

EDITORIAL

Education and Ideals, Morals and Education, Education and Ethics, Education and Method, Education and Cultural Survival: Some Revolutionary and Counter-Revolutionary Explorations

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Education is often a revolutionary and sometimes a counter-revolutionary activity. Education may support or run counter to, the moral or ethical dimensions of a society at a given time. Education may be about changing how we approach knowledge or understanding or about returning to an old or familiar approach to them. Education may be aimed at the goals of a state or ruler or it may be aimed at the good life for an individual. Education may be about cultural ideals or political ideals or it may oppose them. It may be about maintenance of something (for example a language or a cultural group or a religious tradition) or its abolishment.

In this issue of JET all of these ideals are canvassed and discussed. John Wilson, a thinker long associated with the Department of Educational Studies in Oxford, presents his last paper in this issue of JET. John died in 2003 and we are pleased to publish his highly original paper, "Moral Education and Non-Utilitarian Ideals." Following in the Oxford tradition of trying to find ways around the dominant utilitarian moral positions developed earlier by Kant or by 19th century thinkers, Wilson pictures for us a range of phenomena that fall outside the standard utilitarian picture of morality. In utilitarian ethics there are usually thought to be a range of non-controversial goods, like health or having enough to eat, which any morally educated person will attempt to maximize either for their own or for the benefit of others. Wilson lists

as those that fall outside these non-controversial goods such notions as honour, disgrace, chastity, dignity, integrity, obscenity, indecency, purity as well as more behavioural items as well as cannibalism, incest, the disposal of human corpses, and injunctions relating to sex, food, and cleanliness.

Wilson suggests that items such as these are properly in the realm of the moral, but they cannot be handled, or at least cannot always be handled, on utilitarian grounds or by utilitarian reasoning. His puzzle is how to bring these within the realm of reason and offer them a proper place in moral education.

Joseph Malikail replies to Wilson in a very thoughtful manner from a wide scholarly background of depth and breadth. Both Wilson and Malikail see Wilson's work as but a point of departure for further thoughtful research work. So do I.

If one were to list important educational thinkers of the last 50 years, Jerome Bruner's name would be very high on that list, perhaps even lead it. Bruner's most important contention is that there is something terribly awry with the developmental stage theorists, like Piaget, when it comes to how and when children learn. Bruner's most important influence is in suggesting that any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest way to any child at any stage of development. Thus he does not deny the existence of physical or intellectual stages. He only denies that they matter very much for learning. In a very forceful critique Zongyi Deng takes apart, piece by piece, Bruner's arguments for this view. In particular, using Dewey as a counterfoil, he argues that Bruner's arguments for his theory miss a number of crucial steps – steps that Dewey pointed out nearly a hundred years ago. Zongyi also hints that a lot of educational mischief, presumably in China as well as in America, has been done by the followers of Bruner who failed to read and understand Dewey. We hope that a defender of Bruner will step forward.

Following Alastair MacIntyre, Geoff Madoc-Jones points out the importance of virtue and of an account of the intrinsic relation between an educational or other human end and the means to achieve such an end. In particular he offers a new account of teaching, which he refers to as educative teaching, as an enterprise in which the means are internal to achievement of the end, namely of education itself. This too is a fresh and original approach to the question of what teaching is or ought to be.

Finally Yvette Mahé discusses a certain kind of discourse designed for both cultural and moral ends. This discourse, widespread in those

parts of North America where French Canadians migrated since 1840, is a form of defensive nationalism designed to help in the survival of the French language and French Canadian culture in North America. It will be a revelation to English speaking readers, though perhaps not to those educated in French schools, that the form this discourse took was designed to continue their ancestral battles and to protect and defend their linguistic, religious, and educational rights. Having achieved official status for all these things in Canada, she raises the question of why such discourse continues when such battles have been won and such rights are now official rights. Does, for example, the continuance of such rhetoric get in the way of genuine Franco-Albertan sentiment?

Each of the papers in this issue is revolutionary or at least counter-revolutionary. Perhaps we will have many future responses to the dialogue and potential dialogue begun here.

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Editor

