History of Educational Thought

ROBERT ULICH

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

AMERICAN BOOK COMPANY

NEW YORK CINCINNATI CHICAGO BOSTON
ATLANTA DALLAS SAN FRANCISCO

Preface

Indissolubly connected with the many changes of our times is a transformation of our attitude towards learning. During the past century scholars have been too proud of the accumulation of facts. There was in their minds the more or less conscious assumption that progress in knowledge was guaranteed to the degree that they were capable of registering and describing the variety of data to be found in the past and the present. This assumption is true if we consider knowledge to be acquaintance with things and events; but it is not true if we believe that knowledge ought to be a means towards wisdom and personal maturity.

But are we really justified in blaming particularly the last two or three generations for cherishing the ideal of material completeness? Probably not; for in all centuries the majority of scholars have been too easily satisfied with mere fact-gathering, and only a few have asked, "To what end is all this professional busy-ness?" Not that great thinkers have ever objected to thorough research and to a decent respect for exactness; but they have wished a scholar to remember that knowledge, first of all, ought to help man to understand himself, his professional and civic duties, and his relation to the physical and spiritual universe.

No doubt demands like these are raised again with new intensity in our time, which in contrast to happier decades has brought us face to face with the demons of destruction dwelling in the undergrounds of every civilization.

This book has been written with an intense awareness of this situation, for in the field of education, with which it is concerned, there also has arisen the contrast between external magnitude of knowledge and inner certainty. We have developed new methods of research and analysis and most promising techniques of measure-

ment; we know more and more details about the educational systems of the past and of foreign countries; we comfort ourselves with the idea of lengthening the school age—yet we all feel that the effort has not yielded the harvest we expected. Instead of enjoying a wholesomely stimulating diversity of method, opinion, and action within an embracing unity of thought, we are in a growing atmosphere of verbalisms in which ideas of freedom and tolerance, human dignity and justice lose more and more of their concreteness and practical challenge.

It would be unfair to blame the educators alone for this disorder within their domain. If our whole civilization has lost the necessary balance between quality and quantity, how can education remain exempt? For even more strongly than other spheres of thought, education is contingent upon the general state of civilization. On the other hand, we must not forget the responsibility of education for the continuation and improvement of human standards. No civilization can survive which has become forgetful of the persistent concerns of man. Whole nations are waiting for help in the process of physical and spiritual reconstruction of our shattered culture.

One can deal with the ultimate motivations and goals of education *more philosophico*, as I tried to do in my *Fundamentals of Democratic Education*,[1] or one can attempt to clarify them by dint of the developmental approach. The latter method has been tried in this book on the history of educational thought. Rather than concentrate on the history of educational institutions, which often change or perish with the ages, I have attempted to bring to life the ideas which have worked as directing and abiding forces beneath the surface of education and have continued to send elements of vitality into our present civilization. In addition, I have tried to explain the leading ideas in the history of Western education, not in abstract terms and by use of the customary "isms" but in concrete terms of the life, the work, and the thinking of great men. In this way the student may be led to understand how all profound and progressive thought and action emerge from the hopes and conflicts of men which he can reconstruct in his own mind. Unless

[1]Robert Ulich's *Fundamentals of Democratic Education*. American Book Company, New York, 1940.

we help the student of education to transform events of the past and the abstract words he finds in books into living experience, we fail to enrich his life by historical and philosophical instruction.

Naturally a book such as this requires selection. Even within the assumed frame of reference, it was necessary to omit thinkers who deserve our respect as much as do those who are included. But it is perhaps better to expose oneself to some sins of omission than to overwhelm the student with too many and indigestible impressions.

It is regrettable that this book had to be restricted to our Western civilization, for the time is ripe for a history of educational thought which conceives of our Western world as only a part of the total civilization of mankind. Particularly in the thought of Asia could we find sources of profound wisdom. We sometimes forget in our Western conceit that, in spite of all their philosophical richness, Europe and the countries with typical European civilization have failed to produce anything which deserves to be called a world religion. Confucius, Lao-tse, Buddha, Isaiah, Christ—all have sprung from Asiatic soil. And, whether or not we like to admit it, they have done more for the education of mankind than all other great men together.

Inevitably, both the selection of authors and the interpretation of their thought have been influenced by my own philosophical convictions. No historical work of significance has ever been written without some principle of evaluation. But this does not mean that in explaining the work of prominent minds one has always to impose his own opinion upon other people. Such an attitude would be irreverence to both the great authors and the reader. Rather, out of a respectful analysis of the life and thought of the prophetic leaders in education, there may evolve for the student a body of fundamental and critical ideas which will carry more weight with him than could any judgment suggested from outside. Only at the end of the book have I ventured some concluding remarks which summarize the persistent elements and problems in educational thought. It is hoped that these concluding remarks will help prove the value of historical and philosophical studies for our own planning at a time when a principal re-examination of the theory and practice in education is more necessary than ever.

For a more intimate understanding of the ideas described in this book I have in preparation, as an addition to my own essays, a volume of extended readings fitted to lead the student towards a knowledge of the original documents of the history of educational thought. There is something about the mental climate of a great document of thought which no secondary analysis can replace. In addition, I hold that no profession can flourish which does not measure its standards in the light of the ideas and ideals of its great geniuses, and that no field of knowledge can persist, or avoid the reproach of superficiality, in which people talk about great men and their books without reading them. Often our most conscientious teachers fall the prey to new fads clothed in a presumptuous technical jargon because they lack in knowledge of their tradition. Thus they have no criteria available which could help them to distinguish original and profound thought from merely transient ideas and experiments. Unfortunately, the immediate publication of these readings, which would form a second and larger volume than this one, meets now with considerable difficulty. But they are waiting to appear in times more propitious to contemplative studies than ours.

ROBERT ULICH

Acknowledgments

In the completion of this book I was greatly encouraged by generous subsidies I received from the William F. Milton Fund (Harvard University) and from the Bureau of International Research (Harvard University and Radcliffe College).

I also wish to express my gratitude to the many friends who gave me their counsel or contributed to the shaping of the manuscript. To mention them all by name would make too long a list, but I cannot fail to acknowledge specifically the valuable help received from Dr. Hedwig Schleiffer. I also wish to express my gratitude for the many suggestions given by Mrs. Mary Ewen Palmer.

My thanks are due also to the many publishers who granted me permission to use copyrighted material from their publications.

Contents

Plato

(*ca.* 428 B.C.–*ca.* 348 B.C.)

Philosophical Introduction

Any attempt at molding the thought of Plato and of the main figure of his dialogues, Socrates, into a rigid system is bound to distort the true spirit of these men. The famous "Socratic irony" represents an extremely complex and subtle attitude; it smiles not only at the adversary but also at its own wisdom; it is playful in face not only of the trifling but also of the serious; and it produces contradictions not only for the sake of arguing but for the deeper cause of showing that life itself is full of contrasts. Yet neither Socrates nor Plato was a skeptic; they opposed the sophists and were willing to die for the eternal truth they believed to exist behind and within the areas of life.

What we can learn from contact with such men as these is not this or that bit of knowledge, but profoundness. That observation is true even when the answers they offer to their questions are historically conditioned and inapplicable in our time.

Most of us, before really understanding any of Plato's dialogues, have heard vaguely of his "idealism," as being in contrast to modern empirical and realistic thought.

How did Plato arrive at his idealistic conception of the world? His wondering mind asks the question: how is it possible that the thousands of fugitive phenomena we perceive around us are not merely atomistic sensations, but parts of a "world" with meaning and order? And how does it come about that, when we speak, our neighbor hears not only sounds coming from our mouths but "words" which he "understands" as having reference and significance? Plato's answer is that fundamental ordering and unifying forces must exist in the universe. And these forces, in a way which is beyond explanation, must be reflected in our minds; they render us capable of realizing meanings and interrelations within the mass

of our impressions and of feeling a transcendent harmony between our own lives and the psychic forces of the universe. Without these pervasive energies we could not have the inspiring consciousness of freedom and creative spontaneity; we would not be "men thinking," but either mechanical automatons or bewildered animals.

This "unity of ideas," or *logos*,[1] cannot be described with the same concreteness as "this table" or "that tree" before our eyes. Yet for Plato it is endowed with a higher degree of existence or reality than the things we can see and grasp. It is true and real in the sense in which a law in nature, a rule in a game, or logic in correct thought is true and real.

Does this belief in a *logos* within or behind the world of things deviate so fundamentally from the philosophy of the modern critical scientist, who often is inclined to see in Plato the very opposite of his own empirical attitude? The modern scientist also believes that his thinking refers to some kind of truth or reality which persists even after he has finished his specific experiment and which represents something "logical," or a *logos*, in spite of the constant change in the visible world. Otherwise the scientist's research would not correspond to its object nature, nor would the discovery made by one scientist be understood by the other scientists, regardless of whether they live in other countries or other periods of history, or speak another language.

The immanent order of the universe, or the *logos*—whatever one wants to call it—appears to us not only in so far as we reason, but also in so far as we feel in ourselves the urge toward the good and the beautiful. So we read in the dialogue *Charmides:*

> Knowledge alone does not make us do well and be happy, not even if it be knowledge of all the other knowledges together, but only if it is of this single one concerning good and evil.[2]

[1]The use of the term *logos*, in the sense of the ultimate unity of ideas, is not typical of Plato. But we may use it here, as well as in the section on Aristotle, in accordance with the later Stoic, Neoplatonic, and Christian tradition.

[2]Reprinted by permission of the publishers from *Plato*, with an English translation by H. N. Fowler and an Introduction by W. R. M. Lamb, 6 vols. (Loeb Classical Library); Book VIII, *Charmides, Alcibiades* I and II, p. 83, §174. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1927.

The greatest of all human faculties is the capability of searching not only for what is true and what really "is" but also for what "ought to be." The *Eros* of which Socrates speaks in the *Symposium*, the harmony and the proportions we discover in the growth of plants, in music, and in the movements of the stars, man's feeling of an embracing love for all that resembles divine creativeness, beauty, and perfection—all these powers flow into nature and us through the mysterious channels which connect individual life with the soul of the whole.

From this source we receive the incentive for the improvement not only of ourselves but also of our society. And in this purpose Plato was so intensely interested that we may call it the core of his philosophy. For what other purposes did he write his great "utopias," *The Republic*[1] and *The Laws*,[2] but to set up goals for concerted moral and social action? The noble sublimity in Plato's philosophy makes us almost forget that he had a life full of conflicts and disappointments in a period when Greece was shattered to pieces and in utter need of moral and educational regeneration. The Athenian *polis* had been defeated by the Spartans. Common faith and customs had crumbled; teachers and philosophers were necessary in order to give the people, through reasoning, what earlier generations had achieved through tradition, voluntary loyalty, and communal responsibility. Plato himself would have considered his work a failure if it had contributed only to philosophy and not also to the education of men.

The Fundamental Concepts in Plato's Philosophy of Education

One who wishes to understand the deepest of what Plato has to say about education should immerse himself in the poetic symbolism of the *Symposium*. He ought to pay special attention to

[1]Plato: *The Republic*, with an English translation by Paul Shorey. 2 vols. (Loeb Classical Library). Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1930–1935.
[2]Plato: *The Laws*, translated by R. G. Bury. 2 vols. (Loeb Classical Library). Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1926.

the narrative of Socrates about his conversation with the noble woman Diotima of Mantinea, who told him that *Eros*, or Love, the son of Plenty and Poverty, creates in man the instinct of immortality and the desire for the good and the beautiful. *Eros* inspires man also with the vision of the everlasting harmony of the universe of which we are a part.

But instead of commenting on the *Symposium*, which is too great a work of art to tolerate logical analysis, let us concentrate on *The Republic* and *The Laws*, using at the same time pertinent ideas of other Platonic dialogues.

No form of human existence seems to Plato so well worth aiming at as the harmony of the *anér kalós k'agathós*, the man beautiful and virtuous. Plato starts by emphasizing the necessity of sound interaction between body and mind as the basis of all education. But according to his theory of the *logos*, he extends the idea of harmony beyond merely individual accomplishment into the realm of a cosmic metaphysics. Only a person trained to incorporate into his own existence the beauty and harmony of the divine universe will be able to obey the call of *Eros*, to harmonize his instincts and volitions under the guidance of universal principles, and to subject his conduct spontaneously to the four cardinal virtues of wisdom, temperance, courage, and justice. Only such a person will be the perfect citizen, because he has learned "how both to rule and to be ruled righteously."[1] Men imbued with this psychophysical harmony will do their duty in a joyful mood and help to build up a sound community.

If—after laying this general foundation—we try to find the most important pillars in the Platonic philosophy of education, we discover that it rests mainly on the four moral concepts of *worth*, *wisdom*, *service*, and *political leadership*.[2]

[1] *The Laws*, Book I, § 643 E; Vol. I, p. 65.

[2] There are throughout the dialogues of Plato several, not always identical, definitions of social and individual ethics which could also be used as basic concepts for his educational philosophy. One of the most famous is to be found in *The Republic*, Book IV, § 428 E f. There it is said that a perfect individual as well as a perfect State will contain the four qualities of wisdom, courage, temperance (or, better,

The Greek term for worth, or virtue, is *areté*. It demands not only moral convictions, good intentions, and a moral conscience but also the ability of adequate practical action. Therefore *areté* presupposes *techné*, the term from which such modern words as "technics," "technical," and so on have been derived. Consequently, the Greeks can speak not only of the *areté* of a human person but also of the *areté* of a tool. A weapon, a plow, and a house have *areté* if they are fitted to serve the purpose for which they have been created. They must have a proper structure, their effect must not be impeded by unnecessary trifles, and they must show the highest degree of adequateness to their total purpose.[1]

Under normal circumstances, a person endowed with *areté* may hope to become happy and to achieve wealth and honor. And as the Greeks conceived of the good and the beautiful as effluences of the same divine energy, *areté* and beauty also are akin. Beauty is not mere decoration and ornament; it expresses harmony and adequateness. Our modern architects, who strive to mold into one unity structure, proportions, appearance, and purpose, have come very close to the Platonic concept of *areté*.

Applied to man, the Greek ideal of virtue would be not only a moral character, as such, but the "man beautiful and virtuous" and efficient, one of the most embracing ideals of humanity.

Now we understand why Plato considers knowledge, or wisdom, the second of the four pillars in his edifice of educational thought and believes in the connection of morality and knowledge much

self-discipline), and justice (which in the sense used by Plato has much to do with social equity and stability). This classification—though subject to logical criticism, as is any list of virtues (for overlapping can hardly be avoided)—became of great importance in the history of philosophy because the Catholic Church adopted it very early for its own use. It regarded the four Platonic virtues as *natural*, in distinction to the *Christian* virtues of faith, hope, and charity. The *natural* and *Christian* virtues combined formed the *Seven Cardinal Virtues*. (Cf. H. Sidgwick, *Outlines of the History of Ethics for English Readers*, pp. 44 and 133 f. The Macmillan Company, New York, 1925.)

[1]See Julius Stenzel, *Platon der Erzieher*, pp. 105, 174, 237. Leipzig, 1928. See also Werner W. Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, translated from the German manuscript by Gilbert Highet, *passim*. 2 vols. Oxford University Press, New York, 1939–1943.

more than we are inclined to do. For him human perfection is impossible without man's knowing how to transform his intention into reality. Consequently, growing insight into the nature of life ought to serve as a motivating power in the education of man.

But there is a still deeper reason for the unity of the good and the intelligible. Virtue and reason, the good and the true, are, according to Plato, different but essentially identical expressions of the cosmic order. Man alone is given the blessing of perfecting himself through increasing insight into the essence of the world. In realizing himself and striving for a good life, he goes beyond the narrowness of his ego and submits voluntarily to the laws of Being. This is man's, and only man's, freedom and dignity. And *paideia*, the Greek word for "planful education," is the attempt of the older generation to instill into the younger the capacity for fulfilling the eternal mission of man. Or, one could also say, education is the reflection of the *logos* in the life and change of human generations.

> Education is the process of drawing and guiding children towards that principle which is pronounced right by the law and confirmed as truly right by the experience of the oldest and the most just.[1]

But man lives not only as an individual. A Christian ascetic of the Middle Ages could imagine fulfilling divine purpose by withdrawing from the society of men into the desert, but how could a Greek achieve *areté* and become an *anér kalós k'agathós* without working with his fellow men?

Here the third and fourth of the fundamental concepts of the Platonic philosophy of education enter in—namely, the concepts of political service and political leadership; in Greek terms, the problems of the *polis* and of the *aristoi*.

Politics played an intensive role in the lives of both Socrates and Plato. With regard to Socrates this is not surprising to those who

[1]Reprinted by permission of the publishers from *The Laws*, translated by R. G. Bury (Loeb Classical Library), Book II, §659 D. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1926. This edition is referred to hereafter as: *The Laws*.

know of his bravery as a soldier in battle, his interest in the public life of his city, and his death as a political martyr. With regard to Plato, the opinion has frequently been advanced that he preferred the aristocratic leisure of the philosopher to political responsibilities. But this is true only in a very restricted sense. As we know from his *Seventh Epistle*,[1] he did not voluntarily choose this aloofness from the political arena; according to his own testimony, his early ambitions were political. But there was no place for a man of his conscience. He could but disapprove of the political machinations of the aristocrats, among whom he had his relatives; and he was forced to react similarly when the democrats came to power. The aristocrats tried to draw his friend Socrates into a wicked plot; the democrats sentenced him to death with the charge of impiety. Thus Plato became a political refugee in his own country, like many honest and socially minded people in our times who are bound to choose between resignation or the sacrifice of their conscience. We learn from other parts of Plato's *Seventh Epistle* that he threw himself into serious moral conflict and physical danger when, as a man of about sixty years of age, he accepted two invitations extended to him by the family of the rulers of the Sicilian kingdom of Syracuse to give them political advice on the reconstruction of their turbulent empire.

A man of such genuine, though impeded, political interest could not fail to see that a full realization of virtue would never be possible without the citizens' devotion to the welfare of their commonwealth. For man's best intentions and knowledge are condemned to remain abstract unless he is given the chance for honest political service. But he will not be given such freedom unless he helps to conquer it from day to day.

Thus we understand why Plato devoted his two largest and perhaps most influential works, *The Republic* and *The Laws*, to the problems of the State. He wished to picture a State which would be the political image of the *logos*, one in which, conse-

[1] *The Platonic Epistles*, translated with Introduction and Notes by J. Harward, p. 115 f. Cambridge University Press, London, 1932.

quently, statesmanship and education would be twins, for both aim at the realization of a higher order in life. Such an attempt led him by necessity to choose the literary species of a *utopia;* for a plain painting of the reality of political institutions, as they exist here on earth, can never be an image of perfection.[1]

The most productive way of dealing with Plato's political works is to ask to what extent we can learn from comparing his problems with ours. In so doing we will find that the difference of more than two thousand years has not modified the character of the social problems of mankind fundamentally, though, with the change of the environment, they may need different solutions.

We must remember that Plato neither lived in, nor thought of, a democratic society in our modern sense. Even today democracy is an ideal, and nowhere complete reality. Athens was certainly still farther from the ideal than our modern democratic republics. The full citizens were a minority in comparison to the less privileged aliens and the unprivileged slaves. According to recent estimates, there lived in the Athenian state during its best period, *circa* 431 B.C., not more than 45,000 Athenian citizens. The slaves outnumbered them four or five times.[2] Plato's unawareness of the injustice inherent in this situation would be unbelievable if we did not know that nothing is so difficult for a human being as to raise into critical consciousness the very foundation on which his own society and its traditions rest. Even the most astute-minded does not know how much he takes for granted.

Among the citizens of Athens there was no real equality. The period of Plato was one of class struggles between the old aristocracy and the common citizens. The aristocrats, when in power, exploited their fellow men, whereas the democrats, when their turn came, used their influence to have the public offices distributed

[1]We omit here *The Statesman* because for our specific purpose this Platonic work would not add much new material.

[2]Gaetano Mosca, *The Ruling Class*, translated by Hannah D. Kahn, edited and revised with an Introduction by Arthur Livingston, p. 358. McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, 1939. It must be said that all such numerical estimates are based on insufficient evidence and are highly controversial.

without any account being taken of quality and aptitude. Thus Plato could not fail to see that in spite of all differences both parties were similar in their disrespect for the welfare of the commonwealth, each group putting its own interests above those of the whole.

Therefore the fourth fundamental concept in Plato's political philosophy, the concept of statesmanship, became for him of paramount importance. As is natural with a man disillusioned by rigid party systems, Plato's views cut across typical political alignments. He believes in the statesmanship of "the many" as little as in the generosity of the wealthy.

His conservatism is reflected by his proposal to keep separated the three social castes—namely, the tutors or guardians, the warriors, and the business and working class—the principle being "that one man can not practice many arts with success." Translated into modern terms, Plato's three social castes would denote the statesmen with the office of directing the policy of the commonwealth, the armed force (army and police), which has to give effect to the decisions of the statesmen, and the general civilian population, which has to provide for material needs. Yet Plato's conservatism is not built exclusively on the principle of heredity. The guardians or warriors should not hesitate to accept the unusually talented son of a tradesman into their ranks. But as Plato believes that children of well-bred families have by far a greater chance for leadership than others, his society would nevertheless be one of extreme stability.

The radical element displays itself in Plato's recommendation of economic communism and abolition of family life among the ruling classes of the State. Only those can be good guardians who are not tied to the interests of property nor led astray from their duties toward the commonweal by their love for wives and children. Centuries later, ideas not unsimilar to those of Plato again emerged in history. The Catholic Church imposed celibacy on its clergy, and the Bolshevik revolution tried to abolish individual property.