It is argued that the concept of considering is complex, and the word is ambiguous. The meaning which is of central concern in education is considering as reflection, and this is related to open-mindedness. Various objections which seek to prevent certain topics from being openly considered in schools are examined, and it is shown that none of these tell against considering as reflection. In conclusion, the conceptual relationship between considering and teaching is sketched.

WILLIAM HARE*

Considering

Many who would be opposed to the suggestion that the schools should *teach* moral principles or *advocate* a certain moral code would not hesitate to endorse the view that the schools should *consider* moral principles. "Considering" is the name of an idea, or a set of related ideas, which has come to play a prominent role in statements of educational objectives. It is thought to capture something central to the notion of open-mindedness in education. The following will serve as a typical example of the way in which this concept is appealed to:

> "In their efforts to enable students to develop civic responsibility and judgement, schools should consider directly and openly the problems of contemporary society and should be free and encouraged to consider controversial issues, provided they do not espouse a partisan view or cause."[1]

Here the important distinction is between *considering* an issue and *championing* a cause. But even with this distinction underlined, the view advocated would still not receive universal support. There are sizeable groups of parents and citizens who do not want students in school (some would include the university also) even to *consider* certain topics. Regardless of the approach to be adopted, many prefer that, for example, certain topics which fall under "sex education" be excluded from the curriculum and the classroom altogether.[2]

Any reasoned response to this latter position will necessarily involve an understanding of the concept of consideration, for our view will be influenced by what we take to be necessary *features* of the concept, or by what we believe to be the likely *consequences* of considering something. The search for necessary features amounts to conceptual analysis, and the calculation of empirical consequences presupposes it, hence the need for philosophical clarification at this point. This need is equally felt if we are to determine how considering is related to teaching *and learning;* and this must be done if we are to assess the views of those who, like the authors of the quote above, urge the schools to *consider* issues they have often avoided.

In the following section, I will bring out some of the more important ambiguities in the word "consider." It has several distinct, albeit related, senses in English, and it is important to be aware of these if argument in the educational context is not to be at cross purposes. I do not assume that the disagreement sketched in my opening comments results from conceptual ambiguities, though we are always liable to fall into confusion if we do not keep the various senses of the term separate. The disagreement may be a substantive normative one, reflecting different views about the purposes of schooling. Conceptual analysis will not of itself resolve such an issue, but may help us to understand better what it involves.

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[1] *Royal Commission on Education, Public Services and Provincial-Municipal Relations* (Queen's Printer, Halifax, N.S., 1974), III, p. 132.

[2] See John Eisenberg and Gailand MacQueen, *Don't Teach that!* (Don Mills, Ont.: General Publishing Co. Limited, 1972).

1. SENSES OF "CONSIDERING"

In different contexts, "considering" can have one or more of at least four meanings:

(i) "considering" as reflecting,
(ii) "considering" as being inclined on reflection to . . .
(iii) "considering" as being of the opinion that . . .
(iv) "considering" as the name of a moral attitude.

It will perhaps be helpful to have an example of each of these meanings to work with:

(i) Russell considered the counter-argument
(ii) The Dean considered resigning
(iii) The Detectives considered the case closed
(iv) The son considered his parent's feelings

(1) In the first case above, we are clearly referring to an activity, something that we can continue to do, or return to doing. We are pondering, reflecting, puzzling, musing — in short, thinking. And it is "the thinking which is the travelling and not the being at one's destination", as Ryle puts it.[3] While thinking in this sense can be both serious and idle (day-dreaming, for example[4]), considering tends to be confined to fairly serious reflection. "I haven't really considered it yet" is often used when our thinking has been superficial or very brief.[5] If we suspect that a person has stated a view without sufficient thought, we ask: "Is that your considered opinion?" i.e. is your view the result of genuinely considering the matter? If something happens to cross our minds but is rapidly dismissed, we would deny that we had considered it, or given it consideration, for we had not paid adequate attention to it. It follows from this connection with seriousness that, lacking certain intellectual skills, there will be certain issues which some of us cannot properly consider. Without adequate preparation, I cannot consider certain problems in advanced physics; and this is not because I cannot *solve* them, but because I cannot *understand* them.

It is important, however, not to identify considering with problem-solving. It *includes* this but ranges far beyond it. We can consider works of art, people's remarks and natural phenomena when there are no problems to be solved or questions to be answered. We can reflect by looking at, listening to, remembering or imagining something. The spectator in the art gallery is considering the painting when he attends to it aesthetically, though he is not in search of an answer.

In those cases in which considering *does* involve problem-solving, the activity sense implies that a decision or solution has not yet been arrived at. To solve the problem in these cases is to bring one's considering to a satisfactory termination. It is true, of course, that any answer or solution reached may itself be considered, but such activity is a *reconsideration.* To reconsider is to reflect on one's decision with the possibility of revising it. "Reconsider" is, I think, confined to the problem-solving case, for when we speak of a person returning to consider a painting, we would speak of giving it further consideration. We would only speak of reconsidering it, if the person were, for example, reflecting again on his/her *assessment* of the work.

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[3]Gilbert Ryle, "A Puzzling element in the notion of thinking", in P.F. Strawson, ed., *Studies in Thought and Action* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 8.

[4]Alan R. White, *The Philosophy of Mind* (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 89.

[5]Of course, what will count as "superficial" or "brief" will be relative to the subject-matter at hand.

It is only sometimes the case then that, in this sense of considering, the question of making up one's mind occurs at all. And when it does, the person who is considering the issue has *not* yet made up his mind. If a philosopher is considering a counter-argument to his position, he has not yet decided that the argument is invalid.[6] In the case of reconsidering, a mind that was made up is once more exploring the problem.

Finally, in this section, we should notice a related use in which, for example, a person agrees to consider something in making any judgment. This has the sense of "bearing in mind": "The judge will consider the extenuating circumstances in making his judgment." This is clearly related to reflection, for the person who must decide has to think about the relevance of certain facts. It is often implied that what we bear in mind will influence the judgment to some extent. When something is a "consideration" in this sense, it is something *worth* thinking about because it is regarded as having a bearing on the issue.

(2) The second sense of considering outlined above, differs in that, although a final decision or answer has not been reached and on-going reflection continues, it is implied that the person is inclined in a certain direction. A person who is "considering suicide" in this sense is one who is tentatively and provisionally making certain plans. The difference between the first and second senses exactly parallels two senses of "thinking seriously" for this sometimes means (a) giving careful attention (b) being inclined.

(3) While the person is somewhat persuaded to do something, or is moving in that direction, it is ruled out that a decision has been made. To be considering resigning is not yet to have decided to resign, still less to have tendered one's resignation. But when a person considers something to be the case, we have reached sense three above where a view or opinion or decision has been arrived at. This may be very definite, for example, considering that a poet's work is trivial, or it may be a fairly guarded judgment, for example, considering that the poet may perhaps be over-rated. Even when our view is very definite, however, there remains a difference between considering and claims to knowledge. When something is a plain matter of fact, we do not say that we consider it to be true. Thus, I do not consider that Queen Victoria reigned in the nineteenth century in England; quite simply, I know it. When evidence is very strong, people will consider that something is true, but when the evidence is conclusive they will say that they know it. The transition is often gradual and those with more confidence in the evidence will more quickly advance to the knowledge claim. The status of the claim that there is a connection between cigarette smoking and lung cancer reflects this, for some would assert that it is not just that the medical profession *considers* that there is a link between the two, but that it is *known* that the link exists.

In some areas, however, doubt exists whether knowledge-claims can properly be made or not, even though it is allowed that there is room for rational argument. Ethics and aesthetics are two such areas. It is this doubt which explains why we continue to say that Shakespeare is *considered* to be a great dramatist, or that murder is considered to be immoral, even though no serious voices are raised to dispute these claims. When knowledge-claims are, in principle, possible but the evidence available is inconclusive we also speak of considering. Thus "Thales is *considered* to be the first philosopher in the Western tradition," rather than a claim to know that this is so. The difference here is not that the consideration-claim

[6]We must be careful to state *what* is at issue, for he may decide that the argument is invalid and then consider exactly where it goes wrong — a different issue.

is reviseable and the knowledge-claim is not, for they are *both* reviseable in the light of new evidence or argument. But in the case of the consideration-claim there is some reason to believe that the evidence may not be conclusive, *over and above* the logical point that *all* claims are in principle reviseable.

Normally, it is suggested that what a person considers to be the case is the result of considering in sense one. But sometimes we use it less guardedly as a synonym for "believes" or "thinks," even when the views are nothing more than unexamined convictions. Thus we might say that many Germans in the 1930s came to consider, i.e., *believe,* that Jews were inferior, though they did not arrive at this view as a result of careful and serious reflection. But we would not in these circumstances allow that it was a considered opinion.

(4) The last distinct sense to be discussed here is that in which it has the overtones of an affective response. "The son considered his parents' feelings" speaks of a trait of *character* and of a moral attitude. He is, in this instance, a considerate person, one who respects and has regard for[7] the rights and feelings of other people. This is not unrelated to the first sense discussed above, for we need to think about the claims of others if we are to act in a considerate manner. But there is a difference, because the person who does think about the claims of others may nonetheless ride roughshod over them. This does not mean that the person who considers other people (in the moral sense) must invariably *uphold* the claims they make, for the alleged rights may be unjustifiable claims. When a person rejects an application we make, it is still possible to thank that person sincerely for his kind consideration and to believe that we have been treated fairly.

2. EDUCATIONAL CONCERNS

In assessing the significance of these distinctions and the value of considering in education, it will be convenient to organise my comments around a number of objections or doubts which might be raised by those who urge the exclusion of certain issues.

(1) The grade 6 student who announces that he or she is considering suicide, pre-marital sexual intercourse or drugs is clearly going to be asked for a fuller explanation! Most of us would be anxious to ensure that our twelve-year old did not have sense two in mind. It is just possible, though I think very unlikely, that an exclusionist case could be based on a confusion of senses one and two above; that is, the confused belief that to be considering X is necessarily to be inclined to do X. This is unlikely, because not only context, but tone of voice and emphasis, generally make it clear which sense is meant, and the distinction is quite well recognised. The point is simply that we can consistently hope that our children never consider suicide (sense two) but insist that it is vital that they consider suicide (sense one).

(2) While the above objection would, I think, only rarely be encountered, a closely related objection is not at all unlikely. It might be suggested that talk of considering an issue, with its connotation of serious and impartial reflection, implies an element of *uncertainty* about the issue and this is undesirable with respect to some issues. Thus, for example, those who believe that pre-marital sexual relations are always immoral may feel that even considering the issue (sense one) may suggest that, after all, there is something in the arguments which some offer in support of pre-marital relations. The mere fact that the school spends time considering the case for, as well as the case against, will suggest that the pro-arguments are worthy of attention.

[7]"Regard" parallels "consider" in this way, because both can mean (a) look at, examine, (b) respect.

A number of comments are called for in connection with this objection. In the first place, we need to distinguish (a) the accidental, contingent consequences of doing something and (b) the necessary implications of doing it. It may be that considering an issue (sense one) *will* have the consequences of suggesting that an argument is a valid argument, but this is merely a further instance of the unintentional consequences of teaching which threaten any teaching-learning situation.[8] It is not implied by the *concept* of considering, for we can reflect on arguments which we know to be invalid in order to understand *the error* better. Moreover, we need to distinguish (a) being worthy of attention and (b) being valid, (or plausible, sound, etc). Immortality can be worthy of attention without being worthy of imitation. Finally, we need to remember that even if *we* believe that there is nothing to be said against a particular view we hold, as educators we cannot simply pass on our views uncritically. And if we are right, we should have nothing to fear from open enquiry.

(3) Having made the distinction, however, between being (a) worthy of attention and (b) worthy of imitation, it may be urged that there are surely *some* views which are just not *worth* consideration in school. In a crowded time-table, choices have to be made, and it is entirely reasonable that some issues should be judged less important than others. Thus, it may be held that a certain person's poetry is not worth considering in literature classes.

It is true that some selection is necessary and desirable, though important and unanswered questions remain about the right to make this selection. Does it rest with the students, the teacher of the English department in the school, the School Board, the parents, the local university or none of these? Moreover, the judgment that X is not worth considering is curious, because it could only be reasonably made *after* consideration has been given. We need to consider X before we can decide whether or not it has merit. Thus, any work *deserves* consideration, because *in advance* we cannot state that it is without merit. X is worth considering then, if we are ever to decide that it is not worth considering in school. The point of great significance for teaching which emerges is that, however curricular decisions are arrived at, it is vital that students grasp that there is no way of rationally determining that X is not worth considering in their literature classes other than the process of consideration itself.[9] The danger of the hidden curriculum effect is enormous here, for students may well conclude that X is not important because it is not considered in school. They may come to this opinion, but it is not a considered one, if it is held uncritically as a result of the hidden curriculum. It is not my task as a philosopher of education to suggest practical ways in which this force may be offset but I am inclined to make on suggestion again[10], that there is a case for the study in school of some works which are regarded by the educated community as shoddy and inferior.

(4) Those who are persuaded by the view that students should reach and defend their own views about controversial issues may nonetheless have doubts about the concept of considering. It may be argued that when a teacher *asks* a student to consider something, what happens is that a *disguised* evaluation is made. It *seems* as if the teacher is merely presenting a point for reflection, but *really* he or

[8]In contemporary discussions, the "hidden curriculum" effect is the most famous instance. See Ivan Illich, "The Alternative to Schooling," *Saturday Review,* June 19, 1971.

[9]Not that this requirement prevents people from pronouncing on books which they have not read.

[10]See my paper, "Appreciation as a Goal of Aesthetic Education", *Journal of Aesthetic Education,* Vol. 8, No. 2, April 1974, p. 11.

she is covertly saying "This is important, this changes the situation, this is *worth* thinking about." This objection rightly identifies the subtle slide indicated earlier (at the end of sub-section 1 in the first section, and in so far as it holds that evaluation should not be *smuggled in* and passed on *uncritically* the objection is clearly upheld. But what does *not* follow is that a teacher is necessarily prevented from making such evaluations in an open and honest manner. It is an important part of the teacher's task to try to *show* that, for example, one argument is more powerful than another. The emphasis here though is on "show". He/she must not secure conviction on the basis of authority-status. The quote in the opening paragraph of this paper favoured considering controversial issues, but ruled out teachers espousing a partisan view. Two points must be made: (a) the concept of considering does not itself rule out espousing a partisan position for there is no inconsistency in defending X, yet entertaining objections to X, and (b) the concept of education does not rule out espousing a partisan position, if the teacher maintains it rationally and seeks to counter-act the effect of his/her authority-status.[11] (One recent suggestion, striking in its simplicity, is for a group of teachers with different views on an issue to work together with a group of students; each teacher would defend as well as possible the view he/she takes on the issue.[12])

(5) A further objection may be anticipated, this time resting on a confusion of senses one and three. That is, it may be assumed that the activity of considering (sense one) is undertaken in order to determine what we consider (sense three), and this comes to grief because with certain complex topics we are not yet *in a position* to determine what we consider (sense three). The point to be made is that we know that we are not ready to determine what we think about X because we *have considered* X and are still perplexed. Then, after considering something we will be obliged to say, "I don't know what to think." In so far as the objection seeks to criticize those who force students to form an opinion before they can reasonably be expected to do so, it makes a valuable point.[13] But this does not constitute a case against *considering as reflection.* Students can profitably consider disputed and even pseudo-problems.

(6) Different objections arise if "considering as reflection" is confused with "considering as showing respect." The problem is to see how such objections arise, for is it not the case that the character-trait of considerateness is one of those virtues which, as Hume would say, "sufficiently engage every heart, on the first apprehension."[14] Surely, encouraging children to be considerate and respectful would not be regarded as controversial.

Nevertheless, points of controversy do arise. First, it may be disputed what counts as being considerate or inconsiderate in a certain situation. Was the interruption rude, or part of the accepted cut and thrust of debate? Second, it may be held that some show too much consideration for some others, for example, their parents, and thereby encourage unreasonable interference by those others. Third,

[11]On this point see my papers: "Controversial Issues and the Teacher", *High School Journal,* Vol. LVII, No. 2, Nov. 1973, pp. 51-60. "The Concept of Discussion in Educational Theory", *Kansas Studies in Education* Vol. 23, No. 1, Spring 1974, pp. 6-12. "The open-minded teacher", *Teaching Politics* (forthcoming).

[12]Kai Nielson, "The very idea of a religious education", *Journal of Education* (Nova Scotia), Winter 1974-75, pp. 36-38.

[13]See, for example, my review of the Canadian Critical Issues Series (with Karen Duerden and Bruce Roald) in *The History and Social Science Teacher* (forthcoming).

[14]*David Hume, An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* Section II, Part 1. In Section VI, Part 1, in fact, Hume lists "considerateness," as one quality which no person will deny to be a perfection.

it may be held that some situations demand that we act inconsiderately, because other values take precedence. Fourth, it may be urged that some people do not deserve consideration or respect because, by their actions, they have forfeited this normal right.

The point which must be made in reply, however, is that a reasoned view on any of these issues *demands* reflection and consideration. To consider the actions of a barbarian does not mean that a position has been taken on the question of whether or not the person has forfeited the normal right to respect. Encouraging reflection does not entail encouraging a particular view on a controversial moral issue. It is certainly true that serious disputes arise concerning how and when we are to act *considerately,* but advocating *considering as reflection* does not beg the answers to these questions. It needs to be remembered that when a person is considering an issue (sense one), that either he has not made up his mind what to think about it, or, if he does have a view, he is reflecting in an open-minded way on that view, i.e., he is considering objections to his view in such a way that it is possible that a change in his thinking should occur; or he is simply reconsidering the whole matter. Thus the existence of controversial issues concerning the moral character-trait of considerateness does not constitute an argument against advocating considering (sense one), for this latter practice entails an open-minded attitude to such disputes. Sometimes X is wrong to consider Y's feelings (sense four), but it is a simple confusion to regard this as an objection to considering (sense one); we often want to say that we *consider* that a situation demands that we act *inconsiderately.* Similarly, it can be our considered opinion that we can show too much consideration, and the forms which considerateness should take is a proper matter for consideration.

In addition to the elimination of confused objections to considering (sense one), there is a further reason for distinguishing the intellectual virtue from the moral virtue. The distinction should remind us that the methods of developing one virtue may be inappropriate in the development of another. There is no reason to believe, for example, that the consideration of an issue will necessarily produce considerate people.

(7) The recent reference to Hume's view that in certain circumstances any particular value may be overshadowed by some other,[15] will surely bring to mind his example of how an intellectual trait, namely discretion, which is almost always valuable, might in some cases be a fault or an imperfection. In fact, as Hume describes discretion, it can be regarded as a form of considering (sense one). It is that quality

> "by which we carry on a safe intercourse with others, give due attention to our own and to their character, weigh each circumstance of the business which we undertake, and employ the surest and safest means for the attainment of any end or purpose."[16]

But then, if considering is sometimes a fault, is it not the case that there are some objections to persuading students to consider issues? I believe that the solution here is not merely to emphasize Hume's point that "in the conduct of ordinary life, no virtue is more requisite," for this would not do justice to the exceptional cases. The point to be stressed is that it is *through* the process of considering that the non-absolute value of considering can be appreciated. Hume offers, after all, what

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[15]Hume, *op. cit.,* Section VI, Part 1. "No quality, it is allowed, is absolutely either blameable or praiseworthy."

[16]Hume, *ibid.*

may properly be called "considerations" in support of his view, namely the examples of Cromwell and De Retz. Paradoxically then, considering can lead to the realization that considering is not always of value. Of course, we might find that the empirical consequences of considering issues in school were such that students became unable to recognize those situations in which considering would be an imperfection. Or if able to recognize the situation, be unable to break their well-established habits. If we discovered such facts, we could, of course, seek ways in which these effects could be offset. And if we could discover no such ways, we would have to decide whether the value of considering "in the conduct of ordinary life" outweighed the dis-value of the practice in non-ordinary contexts. Since we are speaking of a practice which is *usually* valuable for *most* people (the Cromwells of this world and their special circumstances being genuinely rare), it seems that the calculations of utility would support the side of considering. In any case, those who object to students considering, for example, sexual matters in school, could hardly appeal to this point of Hume's, because it is not the case that such issues call for precipitate decision-making. Students can be pondering such issues as abortion before any action on their part is required at all.

3. CONCLUDING COMMENT

Considering as reflection is, in effect, equivalent to the concept of studying, suggesting an inquiry which seeks to meet certain standards of care and thoughtfulness. Learning is often casual and careless, but these notions do not fit well with either studying or considering (sense one). But though these latter notions may be equivalent, it was necessary to undertake the independent examination of considering, in case special objections derive from ambiguities in that term.

It remains to comment on the relationship between considering and teaching. As my opening comments reveal, it is often held that considering is one thing and teaching another. Thus, we may not teach certain views, but there is no objection to considering them.

Certainly it is true that considering does not necessarily imply teaching. When a committee considers a request, there is not normally any teaching taking place. On the other hand, however, teaching is a polymorphous activity and one of the forms which it may take is the consideration of an issue. This would occur when, for example, the one who teaches acts so that the activity of considering will serve to promote learning. Those who sharply distinguish teaching and considering fail to do justice to either concept for (a) it is falsely suggested that teaching always means something like "trying to persuade someone of a particular view," which, to say nothing more, ignores "teaching about," and (b) it is falsely suggested that considering necessarily rules out arguing for a particular position. We need to remember that teaching is a fuller notion than preaching, and that considering does not serve the ideal of neutrality, but that of open-minded inquiry. In the service of this ideal, considering an issue and championing a cause need not be mutually exclusive.