THE EVOLUTION
OF
EDUCATIONAL THEORY

BY
JOHN ADAMS, M.A., B.Sc., LL.D.
PROFESSOR OF EDUCATION IN THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

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THE SCHOOLS OF PHILOSOPHY

A HISTORY OF THE EVOLUTION OF PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT

BY VARIOUS WRITERS

EDITED BY SIR HENRY JONES

PROFESSOR OF MORAL PHILOSOPHY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

THE first and the most natural consequence of a historical survey of philosophic thought is to induce despair of philosophy. It presents us with the spectacle of the human mind endeavouring to understand the central facts of experience, and failing, in every age and every country, to give an indisputable or final explanation of any one of them. The only reward of historical research in this department seems to be a collection of inconclusive and mutually inconsistent opinions, inflated into theories of a reality which exceeds man's utmost powers to comprehend.

But if we turn from the philosophy of life to that life itself a pause is given to our despair; for the actual experience which philosophy seeks to explain presents the same features of incompleteness and postponed achievement. Nowhere is there finality: not in the world of economics wherein man seeks to satisfy his physical needs, and much less in the sphere of morality, or politics and statecraft, or in religion wherein he

seeks to fulfil his spiritual wants. But it is recognized that in these fields of practical activity the fixity of final achievement were of all things the least desirable, and that movement onwards, through the exhaustion of error and the expansion of the ideals of the good and the true, is man's best destiny.

It is evident that in so far as Philosophy gives a true presentation of the central facts of experience, it must partake of this movement, and its History will be the articulate expression and record of the successive phases of the growing experience of mankind. It will offer no solutions which are not hypotheses, no conclusions which are not premisses, no goals which are not points of new departure. But, on that very account, it will give the sense of movement which its theme demands ; and of the most secure of all movements, namely, that which deepens the significance and widens the application of its main hypotheses, through the exhaustion of error and the antagonism of the critic and sceptic.

The literature of philosophy in this country is rich in many respects ; but it contains no History of Philosophy which is based on this conception or which presents with even approximate adequacy the evolution of the central conceptions of human experience. We have nothing which we can compare for a moment with such works as those of Hegel or Erdmann. Teachers of philosophy have to refer the students of its history to translations ; and translations, however satisfactory otherwise, are always to some degree alien and repellent.

It is the aim of the present series to remove this defect and to give to English readers of philosophy a history of the movement of philosophical thought whose appeal is

more intimate than any which can be transmitted through a foreign medium.

It is intended that the series shall comprise :

(*a*) The History of Greek Philosophy as one continuous development.

(*b*) The History of Modern Philosophy in parallel movements from Descartes to Kant, and from Hobbes to Reid ; and from Kant through his Idealist successors on the one side, and through his Naturalist successors on the other.

(*c*) The Application of Philosophy

(1) in Educational Theory,

(2) in Political Theory.

The Evolution of Educational Theory, by Professor John Adams is now ready. *The History of Greek Philosophy from Thales to Aristotle*, by Professor Burnet, and of *Modern Philosophy from Hobbes to Reid*, by Professor Stout, will be published shortly. To follow are the history of philosophy *From Descartes to Kant*, by Professor Latta ; *Hegel and his Idealist Successors*, by the Editor, and *Political Philosophy*, by Dr. R. A. Duff.

It is hoped that the series will be completed by the addition of other works, including the later history of Greek Philosophy, the history of Mediaeval Philosophy and the history of the evolution of Naturalism in Kant and his successors.

HENRY JONES.

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CHAPTER I

THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF EDUCATIONAL THEORY

To the plain man there is something sophisticated about *theory*, which he contrasts disadvantageously with the simple straightforwardness of practice. He does things and admires others who do things; but he looks askance at the man who insists upon reasoning about how things ought to be done. He regards theory as something abstract and vague, having indeed nothing to do with the genuine business of life, and accordingly does not realise how intimately associated theory and practice actually are. No doubt it is true that as the man of action exaggerates on the one side, so the man of thought is inclined to go to excess on the other, and is not always guiltless of the vagueness and ineffectiveness of which he is accused. When divorced from practical life theory is necessarily one-sided and incomplete. It has to be reached by the careful examination and comparison of facts. The man of theory is not a dreamer: he is the man who understands and evaluates facts, the man of insight, the man who sees life clearly, and sees it whole.

With Plato theory meant the divine vision. The theorist was the man who had reached the summit of the pyramid of knowledge, and from this vantage point could contemplate with full comprehension all particulars and their inter-relations. The movement of the Platonic dialectic is from the beauty of physical things to the beauty of spiritual things, from the mastery of the particular to the comprehension of the universal. The Platonic scheme of ideas

illustrates the development of theory in general, and the ultimate danger to which all theoretic process is exposed. The dialectic by which Plato seeks to attain his theoretic goal is active throughout. In passing from stage to stage of the hierarchy of ideas there is continuous movement, till at length the highest point is reached in the Good, and thereafter the need for movement ceases. Theory is not active: it is the satisfied contemplation of results achieved.

There is no real harm in thus regarding the ultimate goal of theory as passive, since from the nature of things it is impossible for us ever to attain that stage at which we can be content merely to contemplate our results. We never can attain the summit of the pyramid of knowledge, so we are never left without the stimulus to further activity. In our case as in Plato's, there is no lack of effort in our strivings to attain to ever higher standpoints from which wider views may be had. Every new stage we reach enables us to explain much that was hitherto beyond our comprehension, but at the same time each advance brings with it a fresh group of problems. The vision implied in theory is ever widening, but in human experience can never include the whole circle of knowledge. For us, therefore, theory must ever remain active. We are continually encountering new facts and attaining new points of view: we are ceaselessly raising fresh difficulties. Thus we are always kept in touch with the real of life. To be wisely theoretical we must be intelligently practical.

There is indeed a certain difficulty in distinguishing between theoretical and practical philosophy. Practical philosophy has in view a certain end to be attained, but it is not altogether without theory. On the other hand, theoretical philosophy does not concern itself with practice, but rests content with mere speculative or contemplative knowledge.[1] The terms *theoretical* and *practical* must be regarded as correlatives, neither being quite intelligible save in relation to the other. In practical philosophy, theory is subordinated to the direct application of its

[1] Cf. Sir William Hamilton's *Lectures on Metaphysics*, vol. i. p. 174.

principles, whereas in theoretical philosophy it occupies the whole field, and has nothing to do with practice.

It may seem as if education cannot be regarded as purely theoretical, and some teachers are inclined to maintain that, in their practical work, there is no need for a theory of education, and no place for a theory that has nothing to do with practice. But it is quite conceivable that education might be treated as a mere branch of theoretical philosophy, studied for its own sake, and of no direct practical value. In point of fact, some of the modern treatises on education might be quite fitly classed as theoretical in this sense.[1] But though theory may be treated apart from practice, it does not follow that practice can be safely carried on apart from theory.

In the Aristotelian sense, to be sure, education is a practical science as opposed to a theoretical, and is subordinate to the science of politics. The educator must take his orders from the statesman, because the statesman has to use the material that the educator has prepared. Politics is architectonic to education. In modern states it cannot be denied that this is the principle on which education is conducted. In sober truth the educator has to take his orders from the statesman: but this does not in any way justify the assumption that the determination of the educational end does not belong to the theory of education. It only means that the statesman, as representing the science of politics, has usurped a part of the functions of the educator. The statesman who legislates on education is to that extent an educator, and if his legislation is intelligent, it is because he has mastered at least a part of the theory of

[1] In some of our universities the subject of education forms a part of the degree course and is taken by students who have no thought of becoming teachers. They take the subject for its cultural value, its value as mere knowledge. In one of the English universities at the present moment it is being considered whether there should not be established an M.A. in education, the qualifications for which should be purely academic and divorced from all practical considerations. Education, it is claimed, is by itself of equal rank with any other branch of speculative philosophy.

education. Indeed the war may be carried into the enemy's country, for so far as Plato and Aristotle are concerned the main business of the state is to educate the citizens. The state for them was definitely an educational institution. The relation between the educator and the statesman in Aristotle's sense and in our modern sense must be distinguished. They are opposites. For Aristotle and Plato the fact that man is a teacher of virtue and wisdom is what makes him (or controls him as) a statesman.

Like all the other studies that deal with the organic, education has to depend upon a large number of sciences for help, but it is none the less a study by itself with an independent range, and definite aims. It is not a mere practical science in the sense of a mechanical application of principles laid down from without. It has its theory as well as its practice.

It is true that methods may be put into practice without any explicit theory on the subject, while on the other hand one of the commonest complaints against theory is that it is so difficult to reduce it to practice. Indeed, the terms theoretical and practical so far from being treated as correlatives in ordinary speech are frequently employed as antitheses to each other. While we have seen that the practical person is apt to speak disparagingly of theory, the theorist despises the work of the other as mere rule-of-thumb. In the ultimate resort, sound theory must justify itself by successful practice, while successful practice will always be found to be based upon sound theory, though this theory may not be consciously formulated. It is difficult to imagine anything more unintelligent than the attitude of some practical persons towards theory. They appear to believe that their successful practice has somehow got rid of theory, the truth being merely that they have not taken the trouble to bring to clear consciousness the principles on which they have worked. Even when they have taken this trouble they are no further forward, because they fail to see that the result is theory. Since it is so directly related to practice they do not recognise it *as* theory.

To their minds it is a part of practice. But it is theory none the less: for theory after all is only the rational aspect of practice. It is related to practice as science is to material events; and leads to mastery in the same way.

Wherever there is practice there is implicit theory, though by the very nature of the case the theory cannot become explicit till there has been reflection upon the process implied in the practice. It would seem that theory arises naturally out of practice, for though nothing practical can be done without some previous knowledge of the end to be attained, and some notion of the means by which it is to be attained, it is usual at the earliest stages to give most attention to the practical, and to leave to a later period the consideration of the reasons for our actions. We are not to suppose, however, that our progress consists in an uninterrupted advance from practice to theory. The two are continually reacting upon each other. Hence it is that writers give contradictory reports on the priority of practice.

"Educational theory is the what and the why and the how of teaching; and it is always in advance of practice."[1]

"Theory is the last word, not the first. Theory should explain. It should take successful practice and find out what principles condition its efficiency; and if these principles are inconsistent with those heretofore held, it is the theory that should be modified to suit the facts and not the facts to suit the theory."[2]

It is not difficult to reconcile the apparent contradiction. Jones, taking education at its present highly developed stage, finds that there is a great mass of traditional practice that is quite satisfied with itself and that imposes itself upon all educators. The whole prestige of the accomplished fact, all the *vis inertiae* of established custom resist change whether for better or for worse. In such a case

[1] W. Franklin Jones: *Principles of Education*, p. 284. Cf. Plato's: "It is in the nature of things that practice should fall short of the truth of theory." *Republic* 473A: quoted by Edward Caird, *The Evolution of Religion*, vol. ii. p. 370.

[2] W. C. Bagley: *Craftsmanship in Teaching*, p. 80.

all hope of improvement must come either from chance happenings or from the efforts of those who have thought out educational problems, and insist upon their theoretical conclusions having the test of practice. On the other hand, theoretical considerations are based upon experience of some kind or other. What Bagley resents is the theorising that is carried on *in vacuo*. He rightly maintains that theory must be continually corrected by reference to actual practice. But this is not quite the same thing as to maintain that practice must under all circumstances precede theory. There are occasions on which theory must lead. The development of any process such as education, that involves the application of thought to action, may be not inaccurately described as consisting in an alternation between the influence of theory and the influence of practice. Practice corrects theory, and theory improves upon practice. Both are present at all stages of educational development.

Theory is not a mere description of practice, though it is that among other things. It is, to begin with, a critical examination of the experience gained in practice. But then it goes on to evaluate processes and suggest improvements. In its turn it submits its findings to the test of practice, so that there is a continuous series of tests and criticisms and suggestions. But, on the whole, practice supplies more criticism and testing, and theory more initiation and suggesting. Theory really plays around practice: it neither leads nor follows exclusively. It is now busy making suggestions, but by and by it will devote its attention to analysis and investigation of things as they are. True living theory is continually alternating between the forward and the backward glance. Now it turns forwards in anticipation with a view to initiation; again it harks backwards to review facts in order to explain them. It is this ceaseless activity that makes progress possible. From the educational standpoint it may be said that practice stands for the conservative processes, theory for the progressive.

The fact is, that in the ultimate resort there cannot be anything but a purely artificial distinction between practice and theory, willing and thinking. Practice is thinking in every fibre of it. When we theorise we have a different purpose, but it is a practical one, and involves will. Ordinarily we put the fact in a wider content when we theorise, and in a sense seek a remoter end than when we use the fact practically. The question of precedence between theory and practice involves a discussion that can result in very little advantage, as will be evident to those who realise the inherent interdependence of the two. If, while admitting the ceaseless interplay of theory and practice, we insist on determining which of the two is practically prior to the other, it would seem that preference should be given to practice. It is true that when we set about some entirely fresh enterprise—for example, the commercial exploiting of some new scientific discovery—it may be that we have to do all our theorising before the scheme can be launched at all. So too with those schemes that are condemned under the epithet *doctrinaire*. Yet even here the theorising is justifiable only to the extent to which it can be said to be reconcilable with the results of practice, so far as these are known to the theoriser. When we go back as far as we can to the beginnings of processes that involve a combination of action and reflection, we seem to find that action precedes reflection. The baby performs many unprofitable actions before he is able to select those that meet his needs. Throughout organic development the process of advancing by trial and error is sometimes said to be a movement from practice to theory, in a more or less metaphorical sense, for there is no need for real conscious reflection on the result of certain physical activities. Indeed, it is quite commonly said that the ordinary course is to begin by doing, and to reason afterwards. At the earliest stages of human development the order certainly appears to be action, then reflection. Yet a careful analysis of all the facts will show that the only result of an attempt to settle the historical priority of theory and prac-

tice, is a demonstration that from one point of view theory is first, and from another practice. From one point of view the commercial enterprise referred to above implies theorising and making a scheme before the undertaking is launched. From another point of view the theorising implies the comprehension of the previous practice. So from one point of view the baby acts before he thinks, from another point of view his thinking is quite as real and as definite as, and is altogether on a par with, his action—for his action is not that of a machine, but strikes inwards. A machine could not learn from its actions ; the baby does, and this implies a record of experience and a manipulation of that record. The fixing of priority in any particular case is all a matter of the point of view. It is true that, as a rule, mere living involves an advance in theory and practice. When experience grows richer in content, and more ample, it also gets more differentiated, and then the contrast between action and reflection, like all other contrasts in spiritual life, becomes deeper, and the distinction between theory and practice becomes more marked. But at no stage can we give absolute precedence to one or the other, apart from the limitations of point of view.

The beginnings of educational theory are preceded by a stage at which people carry on education without reasoning about it. As soon as the educator realises that he has certain ends in view in the process, there is incipient theory for him, while from the point of view of the historian of education there is theory implicit in the process from the very first. The parent or the primitive statesman wants a particular result from education, and is content to take the readiest means of attaining it. By and by reflection arises and as a consequence we have a crop of theoretical speculations. These are at first vague, but as they gradually clarify themselves they leave room for the development of a general theory that triumphantly justifies the claims of the practical man, explains current practice, corrects errors, and gives guidance for the future.

In discussing the relation between theory and practice, we must remember that though there is a body of professional teachers, it does not follow that this body has a monopoly of educational theory. In point of fact some of the best work in theory has been done by non-professional persons. Diderot here supplies us with a useful classification:

"In every science as well as in every art there are three quite distinct parts: erudition, or the setting forth of its progress, its *history*; the speculative principles with the long chain of consequences that one deduces from them, its *theory*; the application of the science to use, its *practice*. Erudition or the historical part more or less extended belongs to all. The science, or the sum of the knowledges that constitute it, and the practice are reserved for professional people (*gens du métier*)."[1]

In education there has been a strong tendency for the outsider to pass beyond his legitimate sphere of erudition, and dabble in the mysteries of theory. The monopoly of the *gens du métier* has not been respected. For this there are two reasons. First, the study of education has not in the past been carried out in such detail as to lead to the abstruse results that repel the layman from intermeddling with the recognised sciences. Education as an undeveloped study offered an attractive field for the amateur. The second reason is that the professional people themselves were so little given to elaborate theory that there was an open field for the outsider. The *gens du métier* have had a tendency to confine themselves to the practical side.

In actual experience we find a tendency to separate the practical from the theoretical in a distinction that is sometimes drawn, and for practical purposes rightly drawn, between teaching and educating. Education is usually regarded as something deeper and finer than mere teaching, which is limited to the communication of knowledge, or the imparting of skill. In point of fact, however, we observe no great anxiety to emphasise this distinction.

[1] *Plan d'une Université.*

On the contrary, there is an increasing tendency to regard the practical teacher as in some sort an authority on education. This tendency requires explanation, since teaching after all is only a part of education. Sometimes indeed it is recognised that there may be a certain opposition between the two processes; as, for example, when a particular method of teaching is described as uneducational. The meaning here is clearly that the method in question, whatever its result in the mere communication of knowledge, does not produce good results on the nature of the person who is being taught. There is further the implication that education is confined to the development of the pupil in a direction that is satisfactory to the teacher and to those who employ him. In the ultimate resort all the methods of a teacher have an educational effect, just as have all the other elements of the pupil's experience. From the wider point of view, the work of the teacher is lost among the many influences that have their play in the educational process. How subordinate is the teacher's rank under the broad definition of John Stuart Mill, who tells us in his rectorial address to the University of St. Andrews (1867) that Education includes

"Whatever we do for ourselves, and whatever is done for us by others, for the express purpose of bringing us somewhat nearer to the perfection of our nature; it does more: in its largest acceptation it comprehends even the indirect effects produced on character, and on the human faculties by things of which the direct purposes are different; by laws, by forms of government, by the industrial arts, by modes of social life; nay, even by physical facts not dependent on human will, by climate, soil, and local position."

In spite of the elaboration there is nothing here that is inconsistent with the views of the plain man in respect of education. The point of divergence is the apparent suppression of the personal educator. But though some of the educational organa recognised in the definition are explicitly stated to be independent of the human will, it does not follow that they are independent of all will. We

may be thrown back many steps in the educational process before we reach the real educator, but he is there all the same, and must be assumed if the process is to have any meaning at all. So long as we think of education as something different from mere chance happenings, we must postulate a will somewhere behind it. Even when we get to the purely evolutionary thinkers who reduce the development of the world to a process of interaction of impersonal laws, we find the popular view of education respected ; for we cease to use the term when we are dealing with merely cosmic change. We do not speak of educating a watershed to perform its functions. We do not even speak of educating any animal organism from a lower to a higher stage. The physical evolutionists studiously avoid the personal note.

Mill himself recognises that for practical purposes his definition is too wide, for he restricts it in the same address to the following:

"The culture which each generation purposely gives to those who are to be its successors, in order to qualify them for at least keeping up, and if possible for raising, the level of improvement which has been attained."

Here we have the recognition of the need for deliberate intention, the presence, in fact, of the personal element.

To this class of work under modern conditions, there is set apart a professional body of persons who are specifically marked off as teachers, and the fact is thus emphasised that in the popular consciousness education is carried on by means of communicating knowledge. There is a general understanding that schools are places where the young are taught certain things, and *therefore* educated. Exceptional men like Mr. Bernard Shaw may complain that their education was interrupted by their schooling, and they are no doubt right ; but the plain man takes it for granted that knowledge is the essential educational organon, and that school is the place where this organon can be most effectively applied.

When we look into our educational terminology we find a significant lack that illustrates this point. *Teacher* and *educator* are words representing the active agents in teaching and educating respectively. Each, therefore, requires a correlative word to represent the passive side, the person who is acted upon. Yet we find that there is only one correlative available : the word *pupil.* The very fact that this one word has for so long served the double function of representing the person taught and the person educated is a clear indication of the prevalence of the belief that teaching is essentially educative. Since, however, the communication of knowledge is only a part of education, it is highly desirable that we should have a real correlate to each of the words *educate* and *educator.* In actual practice we do not find that the word *teach* is used in an ambiguous way. It always preserves implicitly the need for that double accusative granted by the Latin grammar. We never merely teach a person ; there is always the implication that we teach him something. Even when Gideon taught the elders of Succoth "with thorns of the wilderness and briers" he taught them something. He taught them manners. He could hardly be said to have educated them, though we have here the most favourable example for this possible use.

Many teachers object to the word *educator* as pedantic, and a smaller number object to it as signifying something more than is implied in the duty of a mere teacher. In any case it is clear that *teacher* and *educator* are not interchangeable terms, they are not synonymous. Since they represent different things it follows that we lose in clearness of thinking if we do not bring out the difference in our technical vocabulary. It is necessary to find a suitable correlate to *educator.* In the meantime, the writer who is dealing with education, as distinguished from mere teaching, has to fall back upon some such periphrasis as "the person to be educated," or "the person being educated." At the early stages of educational theory it may have been pardonable to use such cumbrous phrases.