

THE FUNDAMENTAL LAW OF EDUCATION

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ONE of the most striking phenomena of the present day in the field of education has been the restoration of educational philosophy. This revival of interest is explainable partially as a concomitant to the restoration of pure philosophy to its rightful place in the hierarchy of the sciences, partially as a salutary reaction against the absurd attempts to place education under the complete dominance of one or other of the natural sciences. Yet, more important than either of these two, indeed the chief factor in the revival, has been the recognition, conscious or unconscious, of the fundamental law of education, which proclaims that educational movements follow the flux and reflux of philosophical movements; that every theory of education is based on a definite conception or philosophy of life and is therefore associated necessarily with a system of philosophy. Obversely, it follows that every philosophic movement produces a parallel educational movement, and every system of philosophy finds its natural fruition in a system of education. At first sight it appears strange that it should be so, for a wide gap seems to separate the summits of philosophy, popularly eschewed as an abstract and sterile discipline, from the very practical, commonplace work of education. Yet, apart from the principles involved, a discussion of which will be attempted in this article, there are certain indications that witness to the truth of the law. We find educators showing a keen interest in philosophy, and philosophers speaking authoritatively in the field of education, while both strive diligently to cultivate that most neglected yet most necessary branch of knowledge, a philosophy of education. It must be evident that when philosophy is thus coupled with education, the former need not be conceived as embracing the entire scope of metaphysical speculation in all its various branches and ramifications, but rather as including only the fundamental principles which form the basis of a definite outlook on reality, on man and on life. Thus the philosophic questions: What is man? Whence is he? What is his destiny? What is an individual? What is a person? What is society? What are the mutual

relations of the two? Has man any obligations to a Superior Being? and a host of others, must have a clear and decisive answer before there can be any thought of education. In this sense, philosophy must be the very head and source of educational theory, and the value of the latter will be exactly in proportion to the truth or untruth of its parent philosophy. Real education can be based only on a complete philosophy of life, true education only on the true philosophy of life. Once stated and explained, this law seems almost a truism, yet it has often been obscured and even yet produces amazement in some quarters.

It is not at all strange that this law should provoke astonishment, for the educational world has been surfeited with ill-advised attempts to erect the edifice of a science of education not on the enduring basis of a sane and sound philosophy but on some specialized department of that unorganized mass of knowledge, too often an amorphous agglomeration of fact and fancy, that goes vaguely by the name of "Science." We have had, for example, the attempt to draw from psychology a series of corollaries that, somehow or other, would coalesce into an adequate, ordered science of education. Knowledge of the child's nature was to be the key to the solution of every educational problem just as knowledge of human nature in general was to unravel all human difficulties. Psychology was to be all in all to the educator; nothing else was necessary. But it could not be. Psychology, necessary in the integration of knowledge as a whole, is also one of the bases of educational theory and practice, yet not the only base nor even the most important. The day has long since passed when psychology could be hailed as the master science, the knowledge *par excellence*, the measure of the mysteries of the world and all above and below it. We have recovered from that aberration, and psychology takes its rightful place as an important and fertile sector of human investigation, still, only a sector.

From psychologism in education it was but a short step to exaggerated experimentalism. Philosophy was useless, metaphysics superstitious and outworn; a sound set of principles could be deduced from the very progress of educating. Traditions, ideals, even a broad conception of life were unnecessary. Experience was the touchstone of truth and from it would proceed everything we needed to know. Here again is evident a narrowness of view that nullifies the value of the kernel of truth. Experience most certainly is necessary but not sufficient, for education is the lifting up to a higher plane, the transmission of a heritage essentially spiritual, and presupposes an ideal

clearly envisioned as the center of a conception of life. It is impossible simply to teach; we must teach something, and what we teach is of far higher moment than the method used. Several other erroneous views might be enumerated, each of which finds its origin in neglect of the fundamental law that education is a function of philosophy and is always closely connected with a system of philosophy. Yet, it will be, I think, more interesting and profitable to show briefly the universal truth of the law by examining a few educational systems that can easily be recognized as proceeding from systems of philosophy.

We may take as our first example the philosophic and educational system that is very aptly termed Naturalism, a name that we take to include all the various forms of a baneful and inhuman philosophy of life, such as Evolutionism, Materialism, Positivism, Mechanism, Empiricism and Realism. Herbert Spencer was the leading exponent of Naturalism, its philosopher and its educator, and in him and his work is personified the fundamental law that educational theory always follows a philosophic system, and that a philosophic system, if it would live and be perpetuated, must issue in an educational theory. For naturalism the physical world or nature is the great reality; its laws are absolute. Natural science, therefore, is the science *par excellence*, in fact the only true knowledge since it alone, we are told, relies exclusively on positive facts, observation and experiment. Man is not the crown of creation, the ruler of the earth, but a product of nature, more perfectly developed perhaps than other animals but in no sense differing radically from them. The spiritual or rather mental side of man is to be explained by evolution from his material side through physical and social heredity. Intelligence is simply a property of the brain and morality is reduced to usefulness, convenience or practicality. In the brief space of this article it is manifestly impossible to do full justice to Naturalism or to examine it completely and in detail, but what has been said is sufficient to indicate its general trend and leading ideas. Under close scrutiny the whole system is so inhuman, so foreign both to man and nature, so divorced from reality that it could not long dominate the minds of sincere seekers after truth. It is already out-dated and outworn, yet its issue and counterpart in the field of education is still with us, though slowly giving way before reforms springing from the acceptance of a saner philosophy of life.

But, with Spencer as our guide, let us see how closely Naturalistic education follows its parent philosophy. Just as in the latter nature is expected to answer all questions and solve all problems, so

in the former nature is the key that opens all doors. Education becomes preparation to meet the great reality, Nature, which is to be considered the guide and director of all education. The educative ideal is to bring man in harmony with nature, to make him first of all a good animal, to provide him with a training in natural science, to imbue him with the philosophy of Naturalism. With Nature taking its course, there will be no need for an extrinsic morality, since there are no more lofty ideals than bodily and mental vigor, economic advancement and the natural well-being of posterity. Moreover, Nature provides the best sanctions, for those who violate her laws suffer natural punishments. The parent or the teacher, therefore, acts not in his own name as a human person, but as the instrument and servant of nature.

It seems hardly necessary to point out the narrowness and insufficiency of Naturalism as an educational theory. We shall not do so, since our sole purpose in mentioning it was to demonstrate how closely it is associated with the philosophy from which it springs. That this law of connection is universal and inherent in every philosophy of life could be shown inductively by an examination of each system that has claimed the attention of men. It will be sufficient, however, if we examine further only the Catholic philosophy of life and its educational theory, before passing on to show why this connection between philosophy and education is constant and necessary.

If there is one characteristic, that more than anything else sets off the Catholic philosophy of life from all others, it is the completeness, the totality of the Catholic viewpoint. No one of the other systems is altogether false or patently absurd, but they all have the same fault of stressing a single truth to the exclusion of others, of preferring a truth to Truth. According to Naturalism, man is an animal, nothing more; for Socialism, he is a part of society, lacking any proper individuality; for Individualism, he is a self-contained unit without reference to society; for Nationalism, he is the servant and creature of the state. The Catholic view on the contrary is founded on a complete and total conception of reality, of man and of life, inasmuch as it embraces within itself not merely nature but the God of nature, not merely the body but the soul, not merely the individual but the community. From the viewpoint of Catholic philosophy, man is not only an animal but also a spirit; he is both an individual and a social being belonging at the same time to a family, a State, a Church, to humanity and to the kingdom of God. This conception supposes plurality, yet at the same time unites all the different elements into

one harmonious whole. The union, moreover, is not accidental or forced but rather vital and organic, with an organicism that springs from the three basic concepts of God, the Primary Reality, the beginning and end of all things; of Christ, the perfect man, the Ideal and Model, Who is the Way, the Truth and the Life; of the Church which in God's plan is the means by which man will finally attain his end.

Now, considering Catholic education, it will become evident how this conception of life has necessarily produced an educational theory parallel in every detail. Unlike those theories that can include in their vision only one particular branch of natural science, Catholic education goes to all the sciences and accepts data from all of them. It is not content to be exclusively psychological or narrowly ethical or predominantly sociological, yet it is each of these and more. Because its educational ideal is the initiation of youth into the complete conception of life, its bases are rooted not in one branch of knowledge nor in one aspect of reality but in the organic integration of all the auxiliary sciences embraced by its comprehensive philosophy. Here in education as in philosophy there is plurality, but again the plurality falls into a harmonious unity, with religious and moral education the vital bonds that link up the various phases or sectors of education. Thus a man may be formed physically, intellectually, professionally, socially and esthetically, but unless each of these formations have a moral and religious foundation, his training will be one-sided and incomplete. Catholic education is not satisfied to make him an athlete, a doctor or a plumber until it has first made him a man, and this presupposes moral and religious training which alone is precisely and exclusively human.

This attempt to show how completely the Catholic theory of education is associated with the Catholic philosophy of life has been necessarily brief and sketchy, yet we hope sufficient to leave no doubt as to the truth of the fundamental law of education. Both Naturalism and Catholicism have borne witness to its truth; it remains to be shown why it could not be otherwise.

If education and philosophy are so closely associated as we claim they are, there must be important bonds or links connecting them; and, in truth, they are bound to each other in the strongest possible way. There are natural bonds between the two that have their roots in the very instincts of survival and conservation. Man, composed of body and soul, tends naturally not only to the preservation of the human race by physical generation, but also to the spiritual propaga-

tion of the species through education. He must preserve not only his body in the bodies of his children, but his spiritual life, and the philosophy of life that he holds as the supreme truth. Education, therefore is, strictly speaking, the spiritual transmission and propagation of a philosophy, bearing the same relation to this philosophy that physical generation bears to the offspring. There is another bond to be found in the identification of ideals. What a man holds as the ideal of life will also be his educational ideal and it is toward this that he will direct those under his guidance. What he conceives as his Absolute, his acme of perfection, will be the goal toward which his children will be inspired. Their education will be conditioned mainly by the ideal that blazes at the center of his conception of life.

There are, moreover, personal and social bonds connecting the two. Education must be considered from two points of view, individual and social, giving each its due importance because the transmission of ideas and principles involves not only two individuals but two generations. Religion, language, science, art, social institutions are indeed the possession of individuals but they are equally the heritage of the community. Their transmission insures the permanency of the individual as well as of society. Lastly there are cultural and religious bonds. Every culture has an ideal which is its soul; the formation of this cultural ideal is education. In religious formation education finds its most perfect expression, namely, in the initiation of youth to the highest concept in the philosophy of life. Our conclusion must be, then, that education and philosophy are most intimately connected, that every system of education is the flowering-forth of a philosophic system, and that there has never been a philosophy that has not, albeit unconsciously, produced its natural result, a theory of education.

From this mutual dependence flow several consequences of extreme importance. We may cite first what has been called the "struggle for the child." Its significance and importance lie in the fact that the struggle to mold youth according to one or other educational theory is in reality a struggle for existence between one or other philosophy of life. The young generation is the single permanent avenue to the future; only in our children and through our children may our spiritual heritage be preserved. Their conception of life, their philosophy depends on education and formation; correlatively, their formation will follow strictly the lines of our philosophy of life. As a further consequence it follows that there can be no such thing as a negative or neutral education, that is, an

education that professes to hold aloof from any particular philosophy in order to be acceptable to all. Every philosophy necessarily recognizes some supreme ideal, some divinity, and if the true God be ignored an idol will be set up in His place. So-called neutral education is either not neutral or not education. A non-religious education is anti-religious; a non-Christian education is anti-Christian; a non-Catholic education is anti-Catholic. That is the reason why the Church insists so strongly on Catholic education, and so untiringly deprecates the education of her children under secular auspices, since the only education that can form in youth the Catholic conception of life is the education that issues directly from the Catholic philosophy of life.

The interdependence of education and philosophy, moreover, imposes a duty of major importance on Catholic teachers and those who have charge of their pedagogic formation, especially in the normal schools. It is manifestly impossible and indeed undesirable to burden prospective teachers with a complete philosophical training that will offer small practical utility and for which the majority are unfitted. This, however, should not impede their philosophic training to the extent, at least, of understanding how intimately philosophy and education are related and of grasping the fundamental concepts of the Catholic philosophy of life. They should be able to criticize modern educational systems and appreciate their flaws, but such criticism can be truly instructive only if studied in connection with their philosophic errors.

Besides the philosophic formation of our educators, it is vitally necessary to inspire our philosophers with the desire to make their academic theories bear fruit in their natural and logical field of application, that is, in educational theory and practice, for the philosopher always precedes the educator and points the way. Knowledge for its own sake is indeed good, and speculation has its own justification apart from practice, yet speculation and particularly that which has a bearing on man and on life finds its perfection and consummation in practice, primarily in personal practice, ultimately in education. It is becoming more and more necessary for thinkers to present their philosophy in a form intelligible to the common run of men; in this connection, education offers an ideal field in which philosophic theories may be presented in attractive form. There is no surer way than this of bridging the unnatural gap that, at present, seems to separate philosophy from life. Too long has education been the playground of physiologists, biologists and pseudo-psychologists, impelled by the insane desire of constituting an exact natural science of edu-

cation on the narrow foundation of their favorite physical science. Their hope was absurd because education is not a natural science but a science of the spirit, a science of values, a moral science, and it accepts its first principles neither from biology nor from experimental psychology, but from the one science that is specifically human, the Christian philosophy of life.

MARY, STAR OF THE SEA

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And like a phantom draped in silver mist,
She rides the snowy crests of blissful waves,
With Neptune's sons to keep a lasting tryst,
And nightly whisper blessings o'er their graves.

The doughty seaman crossing nigh the bar,
With childlike faith does ask this Queen his boon,
Whose hidden splendor charms the brightest star,
And veils the mystic beauty of the moon.

As mighty tides respond to Luna's beck,
So too, the power of Her heart abates
Chaotic waters which our souls would wreck,
And draws us safely through life's rocky straits.