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Introduction to
PHILOSOPHY
of
EDUCATION



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DEDICATED TO
THE MEMORY OF MY FATHER
EDWIN MALANEY VAN PETTEN

PREFACE

THIS textbook was written to assist the undergraduate student who is preparing to teach in formulating a philosophy of education. Teaching is a profession the importance and dignity of which cannot be overestimated. This was never truer than in the troubled modern world. Teachers cannot assume the entire responsibility for making the decision as to how the social changes necessary for a better world will be brought about. Such changes may come only through man's suffering and bitter experience. Or they may come as the result of man's growth in intelligence, good will, and ability to use his imagination in foreseeing the consequences of his behavior. It is, therefore, certain that the better teachers do their work, the more speedily and effectively will men work co-operatively and intelligently to promote human welfare. If teachers do not see how their work is related to the problem of social progress, man's suffering is sure to be greater than it need be and his advance slower than it could be. To help teachers see this major responsibility and understand the implications of such a concept is the purpose of the author.

Philosophers have always been concerned not only with attempts to understand the world as it is, but also with discovering how life should be lived, what man should strive for, and how he can improve his social organization. Philosophers have also understood the importance of education in promoting this better world. If teachers are to be successful in furthering human welfare, they need to study philosophy in order to apply it to the study of educational problems. Education cannot be understood apart from life itself, for the ends and objectives of living determine educational aims. The connection between philosophy, philosophy of education, and the work of a teacher has not always been recognized. One of the most hopeful signs, however, in the field of education today, is the growing conviction that every teacher needs a carefully formulated and intelligently criticized philosophy of education and that this philosophy of

education must be rooted in philosophy itself.¹ In a recent book written by Brand Blanshard and his associates after an investigation into the relation of philosophy to the educational and social scene, there is a severe criticism of philosophy of education as it is taught in many schools. The writer quotes John H. Randall, who condemned "that complacent acceptance of a gospel that marks too many a student of 'the philosophy of education' in these United States." The author continues, "And it may seem obvious that the road to improvement lies . . . in putting more philosophy into philosophy of education."² That, the writer of this text intended to do from the inception of the book.

Philosophy has been applied to the study of every problem introduced. While every philosopher worthy of the name has something of insight and wisdom to contribute to the solution of human problems, the author has cited Plato, Aristotle, and Kant more frequently than others. Kant has been said to combine the idealism of Plato with the hardheadedness and practicality of Aristotle. While a modern student of philosophy would find it impossible to agree with everything that Kant wrote, his fundamental positions in epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics seem sound to the writer. Certainly no one has formulated better the basic principle upon which true democratic thought and practice are founded: the principle of respect for human personality.

Kant was a great synthesizer. He could see the strengths and weaknesses in two opposing views and was able to integrate the truth in each into a unified concept. Such an operation is needed badly today in educational theory. There is a growing uneasiness with and distrust of many practices in modern education. In some communities there has even been a demand that everything known as Progressive education be abolished and the older type of school procedure restored. To do this would often mean a backward step. Modern Progressive education has grown out of the philosophies of Rousseau

1. See report of Committee on Teaching Philosophy, "Philosophy and Philosophy of Education," *Journal of Philosophy*, XXXIX (April 9, 1942), 205-12; also articles by H. A. Larrabee and A. G. A. Balz, *School and Society*, LVI (July 4, 1942), 4-9; and C. D. Champlin, *School and Society*, LVI (September 19, 1942), 231-34.

2. Brand Blanshard and Others, *Philosophy in American Education*, p. 243.

and John Dewey. That which seems objectionable in the philosophy of this movement stems from Rousseau's extreme individualism and from Dewey's pragmatism. There is more in Rousseau than individualism and more in John Dewey than pragmatism. To dismiss all educational theory and practice from these sources would be to "throw out the baby with the bath."³

True, Progressive education unfortunately has advocated some questionable practices. But it has also advocated and put into practice reforms long overdue in the schools. These reforms were suggested before the days of the Progressive Education Association; they are time-tested and were advocated by educational reformers who were defenders neither of extreme individualism nor of modern pragmatism. All teachers should be progressives in the sense that they should work for social progress and for the kind of education which will promote human welfare. Many sound and promising practices will be found in Progressive education. Study, in the light of philosophy, should enable students of education to separate the wheat from the chaff.

A philosophy of education should answer three questions: What is education; what ought education to accomplish; and by what means can this be done? To answer these questions, it is necessary to inquire into the nature of man and also into the problem of how man may live his life to the fullest. Only then can the what, the why, and the how of education be defined. Chapter i of this text is an introduction. Chapters ii and iii deal with the what of education. Chapters iv through xii are concerned with understanding what education should accomplish; they deal with the why of the educative process. Chapters xiii through xvi are concerned with the how of education, i.e., how we can realize the aims implicit in the educative process. It is, of course, impossible to discuss any one of these without reference to the others. For example, as Aristotle pointed out, one cannot understand the what of anything without reference to the why. But attention has at least been centered on attempting to answer each of these questions in turn.

This text has been used in manuscript form for five years in the philosophy of education classes at Illinois State Normal University

3. See chap. xii.

and was revised in the light of the experiences of the teachers of the course.

There is for every chapter, first, an outline of the contents of the chapter. Then comes the exposition. After that there is a summary, followed by questions which the student may use to check his understanding. Each chapter ends with a bibliography for supplementary reading.

There has been no attempt to give an exhaustive bibliography for each chapter. Each bibliography is, rather, a selective one. Most of the references have been tried and tested in use. Materials of all grades of difficulty and of differing points of view have been included.

The Glossary of Philosophical Terms at the end of the book can be used as a dictionary, but students should be encouraged to consult an encyclopedia, particularly the *Britannica*, for more extended discussions of the meanings of the terms.

The author is deeply indebted, for more things than could be enumerated, to Dean Emeritus H. H. Schroeder. Without his help and encouragement this book would not have been written. He not only introduced the author to the study of philosophy, and particularly the Kantian philosophy, but read and criticized this entire manuscript. From those criticisms the author profited greatly. He was also kind enough to furnish translations for some passages in Kant's work for which translations either are not available or are unsatisfactory.

The author also owes a debt of gratitude to Professor William Heard Kilpatrick. He is a great teacher. During a year of stimulating and challenging study with him, Professor Kilpatrick never failed in kindly and friendly interest, even where there was disagreement on basic, philosophic issues.

Professor Newton Edwards of the University of Chicago read the manuscript and offered valuable suggestions and materials.

The author is also indebted to certain of her colleagues who were kind enough to read the manuscript and to give her the benefit of their suggestions. Dr. Gerda Okerlund read and criticized the entire manuscript. Differing from the writer as she does on many philosophical questions, her criticisms were particularly helpful. The book

is better for her comments, and to her the author gratefully acknowledges deep obligations. Dr. Bertha Royce, Dr. John Kinneman, and Dean Chris De Young read portions of the manuscript and criticized what they read most helpfully.

It was a student, Miss Alma Uphoff, who suggested that a list of novels with philosophical implications be included. She had read Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and Somerset Maugham's *Of Human Bondage* during the Christmas vacation of the semester in which she was studying philosophy of education and had found to her delight that the books meant so much more to her than they could have meant before any acquaintance with philosophical terms or concepts.

In the hope that other students may be tempted to repeat her experience, a list of such novels is included. Although the writer, in making the list, has had the assistance of several of her colleagues in the English department, there is no intent to suggest that this is an authoritative and inclusive list of all such books.

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CHAPTER I

PHILOSOPHY, SCIENCE, AND PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

The origins of Western philosophy—The meaning and function of philosophy: (1) Philosophy defined; (2) The question with which philosophy deals—The relation between philosophy and science: (1) Comparison as to (a) history, (b) content, (c) method, (d) purpose; (2) Need for both philosophy and science in solving life's problems—The relation between philosophy and philosophy of education—The relation between philosophy of education and the science of education: (1) The function of philosophy of education; (2) The function of science of education; (3) Their complementary nature—The teacher's imperative need for philosophy of education

THE sixth century before Christ was an amazing one in the history of human thought. About 604 B.C., in China, Lao-tse, the father of Taoism, was born. In 551 B.C., in that same country, Kung-fu-tse, whom we know by his Latinized name, Confucius, first saw the light of day. In 560 B.C., in India, Gautama, who became the Enlightened One, the Buddha, gladdened the heart of his mother, Māyā. Persian tradition says that it was during the sixth century that Zoroaster lived and taught in ancient Iran. And most important for us of the Western world, Thales, the father of Greek philosophy "flourished" in the early years of the century.¹

Said to have been born in 640 B.C., Thales was a citizen of Miletus with the reputation of being the wisest of the Greeks. Legend relates that it was he who said that the hardest task for a man was to know himself; the easiest, to give advice to another. When asked what was most pleasant for man, he is said to have replied "success," and to the question what was the strangest thing he had ever seen, he an-

1. Thales (fl. ca. 585 B.C., the date of the eclipse), in Diogenes Laërtius *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 23.

swered "an aged tyrant." A statement which modern man would hopefully applaud. Again, when people inquired how they could best bear adversity, he said, according to the tale, "By seeing your enemies in a worse plight."²

But Thales' reputation for wisdom does not rest upon his repartee, however discerning a knowledge of human nature it reveals. Rightly or wrongly, he received credit for having begun in our Western world that search for wisdom which we call philosophy, to which the Greeks gave such impetus and for which they are so justly honored.

In China, Lao-tse and Confucius were studying, editing, rearranging, and expounding ancient wisdom. In India, Gautama was rebelling against the Hindu conception of the world and, with Buddhism, setting his disciples upon another path. In Palestine, Jeremiah and Ezekiel were thundering at their people to return to those moral standards, the origin of which probably lies in the hoary civilization of ancient Egypt where Breasted says the conscience of man had its dawn.³ In Iran, Zoroaster taught his people a dualistic philosophy of the good and evil forces which he thought lay at the basis of this world. It was during this age, as stated before, that Greek philosophy was born.

These remarkable currents of thought showed astonishing similarities for a world in which travel was so dangerous and so difficult. That they were somehow connected seems possible. Tradition pointing in that direction has in recent years been confirmed by some oriental scholars.⁴ It may be that the Greeks served as transmitters rather than as originators of what we call early Greek philosophy. Certainly it was in the eastern colonies of Greece that their philosophy began. It was the Ionian speculative thinkers who introduced philosophy into other parts of Greece. Moreover, Greek traditions refer to the influence of Egyptian teachers upon Thales and other early savants. Oriental philosophy may have influenced the development of Greek thought.

Wherever it originated, Greek philosophy has been for us of the greatest significance. It has been Greek thought, combined with Hebrew-Christian doctrines, which has molded the Western mind.

2. *Ibid.* 37-39.

3. James H. Breasted, *The Dawn of Conscience*, chap. xvii.

4. *Ibid.*, Foreword.

It is in these systems that we find the germs of all the philosophies which have followed. It was the Greeks' insatiable curiosity, their passion for the truth, their respect for clear logical thinking, which enabled them to make the remarkable start in both science and philosophy for which they are justly honored. And Thales is remembered because, so far as we know, he was the first of these Greek thinkers.

PHILOSOPHY AND ITS FUNCTION

Philosophy is an attempt to understand all that comes within the range of human experience. It is a "search for a comprehensive view of nature, an attempt at a universal explanation of the nature of things."⁵ It is only in the light of such a search that man can hope to understand himself and to obtain some glimmer of light on his relation to the rest of the universe. The word "philosophy" meant originally "the love of wisdom." And that is not a bad interpretation of its present meaning, if the word "wisdom" is rightly understood and if one is convinced that the only lovers of wisdom are those who continually seek it.

Wisdom is more than knowledge. It presupposes knowledge but goes beyond knowledge to find relationships and to discover implications. There is discernment and depth in wisdom. Speculation is usually an essential part of philosophy, particularly in that branch known as "metaphysics," but it is a rigorously disciplined speculation, not that resulting from armchair dreaming.

There is much misunderstanding on the part of the general public as to the meaning of the word philosophy. It is used commonly to mean anyone's belief or point of view concerning purposes or values. A student in one of the author's classes, in a paper on the curriculum, once discussed the "philosophy of the notebook." Such an expression is pretentious and inexact. It would have been better to have spoken of the value or the purpose of the notebook.

It is also common to speak of anyone's ideas about life's values or purposes as his "philosophy of life." Commenting on this, one writer says:

There is indeed a sort of philosophy untouched by any conscious acquaintance with scientific lore. . . . The only philosophy ultimately worthy

5. Alfred Weber, *History of Philosophy*, p. 1.

of acceptance is that which is built on the foundations laid by the best thought and experience of the race. . . . In short we must pass from the philosophy of common sense, with which we begin, to philosophy as a reasoned discipline. Otherwise, we remain in bondage to largely untutored prejudices.⁶

Actually, philosophy is a rigorous, disciplined, guarded analysis of some of the most difficult problems which man has ever faced, not just anyone's point of view. It requires the best thought of which man is capable. Philosophers are men of great intelligence and remarkable insight who have been able to see the significance of the discrete events in human experience and, to use Plato's term, take a synoptic view of them.⁷ Philosophers have asked and tried to answer such questions as the following:

How does it happen that mankind is here? What is life for? What is right for man to do? What is wrong? How can man live a life that is worth while and satisfying? Is there any intelligent purpose back of the fact of this world and its phenomena? What can man hope for after this life? What sort of world is this in its essence? Is there any one substance out of which everything is composed? Or, are there two or more substances? What is the nature of the substance or substances? What does it mean "to be"? Is man's mind capable of answering these and many other questions? How do we get the knowledge we think we have? How valid is this knowledge or supposed knowledge?

Philosophers differ in their answers to these questions. The beginning student is often confused and troubled because he can find so few answers which he can be certain are true. So eminent a philosopher as John Dewey thinks that it is foolish to attempt to discover the answers to most of these questions and that philosophers should turn their attention to solving social problems.⁸

Another famous modern philosopher has this to say on the study of unanswerable questions:

Philosophy is to be studied not for the sake of any definite answers to its questions, . . . but rather for the sake of the questions themselves;

6. G. W. Cunningham, *Problems of Philosophy*, pp. 31-32.

7. Plato *Republic* 537C.

8. See esp. John Dewey, *Problems of Men*, Introd.

because these questions enlarge our conception of what is possible, enrich our intellectual imagination and diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes the mind against speculation; but above all because through the greatness of the universe which philosophy contemplates, the mind also is rendered great and becomes capable of that union with the universe which constitutes its highest good.⁹

But the student should not jump to the conclusion that there is no knowledge to be derived from philosophy. It is possible to achieve certainty on many important questions, although there are other questions which cannot be answered with any certitude.

PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE

The word "synoptic," used in the previous section, gives us a clue not only to the meaning of philosophy but to an important difference between philosophy and science. The scientist, of course, attempts to understand our environment, but the philosopher views the universe as a whole. Science divides and analyzes. Each science concerns itself with one field of human knowledge: mathematics, astronomy, geology, physics, chemistry, biology, or psychology—to name some of the most important—each has a fairly well-recognized and delimited area. The philosopher learns all that he can from the various sciences and, in the light of all the knowledge he is able to obtain from them, attempts to see the universe as a whole and to understand man's place in it. Wholes have characteristics that their parts do not have, and what these characteristics are is philosophy's deepest concern.¹⁰

There is a sense in which philosophy is the mother of science. In the ancient world all known science was a part of philosophy. Thales was primarily interested in trying to discover some fundamental, underlying substance, the combinations and variations of which make up the infinite variety of individual things in the world. This same problem was the principal one of his immediate successors. Aristotle was a very remarkable scientist, who observed, classified, investigated, and generalized about the phenomena of physics, zoölogy, psychology, politics, and cosmology. He might have been distressed

9. Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, pp. 249–50.

10. Edgar Brightman, *An Introduction to Philosophy*, p. 10.

at some of the very unscientific uses to which the results of his investigations were put all through the medieval age.

Mathematics was the first science to become independent of Mother Philosophy; astronomy followed next. Then, as man learned not only to observe and to generalize from his observations but to devise instruments which would help him in his observations, as well as to experiment under controlled conditions, other sciences developed and became independent. Men found it advisable to specialize, to study more and more deeply into a particular field. Physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, and finally sociology stood each on its own feet. Then philosophers put together and studied as a whole the knowledge discovered by specialists working in these different fields.

Indeed, many modern philosophers as well as the ancients were scientists first. Descartes and Leibnitz would have been remembered for their contributions to mathematics if they had never become interested in philosophy. Kant was an expert in geography and a physicist, antedating Laplace with his nebular hypothesis. Because of the intimate connection between science and philosophy, philosophy is sometimes called the science of sciences.¹¹

But there are other differences between science and philosophy. The scientist is primarily interested in obtaining facts about things as they are. He wants to know what *is*. He does not concern himself as a scientist about what *ought to be*. If he discovers how to split the atom, he does not tell us as a condition for sharing his knowledge whether it should be used to destroy man or to make life easier for him. He may be and often is concerned as a citizen. Men of science have written and spoken much on the subject of man's individual and social welfare. But in doing so they speak as citizens. The modern physical scientist, for example, appalled at the use to which man may put the discovery of the release of atomic energy, is using both the radio and the press to urge wise controls. But scientists make it clear that they speak as citizens and that as scientists it is their business to discover facts, to invent techniques, to devise means. In contrast, it is the business of philosophy, as it is of religion, to help mankind to decide how such discoveries should be used, indeed, to decide upon those ends toward the realization of which all scientific

11. Robert Flint, *Philosophy as Scientia scientiarum*, p. 3.

facts and knowledge of techniques ought to be used as means, for philosophy does concern itself with values and with what ought to be as well as with what is.

Again, the scientist starts with assumptions. So do most of us. It does not occur to the average citizen to question whether there are such things as cause and effect, time, space, or matter. He assumes that the way things seem to him is the way they are. Science, too, starts with such assumptions, although the world which the scientist investigates is not the world as it appears to our senses. For example, the scientist assumes that matter is real. Reasoning from such an assumption, observing and experimenting, he arrives at the atomic theory and later at a theory of electrons. Philosophy, too, has its assumptions, but questions them, accepting nothing without critical examination.

There is also a difference in the method used by these agencies. The most important advances have been made in science since men have learned to use the controlled experiment. It is true that many of the sciences called "social" can use this method only to a limited degree. To control all factors, to have but one variable, is well-nigh impossible wherever human beings are concerned. It is even more difficult, if not impossible, to reach conclusions about the characteristics of wholes, about values, or about ends, by means of experiment. To be sure, conclusions may be and should be tested through the experience of man. Philosophers certainly have to begin with man's experience. That is where all knowledge begins. But philosophers use not only experience but reason in arriving at their conclusions. So, of course, do scientists. Galileo, for example, arrived at his conclusions concerning falling bodies by mathematics rather than by empirical evidence.¹² But he did test his reasoning by experience, if only to demonstrate the truth of his conclusions to his opponents. Since philosophers are concerned with many problems which cannot be immediately verified in experience, reason is depended on to an even greater degree for reaching conclusions. In fact, some philosophical problems are of such a nature that man may never find a solution. The central and most important problem of all, answers to which in the judgment of many philosophers affect answers given to almost

12. E. A. Burt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science*, p. 65.

all other questions, is that concerning the nature of ultimate reality. Is there some one substance which lies at the basis of the infinite variety of objects which we experience? Or is there more than one substance? And what is the nature of this substance or these substances? That, as has been pointed out, was the problem of Thales and his successors. It is one to which there is as yet no answer that can be confirmed by experience. The truth of the matter may never be discovered by man.

Because this is true of many philosophical problems, some thinkers have declared that philosophy cannot arrive at truth. If science has established a truth, it was done through empirical evidence. And that is the only way, say they, that truth can be established. Supposed knowledge is not knowledge unless it has been so verified. Positivism is the name given to this position. While the term "positivism" is applied to any philosophy which confines itself to the knowledge gained and verified through sense-experience, it is most commonly applied to the school of thought founded by the French sociologist, Auguste Comte (1798-1857). Impressed by the success of the physical or positive sciences, Comte proposed to introduce the same scientific methods into the study of society. He thought it would be possible to discover general laws operating in social phenomena if sociologists would examine the actual facts of social existence and forget about causes of social relationships or ideal arrangements for society. In other words, he taught that whatever is given through sense-experience constitutes the only objects of knowledge, as well as being the supreme standard for judging the validity of human knowledge.

This idea has been widely taught and is generally accepted in this scientific age. It helps to account for the high respect in which science and scientists are held. The scientist alone, by the scientific method, can reach truth. Through scientific research he has learned a great deal which has helped us to control our environment. Life has been lengthened and made easier and more comfortable. No longer need disease, famine, or backbreaking labor harry man. Science has shown us the way to control disease, to produce all the food we need, to do much of our work by machine. Our homes are more comfortable and our lives easier than those even of the most fortunate few several generations ago. Science has shown us how to produce more and