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Value Inquiry and the Philosophy of Education

This article attempts to demonstrate the nature and status of the inquiry that is labeled, "philosophy of education." "It urges that philosophy of education is a discipline to which educators must turn if they are to affirm inquiry rather than dogmatism and indoctrination," when dealing with the value problems of the educational undertaking.

CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY is placing major emphasis on critical analysis and inquiry.[1] There is a growing body of literature on methodological inquiries into the sciences, the arts and value theory. There is also work upon the ways in which these researches bear upon each other and upon the theorizing generally. The laws of logic and the foundations of mathematics, coming to us out of the historical framework of philosophy, continue to receive critical attention; and comprehensive value frameworks persist as alternative proposals for the means, ends, methods and criteria of human conduct. Still, major emphasis is on an analysis of symbol and meaning and the conditions of adequacy for general theory; and this emphasis reflects itself in the philosophy of education.

Philosophic inquiry into the educational undertaking proceeds in much the same way as philosophic inquiry elsewhere. It singles out value criteria, judgmental method and goal formulations as these are at work in, or proposed for, an important human institution.[2] It shares with other "philosophies of" concepts and terminology which help distinguish philosophy from psychology, physiology, biology and other theoretical disciplines. And it is distinguished from other "philosophies of" because of the kinds of problems and subject matters to which it directs its analyses, criticisms and proposals.[3]

The following analysis deals with integration and values in education in order to show how philosophy of education "works." The reader is urged to direct his attention not to the personal analysis and conclusions of the author, but to the *act* and to the *making* that is the analysis. The author's purpose is to demonstrate the character of inquiry distinguishing philosophy of education from other disciplines.

[1] Morton White, *The Age of Analysis* (New York: Mentor Books, 1955).

[2] N. Champlin, *et al*, "The Distinctive Nature of the Discipline of the Philosophy of Education," *Educational Theory*, Vol. IV, No. 1 (January 1954), p. 1-3.

[3] Francis T. Villemain, *Philosophic Research in Education* (New York: New York University Press, 1953).

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From the time of Plato down to the present, men have attempted to effect integration in their lives. According to one theory that has come down to us both art and science are finite, partial or fragmentary approaches to a reality, divine or other, which provides, in the form of unity, the guide and goal for art, science and, indeed, all human endeavor. Called "Platonic" ("idealism" for some), it was imported into the theoretical architecture of Christianity. It profoundly influenced Emerson, and it gained major educational expression in Froebel. It has moved men to deplore fragmentation and to seek integration in their most significant institution—education. It still operates as a court of appeal for educators throughout the contemporary scene.

In the recent past, integration and unity became an object of concern for analytic philosophy directed to the sciences. A "unified science" movement took form.[4] Contributed to by some of the finest scientific methodologists of our time it achieved a respectability of inquiry not enjoyed by the more mystical, metaphysical or religious concerns. This inquiry attempted to locate an alleged inter-relatedness of the various sciences and to formulate principles of integration.

The significance of such an undertaking for the "Platonic" tradition is quickly seen. Armed with such principles, men would have taken a major step in the direction of discovering more *inclusive* principles which, in their turn, would become guides for organizing the content or range of activities of life and education.

However, the movement has failed to locate any unifying principles or any trans-science generalizations except those principles of inference and empirical investigation which permit us to locate the various sciences *as sciences* in the first place. The different sciences simply do not contribute to, nor do they rest on the assumption of, a "total" reality, unity or integration. It is impossible to "add" the theorems of physics, for example, to the concepts of biology, economics, and/or sociology. Rather than different "parts," the sciences provide us with different theoretical contexts within which we find knowledge claims, predictions and hypotheses. The different sciences *are* these different and non-additive contexts of control, prediction and inquiry. Neither are they "copies," duplications, or exhibitions of the objects or subject matters to which their concepts refer, nor are they "abstractions" *from* these objects or subject matters.

The Integrated Person

The quest for a conception of a whole, unified or integrated person (or personality) suffers in the same way. Chemistry, physiology, psychology, biology, anthropology, and artistic descriptions—empirically based—provide non-additive, non-correlated, and unrelated meanings. They cannot, without breaching the canons of scientific methodology, presuppose or contribute

[4] Rudolf Carnap, *et al, Encyclopedia and Unified Science*, Vol. I, No. 1, of *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science*, ed. by Otto Neurath, Rudolf Carnap, and Charles Morris (2 vols., 20 monographs; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1938-1952).

to a conception of a total, unified or integrated person.[5]

Some current theories of an integrated person commit one of two methodological fallacies: the *teleological fallacy* in which a describable consequence of an object or event is converted into a causal constituent of that object or event, and the *symbolic fallacy* in which a *term* having stipulated usage in one theory is used in another and different theory with the tacit assumption that its precision still holds.

Teleology, the practice of claiming a purpose behind, above or other than that purpose or those purposes distinctive as *human* goals and anticipations is something most of us are familiar with in religion. More technically we find it in theology and those metaphysics which proceed on the assumption of a reality ordered by, or in the service of goals, ends, objectives, purposes and/or first or final causes. However, one will find the presence of teleological explanations also in what sometimes passes for scientific formulation.[6] In biological language, for example, one may find it in the first of each pair of the following statements:

1. The purpose of gastric juices is to help break down food matter for other and related bodily functions.

2. Food breakdown is a consequence of, among other necessary conditions, the presence of gastric juices.

Another example in the same order:

1. The infant is crying because *it* wants (or needs) food in order to satisfy its hunger.

2. The infant's cry is a consequence of, among other necessary conditions, a state of the digestive system alternative to the state subsequent to the introduction of food.

The first statement in each pair of illustrations erects describable consequences of bodily relations into *causes* for themselves while the second statement conveys the *scientific content* without resort to teleological luggage. "Instincts," "wants," "needs" (a major metaphysical prop) or "drives" are other terms illustrative of the teleological fallacy. They, too, function to impute goals and purposes which are *not available as ends-in-view of those objects and relations to which they are assigned*. In order to assign goals to gastric juices or to infants we must gain *representatives of the future*—symbols which represent. In the case of the infant the cry must be connected to the food or to the "tummy" by more symbols or by a simple pointing supplied *by the infant*. However, it is usually the mother's symbolizations (her thinking) or the reified dialectic of an "inquirer" that we find to be the case.

Now it is properly scientific to assert that food is a necessary condition for crying to cease or, for that matter, for the infant to live. But to say the infant *needs* or *wants* food is to hide a value judgment. To say that the infant *should* have food, or that the infant *ought* to live is more correct, for it points us away from the descriptive-predictive domain of scientific inquiry and to the normative-prescriptive domain of value theory. Otherwise we

[5] One resort is to return to the mysticism of an Emerson or Rousseau, holding that the child has the unity and that adults, not having it, vitiate it as they "impose" their "wills" on the child. This, of course, is itself a view imposed not only on the child but on those educators who prefer to stick to the usual standards of scientific intelligibility.

[6] Ernest Nagel, "Teleological Explanation and Teleological Systems," *Vision and Action: Essays in Honor of Horace Kallen on His 70th Birthday*, ed. Sidney Ratner (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953), p. 192-222.

face the age old riddle of how the *ought* is derived from the *is* and *is possible*.

One operation of the *symbolic fallacy* may be found in the rather fashionable practice of borrowing terms from the context of the physical sciences in which they have gained precision, and using them *as though they retained* that precision in other contexts of symbols.[7] Thus, for example, in physical theory, "force," "tension" and/or "energy" make reference to relations of qualitied structures and thereby gain status as "short hand" symbols fashioned to explain the relations. Yet, as theoretical symbols, they become converted into mysterious *agents* lurking behind those relations and, therefore, candidates for fancy metaphysical explanations. Now, instead of being used *to explain* they *must be explained*. Furthermore they are pressed into psychological and sociological service as a means of gaining scientific *sounding* explanations for human conduct. Without re-defined rules of usage for these terms we find ourselves *sounding* scientific as we speak of "the force of personality," "the release of subconscious tension," "adjustment mechanisms," "levels of learning" and "the intellectual energy of the group." But, failing at being scientific, we produce little more than the aesthetic or poetic character of science and, more unfavorably, we cloak a materialistic metaphysics—a particular philosophic bias—in the guise of scientific profundity as we press it in the schools.

[7] Ernest Nagel, "Some Reflections on the Use of Language in the Natural Sciences," *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. XLII, No. 23 (November 8, 1945), p. 617-630.

Symbolic fallacies yield, oftentimes, a curious case in which a mode of description—a theoretical discipline—itself is erected into a cause for what is explained or described. For example, one may find reference to food as being a *biological need* or to love as being a *psychological need* of the infant.

Now it has been demonstrated that we smuggle in a philosophic outlook or we bootleg a value theory when we impute wants, needs, drives, inherent potentialities or innate faculties to infant behavior. But when we elaborate this obvious teleology with the qualifying term of *biological* and *psychological* we do more. We assert that the infant is a biologist and/or a psychologist; for *biology* (coined in the early part of the nineteenth century), *psychology, physiology, economics* and *anthropology* refer to theoretical disciplines which attempt to be *sciences*. A biological "need" is nothing more than a necessary condition for biology to proceed, just as an astronomical "need" is nothing more than a necessary condition for astronomy to proceed. A live food consuming creature is *needed* for scientific *and* non-scientific purposes to be achieved. Plainly, the infant has neither these purposes nor the conceptual facility required to have a most basic *biological need*—at once the principles of logic and the conceptual techniques of biology.

It is most certainly scientific to say that *planetary motions*, a concept found in astronomy, makes reference to empirically discernible relations of heavenly bodies which were around *prior* to the appearance of astronomy. It is equally scientific to say that *organism* is a concept, defined in biology,

making reference to an inter-related, inter-influencing set of bodily functions which graced the planet *prior* to the appearance of biology. But, scientifically, it is as much nonsense to *call* or *label* the inter-related, inter-influencing set of bodily functions *biology* or *the biological* as it is to call or label the heavenly bodies *astronomy* or *the astronomical*.

It is not a matter of "mere semantic" flippancy to state that only biologists, or those whose *purposes* require knowledge provided by biology, have biological "needs." And it is not "verbal gymnastics" to state that only psychologists have psychological problems—that only economists have economic problems. It is simply a matter for the same precision of inquiry that yielded the different sciences and their varying degrees of precision in the first place. Only as inquiry has *rid itself* of teleological and symbolic fallacies has precision in the several sciences been gained. To carve up, dialectically, the human creature, or "reality," and to label the alleged parts with the terms which distinguish *only* different universes of discourse or theoretical disciplines is to block the advance of science and to make a mockery of education, the institution upon which all science depends. Indeed, the theoretical foundations of the educational profession are at stake in this matter.

The Integrated Program

If education is to become a profession with its distinctive discipline, then efforts to formulate an "integrated" program must come to grips with three significant philosophic-methodological questions:

1. What *is* integrated?
2. What *does* the integrating? and
3. With what standards or criteria do we determine whether or not integration has been achieved?

Proposed and instituted programs which are advanced as "integrated" or "core" on the strength of "needs of the child," "interest of the student," or "teach children and not subject matters" are camouflaging these questions as well as the value preferences of those advancing the programs. Until "integration" finds a methodologically defensible meaning, it must go the way of all metaphysical doctrines.

Some educators, working out of Dewey's thought, have recognized the dilemma yielded by inner, outer, personal or cosmic theories of integration and have shifted attention to *problems* as an organizing category. Only as we locate a problem, the theory goes, can we institute relatedness in personal and/or social experience or in the curricular structure of our schools.

Such a theory constitutes a significant alternative to the traditional view of integration. However, if problems establish relatedness and integration, and there are many problems, then it would follow that there are *many* relatednesses and integrations possible. Thus the problem of *significant* problems appears. The problem of establishing *categories* for locating, fashioning and organizing problems for purposes of curricular programs becomes the most significant philosophic problem of education for this view.

Whatever view or views educators may have, it is to their methodological and value assumptions they must turn. A responsible and intellectually so-

phisticated framework for conceiving an educational program will come only as the tools and concepts of philosophy of education, the most *practical* resources available, are put to work upon these assumptions.

A tragic twist appears, however, when we note the variety of ways in which the philosophy of education, as a discipline, is circumvented at those points in educational theorizing where its tools and concepts are singularly appropriate. Among these ways we find: the conception of integration ambiguously used (the humanities movement, integrated science movement, "total" child movement); the conception of "needs" floating independently of purpose, significant or insignificant, ("needs" whether of the child, organism, group, community, society, mankind or cosmos); the conception of problem solving *method* minus a formulation of the *principles* of method entailed; the conception that statistical and other *descriptions* (levels of learning, "reading readiness," "normal-abnormal," "adjusted-maladjusted," "mentalphysical age," "healthy-neurotic") are cases of *normatives* or *prescriptions* for the educative process.

Another way in which philosophic inquiry is circumvented is via the assumption that *everyone* has a philosophy already and that by *collecting* individuals representative of different departments or subject matters we have a condition in which the "give and take" of opinions will produce the value decisions.[8] Called "democratic" by some, and "watered down Hegelianism" by Dewey,[9] this view finds contemporary expression in the group-dynamic-workshop movement. This movement has failed to give us criteria for establishing common meaning, common procedures for testing, and other bases for building critically forged social agreements. Its appeal to "give and take" is an appeal to teleology; and, in consequence, the movement is fraught with the danger of benevolent indoctrination.[10] Needless to say it provides the critics of education with an excellent target.

This should not serve to suggest that philosophers of education occupy the Platonic realm of law givers. Rather it is intended to underline *philosophic competence* as a necessary competence for anyone caught up with the problem of reaching value decisions in education. The view that everyone has this competence in consequence of "experience" (unspecified) permits one to avoid the "pangs" which oftentimes attend the inquiry required to build it. This permits one to assume that philosophy is identified with *values* rather than with a demanding methodologically oriented inquiry into value *criteria*. It permits one to smear over the distinction between a Plato and a Willie Sutton, a John Dewey and Bob Hope. Moreover, it permits one to

[8] These euphoric decisions would be what Rousseau called the *Volonté Générale*, the "consensus" arrived at from the play of *Volonté De Tous* or the will of all. "But take away from these same wills," he writes, "the pluses and minuses that cancel one another, and the general will remains as the sum of the differences." [*Social Contract*, quoted in Robert Ulich, *History of Educational Thought* (New York: The American Book Co., 1950), p. 215-216].

[9] John Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1935), p. 71.

[10] Fred N. Kerlinger, "The Authoritarianism of Group Dynamics," *Progressive Education* (April 1954).

view philosophy of education as being merely another curricular candidate with a unit value proportionate to the *number* of other curricular candidates.[11] As a matter of fact, we learn of individuals, some of whom have gained philosophic status (and the ability to quote a Dewey, Bode or Kilpatrick), who "group process" and "integrate" philosophy right out of the curriculum. It is positively alarming to note the consequences; for the absence of philosophy in the elementary and secondary schools provides the conditions for its disappearance from the colleges and thus from the intellectual equipment all individuals need for dealing with the most pressing problems characterizing this century—the value alternatives competing to make ours an age of conflict.

The foregoing seeks to demonstrate the nature and status of that inquiry we label "philosophy of education." It urges that philosophy of education is a discipline to which educators must turn if they are to affirm inquiry rather than dogmatism and indoctrination. It suggests that one way of putting philosophy to work is to turn to the philosophers of education themselves and direct *their* attention to the value criteria and theoretical methods at work in formulations of curriculum, teacher certification, learning, the relevance of the arts and aesthetic analysis, the problem of liberal-vocational, professional-general, the relation of religion, law, labor and politics to the work of the schools, the relation of the work of the schools to other cultural institutions, and, most importantly, the traits, characteristics and theoretical content *distinguishing* the teaching profession from such other professions as law and medicine.

True, educators should not be surprised to find some of their philosophers uneasy and, perhaps, piqued at the thought of "cluttering up" their thinking with these kinds of problems. But, by so confronting philosophers of education, educators will move significantly at once toward getting philosophers of education to earn their bread and butter *in* education and toward recognizing which side of the educational bread the butter is on. Moreover, they will continue the important work of building responsibly the *intellectual content* and, in consequence, the *scholarly literature* distinctive to the educational profession. There is no barrier better than this that educators can throw up around the march of anti-intellectualism and the retreat from reason abroad in the land and, unfortunately, in our profession—poignantly noted when philosophizing in education is dismissed.

[11] This judgment is, of course, a value judgment, and it points up the fact that the *choice* to include or exclude philosophy is itself a philosophic problem—a curious case in which philosophy as inquiry is evaluating philosophy as a candidate for curricular structures.

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