are no different than they were in the past, but employers have raised their standard when it comes to levels of higher education. To show this in perspective, in 2007, only 12% of ads for a dental technician required a B.A compared to 33% in 2012. (Stark) In the same article from Ernie Stark, he expressed that by 2012, 66% of ads say they're now hiring college and university graduates for jobs previously filled by high school graduates. Caplan ultimately argues that many skills taught in schools, such as foreign languages, are not skills that employers want to be used on the job. There are several issues with Caplan's argument here, especially because he is not considering businesses that do indeed make money off of the fact they have employees who speak Taiwanese or Spanish. In reports made by Jill Casner-Lotto, they report that the importance of foreign languages is actually on the rise. In 2020, the knowledge of foreign languages was considered "very important" to 11% of employers (Casner-Lotto). The report from Casner-Lotto further goes on to report that there is a growing pertinent need for foreign languages. It comes down to the fact that Caplan's argument about skills not being needed by employers is simply false.

In Caplan's claim about there not being a relationship between education level and national economic growth, he asserts that more education an individual has does not result in a higher benefit to society. Rather, he claims, it takes more resources than it puts in. This argument can anger people depending on the fields they're going into, especially ones that require a large

extent of research. In a surprising turn, however, A Stanford research paper written by economist Erik A. Hanushek does back up Caplan's claim. The paper claims that it is indeed true that while high level education results in prosperity for the individual, it does not yield national economic growth (Hanushek).

Higher-level education has strived a point of honor for many. For many Americans in recent generations, they've been the first ones in their families to complete a college education program. However, Caplan argues that these college education degrees have simply become signals to employers rather than credentials of your ability to do work. What are the alternatives to college degrees if they've simply become nothing but paper? While many Americans are still continuing to go through the process of college education, the result of these degrees is not what many Americans have been made to believe from their parents or instructors Other alternatives to higher education continue to be looked down at, so for the meantime, as degree "inflation" continues, there's nothing but continuing to get more advanced degrees.

Works Cited

- Casner-Lotto, Jill, and Linda Barrington. "Are They Really Ready to Work?." ERIC, 1 Jan. 2006, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED519465..>
- Gauthier, Thomas. "The Value of Microcredentials: The Employer's Perspective." *Wiley Online Library*, 4 May. 2020, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/cbe2.1209>. Accessed 3 Nov. 2023.
- Hanushek, Erik. "Will More Higher Education Improve Economic Growth?." *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 13 Oct. 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxrep/grw025>.
- Pethokoukis, James. The Case Against Education: A Long-read Q&A with Bryan Caplan." *American Enterprise Institute*, 16 Mar. 2018, <https://www.aei.org/education/higher-education/the-case-against-education-a-long-read-qa-with-bryan-caplan>. Accessed 1 Nov. 2023. Accessed 1 Nov. 2023.
- Stark, Ernie, and Paul Poppler. "What Are They Thinking? Employers Requiring College Degrees for Low-Skilled Jobs." *SAM Advanced Management Journal*, Aug. 2016, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/306444567_What_Are_They_Thinking_Employers_Requiring_College_Degrees_For_Low-Skilled_Jobs. Accessed 6 Nov. 2023.