

## PHILOSOPHY FOR EDUCATION

Knowledge does not advance in the same way we construct a building. The advancement of knowledge is not simply a process of accumulation; it is not merely the accretion of facts, ideas, and skills. Knowledge advances only as theories more nearly approximate the truth. And the matter of distinguishing truth from falsity is the province of philosophy. So, if teachers agree that they are in the business of advancing knowledge, then they must become more like philosophers. And to help their students to advance knowledge, they must teach them philosophy. If educators set out to advance knowledge, and not simply perpetuate it, then the question of how people learn becomes less important than the validity of what they learn. Logic supersedes "learning theory" in the attempt to secure effective education.

Here we must take care not to extort promises from philosophers that they cannot fulfill. Logic does not tell us what is true, nor can philosophers give us a single criterion for truth. Of course, many have tried to do just this. More than one has put forth intuition . . . or sense experience . . . or a disciplined reason . . . or the scientific method . . . or some other criterion as the authority for truth. But none of these solutions has held up. So, we cannot make impossible demands on philosophers or philosophy. Indeed, as everybody knows, what we usually get from them is criticism—arguments and refutations. Yet it seems, this is precisely what we need. Philosophers cannot tell us whether our theories and ideas are true, but they can uncover contradictions, thus revealing that some are not true. (If two statements are contradictory, then one, or the other, or both are false.) is the quintessential critical enterprise—it helps us uncover inadequacies. This, in turn, forces us to create or discover new theories to avoid the contradictions. So, through the practice of philosophical criticism, we advance knowledge.

Applying this insight to the educational process would largely transform the role of the teacher. Instead of being promoters of learning, teachers would become critics of the knowledge students already "possess." Like Socrates, they would elicit their students' ideas and theories about problems and issues, and subject them to critical scrutiny. Through dialogue, teachers could help students recognize the inadequacy of their present knowledge, the need to improve it, and possible improvements.

Socrates in addition to criticizing the theories of his pupils also taught them the logic of criticism so that they could themselves criticize—and thereby improve—the traditional wisdom they were heirs to. In the same way, we could teach our students logic so that they could then approach *all* their studies critically—looking to improve the store of human knowledge, instead of simply accepting it.

When the teacher construes education as the advancement of knowledge, the focus is on the present knowledge the student has. The task is to demonstrate to the student any inadequacies in his knowledge and to supply sufficient encouragement so that he will seek better knowledge. Thus, the Socratic teacher is not interested in how or where the student learns; he simply accepts prior learning as a precondition for education—this is where education begins. Logic, not learning theory, directs pedagogical practice.

Thus, teachers can help advance knowledge regardless of the students' heredity and environment, and with little regard for their social and cultural backgrounds. Logic is not subjective, not socially or culturally relative. At a certain level of maturation, as Piaget has demonstrated, youngsters are able to perform logical operations and use them in thinking. The Socratic teacher simply helps them think (logically) about their own theories and ideas, initiating a concern with their improvement or advancement.

Of course, schools have other functions: political, social, and economic. In modern times we have come to construe all three of these as "socialization." That is, we view the school as the agency which initiates the young into politics, economics, and society. Socialization is, of course, as old as man himself. What is new is the notion that schools are the main agents—a notion that has led many to conclude that education is primarily socialization.

It is obvious that political, economic, and psychological socialization are forms of control and manipulation. When education is construed as socialization, it becomes a process of shaping or moulding the young into predetermined modes of behavior; simply, authoritarianism. No doubt people fail (or refuse) to see it this way as long as they find existing political, social, and economic arrangements acceptable. But when—as in recent times—there is increased disenchantment with those arrangements, then people begin to complain about the authoritarianism in the schools' attempts to socialize the young. The rash of romantic criticism during the late sixties and early seventies against the oppressive nature widespread disenchantment with the established social, political, and economic system.

Since that time, the end of the Vietnam war, the recession, and the message of the media have pacified the movement to smash or change the system, and things have settled down in the schools too—back to business as usual.

Yet socialization is still an authoritarian business. And the trouble with authoritarianism is that it stultifies improvement. The deliberate attempt to socialize the young prevents the advancement, the improvement of society. For just as knowledge can advance, so can our social arrangements improve—and in the same way: via criticism.

Quite simply, criticism of our social, political, economic arrangements will be directed toward revealing the suffering or pain these arrangements produce. Improvement will consist in the elimination, or at least reduction, of that pain and suffering.

Criticism requires an open society where decisions made by those in authority—government officials, employers, and teachers can be criticized by those adversely affected by them—citizens, employees, and students. Moreover, in an open society such criticisms are taken seriously, and the existing decisions reconstructed in light of those criticisms that remain unrefuted. In an open society people can protect themselves against those in authority.

Admittedly, this conception construes improvement negatively, as the reduction of pain and suffering, simply because human beings lack knowledge of what a good society is. However, instead of questing vainly for one or another *ideal* society, people could focus on what is—on the existing society. They could approach it critically. They could seek a better society through discovering what is wrong with the existing arrangements. The reconstruction or replacement of old arrangements in the light of such criticism would mean improved conditions. Of course, new arrangements are never perfect, and require a continuing critical approach, and so on *ad infinitum*.

All this merely points out the possibility of improvement, of eliminating or reducing victimization. The desire must come from us. We must care about the quality of our society.

The creation of an open society is, in part, an educational task—one for the schools. The young must be prepared to participate in critical dialogue. One way to do this is to present “what is” to the young—descriptions of the existing social, political, economic arrangements, or what some people say those arrangements are; what problems they were set up to solve; how they operate. Then students can critically appraise them, as well as all proposals for new or altered arrangements. The teacher’s task would be to engage his students in a critical dialogue, criticizing their criticisms, pointing out what is invalid. In this way, the school would become the critical agency of the society, an important force for improvement. Note that this does not envision the school as a panacea. Rather than the “problem solver,” the school will become the “problem raiser” of the society.

Now schools cannot take on this role unless teachers become more sophisticated in philosophy—especially in logic, both formal and informal. Yet the creation of an open, advancing society demands more than skills of logic. It requires citizens who prize rationality, eschew dogmatism, forswear fanaticism, and who possess a developed social consciousness. The study of social philosophy in the high school can, I think, move many toward these goals.

The study of philosophy can develop critical rationality—by which I mean a critical approach toward all that human beings have created: toward all theories, all institutions, and all social, political, and economic arrangements. Critical rationalists hold that man can never create perfect social arrangements, but they insist that man can rationally improve whatever he has created through criticizing it and uncovering its inadequacies. This kind of critical rationality should, I think, inform all work in the social studies in high school.

Next, the study of philosophy can help make would-be reformers less dogmatic by encouraging them to look for improvement through dialogue—through the give and take of argument. Such citizens will be less tempted to pursue change through confrontation and imposition of their solutions on others.

Further, the study of philosophy can reduce the degree of fanaticism among reformers, encouraging them to regard all reforms as trials we can criticize, as experiments we can learn from. The study of philosophy can engender a disinterested, critical concern with all answers—all existing and proposed social policies, practices, and procedures.

Finally, I think that the study of philosophy can help develop a social consciousness—an awareness that we are responsible for the arrangements in our society. We have created them; it is up to us to renew and improve them.

HENRY J. PERKINSON

*New York University*

### **A JUSTIFICATION FOR TEACHING PHILOSOPHY IN THE HIGH SCHOOL**

Various vehicles can be used to carry the teaching of philosophy into the high school. (1) Philosophy could be offered as a full or half course, either for credit or general interest, and at various grade levels; (2) philosophy could be included in the actual content of courses already being taught in secondary schools (e.g., section in a mathematics course, a philosophy of history section in a history course, an aesthetics section in an art course etc.); (3) philosophy could be applied to clarifying value issues integral to the discipline. There are numerous instances of such value issues occurring in high school subjects. Some examples are: the defensibility of Trudeau's declaration of the War Measures Act; the soundness of Euclid's proof of the Pythagorean theorem; the relevance of an experiment involving the observations of scintillations on a luminous surface to a theory about the existence and nature of electrons. I wish to argue that the inclusion of philosophy in a high school curriculum as indicated in item (3) above is not only desirable but inseparable from