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The LANGUAGE *of* EDUCATION

Tenth Printing

By

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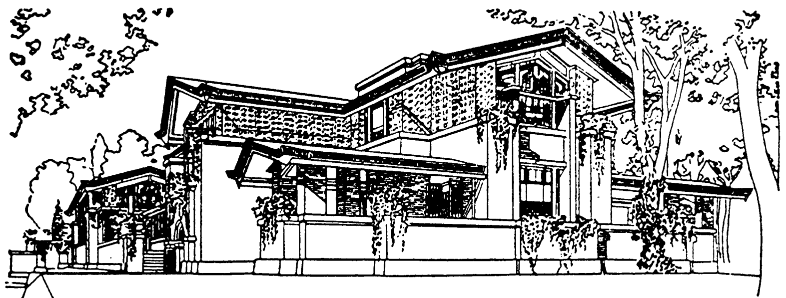

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To Samuel and Laurie
and their teachers

PREFACE

THE PURPOSE of this book is, through an application of philosophical methods, to clarify certain pervasive features of educational thought and argument. In particular, analyses of the logical force of educational definitions, slogans, and metaphors are presented, and a study is made of the central idea of teaching. It is hoped that the reflections to follow may be of interest not only to students of education and of philosophy but also to those who, as citizens or educators, are vitally concerned with the practice of the schools.

Several of the ideas here developed have grown out of my introductory lectures on the philosophy of education over the past few years and may perhaps be found useful in courses dealing with this subject. Many of those already acquainted with my recent anthology, *Philosophy and Education*, may find the present book convenient as an auxiliary, systematic treatment of certain related topics.

I wish to thank the editor and the publisher of *American Lectures in Philosophy* for their advice and cooperation. For numerous critical suggestions on form and content, I am indebted to Professors William K. Frankena, Sidney Morgenbesser, and Harold Weisberg. I am grateful to the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation for the award of a fellowship which enabled me to complete the final version of the study. I want to thank my wife for her encouragement and help in the preparation of the manuscript. Finally, I wish to acknowledge the stimulation I have received from my colleagues in education and in philosophy at Harvard, as well as from my students, who taught me while I taught them.

ISRAEL SCHEFFLER

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INTRODUCTION

THIS BOOK is an effort in the philosophy of education. It deals first with certain recurrent forms of discourse related to schooling, and then offers an extended consideration of the concept of teaching, which is pervasive in such discourse. Through an analysis of selected statements in educational and social contexts, certain strategies are presented for the critical evaluation of statements of the same and related sorts, while study of the concept of teaching involves the treatment of such topics as the nature of educational rules, the relation of scientific research to schooling, the development of moral conduct, and the clarification of curricular discussion. Throughout the book, there is repeated emphasis on relating the critical evaluation of assertions to the contexts in which they appear, and further emphasis on disentangling practical and moral issues from others with which they are often confused. These two emphases, as well as several subsidiary notions employed, will be seen to be relevant to a greater variety of subjects than those specifically treated here.

To refer to this book as a study in the philosophy of education requires, however, some words of clarification. For there is an ambiguity in the notion of philosophical study that may prove misleading here unless explicitly resolved. This notion may, on the one hand, indicate inquiry into philosophical questions or the use of philosophical methods; it may, on the other hand, refer to historical study of what has been concluded by inquirers into philosophical questions or users of philosophical methods. These two sorts of enterprise are quite different in spite of the fact that they often bear the identical label. If we undertake the first sort of enterprise, we need, ourselves, to philosophize—that is, to take a stand on philo-

sophical issues or to apply philosophical tools of inquiry. If we undertake the second sort of enterprise, we do not, in the same sense, need to philosophize, but rather to try to understand the results and the course of past philosophizing.

The present study in educational philosophy is an effort of the first sort. It is an attempt to apply philosophical methods to fundamental educational ideas, rather than an attempt to chart the growth and career of received educational doctrines of a philosophical kind. Choice of the present course does not, however, rest upon a negative evaluation either of historical study or of philosophical doctrines of the past. An important and, indeed, necessary part of all philosophizing is a close study of the writings of past thinkers. It is, rather, the working attitude taken toward such writings that serves to distinguish the present attempt from studies in the history of ideas. The examination of such writings is, for present purposes, a tool rather than a primary aim. Thus, historically important views are here presented only in relation to problems receiving independent treatment, and no attempt will be made to provide a balanced historical narrative. That it is, however, not an undervaluation of history but only a particular working attitude toward historical doctrines that is here involved may perhaps be illustrated by consideration of the following, related question: What is the difference with respect to past scientific doctrines between the historian of science and the practicing scientist? It surely is not true that the one quotes his predecessors whereas the other does not. Nor is the one any less dependent, in general, on previous work in the field than the other. Rather, the historian studies past doctrines with the aim of understanding their genesis, development, and influence whereas the practicing scientist is primarily concerned with their bearing on current problems of independent scientific interest.

The distinction between philosophical inquiry and the history of ideas is here stressed not because it is presumed to be particularly subtle, but rather because it has not been sufficiently acknowledged in many recent presentations of philosophy of education. That the present occasion is, moreover, especially suited for a fresh emphasis on philosophical inquiry into education is indicated by the spurt of new and fruitful developments within philosophy as a whole,

particularly in English-speaking countries.[1] To give an inkling of these developments, it is necessary to present a brief account of the course that philosophy has taken in recent years. Any brief account of such a large topic must be impressionistic and over-simplified, but not therefore unilluminating. Provided the following remarks are understood to represent a mere sketch of a rich and complex phenomenon, they may serve to introduce the reader to the contemporary climate of philosophical work.

Philosophy, in a word, may be said to seek general perspective, on a rational basis. Historically, those called 'philosophers' have concerned themselves with such subjects as the nature of the physical universe, mind, causality, life, virtue, law, good, history, and community. Historically, also, they have tried to argue rationally about such general topics and to defend their views by appeal to evidence and reasons open to all. The philosopher wants to see things in perspective and he wants to see things sharp and clear. He strives for a maximum of vision and a minimum of mystery.

In its quest for generality, philosophy thus bears a certain resemblance to religion, but differs from it in its exclusive appeal to rational argument, whereas religion appeals also to other sources of authority, such as revelation, sacred writings, and tradition. In philosophy's exclusive appeal to rational evidence, it resembles the sciences, but differs from them in being more general, in trying not only to understand the world through science, but also to comprehend science itself as a mode of understanding, as one aspect of a varied human experience.

The scope of each science, at any given time, is restricted in two ways. First, it is not and need not be concerned with relating its findings to the other special sciences nor to disparate realms such as those of the law, of practical life, of the arts, and of common sense. Secondly, it uses but does not itself generally analyze basic notions held in common with other domains, e.g., 'evidence,' 'theory,' 'cause,' 'purpose,' 'object.' The scientist, in short, takes over certain fundamental ideas and applies them in investigations legitimately abstracted both from other investigations and from other sorts of undertaking. These two sorts of restriction in scope are perfectly

1. In this connection, see Passmore, J.: *A Hundred Years of Philosophy*. London, Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1957.

reasonable from the scientist's standpoint; indeed, they are not to be thought of as arbitrary limitations on his work but rather as conventions that render his energies effective through channelling them.

Yet, they leave room for another, characteristically philosophical, sort of enterprise. The philosopher may, that is, seek general perspective precisely in overriding the restrictions of scope proper to the special sciences. Thus, he may strive for generality either by building on accepted findings and common experiences in various domains in order to elaborate a picture of the whole world, or by analyzing the basic ideas and assumptions recurring in a variety of special fields. These two forms of the search for generality are familiar components of the philosophic tradition. They have, however, been unequally affected by the development of science in modern times.

With the increasing specialization of scientific knowledge and the amassing of data, it has become more and more difficult to encompass available information in a single, significant world-picture. Attempted world-pictures have thus increasingly run the practical risk of turning out superficial or badly inaccurate, though not theoretically shown to be incapable of providing significant illumination. Philosophers have thus naturally tended, in increasing numbers, to seek general perspective not by gathering the fruits of knowledge, but by analysis of the roots,—the basic concepts, assumptions, arguments, and inferences characteristic of different domains. Some philosophers have then proceeded to employ such analysis for the projection of an integrated picture, not of the universe, but of the human mind;[2] others have remained content with

2. See, for example, Cassirer, E.: *An Essay on Man.* New Haven, Yale University Press, 1944, and his statement, (p. 68) "Man's outstanding characteristic, his distinguishing mark, is not his metaphysical or physical nature—but his work. It is this work, it is the system of human activities, which defines and determines the circle of 'humanity.' Language, myth, religion, art, science, history are the constituents, the various sectors of this circle. A 'philosophy of man' would therefore be a philosophy which would give us insight into the fundamental structure of each of these human activities, and which at the same time would enable us to understand them as an organic whole." See also, in this connection, Langer, S. K.: *Philosophy in a New Key.* Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1942; Reprinted by Penguin Books, Inc., First Pelican Books Edition, February, 1948.