

## EDUCATION AND INDOCTRINATION

It is a student's prerogative not only to answer questions but also to question answers. An inflexible absolutism whether it be political, religious or scientific treats an individual as a means for arbitrary use rather than as an end in himself.

In a contingent universe there must be room for the critical weighing of alternative possibilities whether they be highly probable or probable or just likely. Outside formal logic and mathematics where we are concerned with a tight system of deductive reasoning evidence for a particular belief or hypothesis is always incomplete and so the most significant ability that man has developed is the art and science of asking questions. This seems to have been grasped by Postman and Weingartner who in their paper "Teaching as a subversive activity' expect teachers not to assume omniscience but instead to throw everything open to the child's interrogative spirit. This however would be an exercise in futility until and unless children acquire information and also acquire the knowledge as to what type of information is pertinent to what type of questions. Further they have to acquire the formal notion that is able to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant reasons.

Socrates asked questions so he could rid people's minds of error and his wisdom comprised of having recognized his own limitations and not pretending to know what he did not know. Moreover in his own words 'He O man is the wisest who like Socrates knows that his wisdom is in truth nothing.' Thus by asking questions he strove to cleanse his own mind and the minds of others of preconceived ideas which thwart understanding.

Here we are confronted with the questions a philosopher can legitimately ask and the areas in which he is entitled to ask them. In O'Connor's words 'what sort of evidence is appropriate to the different sorts of questions that we ask'. Of course it is not the right of philosophers' alone to ask questions, neither are all questions of a philosophic nature.

Russel has distinguished between empiricial question that Science asks and speculative ones which are of a theoretical and contemplative nature. It is the domain of philosophy to sift and refine, taking a synoptic and critical approach sweeping away pseudo-problems and pseudo-questions, without being bound in the fetters of any inherited orthodoxy or dogmatic assumptions. Without having to agree entirely with Russel I would like to quote a paragraph from the introduction of the History of Western Philosophy where Russell qualifies the spheres of scientific, philosophical and theological questions. He says "Science tells us what we can know but what we can know is little and if we forget how much we cannot know we become insensitive to many things of very great importance. Theology on the other hand includes a dogmatic belief that we have knowledge where in fact we have ignorance and by doing so generates a kind of impertinent insolence towards the universe. Uncertainty in the presence of vivid hopes and fears is painful but must be endured if we want to live without the support of comforting fairy tales. It is not good either to forget the questions that Philosophy asks or to persuade ourselves that we have found indubitable answers to them. To teach how to live without certainty and yet without being paralysed by hesitation is perhaps the chief thing that philosophy in our age can still do for those who study it."

For a layman Jacques Maritain explains it thus - all characteristically philosophical thinking resides in the three most simple questions. What are we? Where are we? Where ought we to be going? The third question presumably deals with what ought to be our aim

in life and is a question of ethics and values. The other questions need elaboration. We should remember here that a question may be a pseudo question if it fails to set any limits within which the answer has to fall or by setting them far too widely. It may also fail to be genuine by setting the limits too exactly. If we analyse these questions they are in fact disguised conclusions of arguments on natural religion and very debatable conclusions at that.

This brings us to the notion of the nature of a 'loaded question' which compel the person whom we are questioning to give the answer which we require to suit our purpose which is only begging the issue. We also have to consider the inter-relations between descriptive and evaluative/emotive uses of language especially regarding the concepts knowledge and education.

Knowledge according to P.H. Hirst in his paper "Liberal Education and the Nature of Knowledge" is separable into a number of distinct forms. These forms of knowledge are not mere collections of information but rather complex ways of understanding experience which man has achieved. Again "by a form of knowledge is meant a distinct way in which our experience becomes structured round the use of accepted public symbols. The symbols thus having public meaning, their use is in some ways testable against experience and there is the progressive development of a series of tested symbolic expressions. In this way experience has been probed further and further by extending and elaborating the use of symbols and by means of these it has become possible for the personal experience of individuals to become more fully structured.

Furthermore his four fold criteria for distinguishing forms of Knowledge :

1. Distinctive concepts.
2. Logical structure.

3. Testability against experience.

4. Development of techniques and skills for exploring experience, or the cataloguing of various disciplines is so as to establish a conception of education whose definition and justification are based upon the nature and significance of knowledge itself and not on the predilections of pupils, the demands of society or the whims of politicians. The ideas are debatable to say the least especially from the point of view of the proponents of society as the fulcrum of all human activity

Education has been defined etymologically. The controversy whether it is a derivative from the Latin word 'educere' or 'educare' seems to have died its natural death for the origin of the word itself is not particularly compelling evidence of its nature. Secondly the Romans in most cases used Educere and Educare as equivocal. The substance of the argument however i. e. the controversy terms between leading out what is innate in child, rather than arbitrarily imposing pre-conceived and pre-selected attitudes on him is however very much alive and pertinent to the issue at hand i.e. of differentiating Education from Indoctrination.

R.S. Peters holds that Education (as process rather than content) is a polymorphous concept (or a generic) term) and that it is a mistake to think of educating as the name of one and only one particular activity. It incorporates distinguishable processes like drilling, instructing, training and teaching. Thus Education forms a family of idea which overlap and criss-cross.

The task of defining Education is not as simple as it may seem. At the outset let me point out two of the many kinds of definitions that Scheffler has enumerated—the descriptive and the stipulative ones. A descriptive definition has been formulated in the past

become standard, familiar and accepted. These are what we also call Dictionary definitions. However since these determine what we shall think and does not allow us the freedom to think for ourselves, we would like to use a stipulative definition and think of Education as a process of asking questions. Since at no stage can we with supreme confidence assert that we possess infallible truth we have to learn to think and not told what to think.

Peters proposes in place of a definition of Education three relevant criteria or standard which is more of a guide rather than an exact measure. He says :

1. 'Education implies the teaching of what is worthwhile to those who become committed to it.
2. Education must involve knowledge and understanding and some sort of 'cognitive perspective' which is not inert."

Whitehead also asks us to beware of inert ideas i.e. those that are merely received into the mind without being utilized or tested or thrown into fresh combinations.

The third criterion of Paters asserts that.

3. 'Education atleast rules out some procedures of transmission on the ground that they lack willingness and volutariness on the part of the learner.'

Later when we analyse Indoctrination we may well ask if it fulfills the third criterion of Peters, and whether it may be classified within the process of Education at all since it denies the learner both awareness and understanding together with lack of willingness.

I have considered Education as a process and a process of initiation but it must have both content and a method. That content is knowledge and what is worthwhile—values and this is where we may

---

Schofield, Harry "The Philosophy of Education". George Allen & Unwin, London 1972 p. 36.

refer to the first criterion of Peters. As far as method is concerned we have to allow the learner to grasp what is being taught without falling under the spell of what has aptly been called the "bewitchment of language". Slogans and Propoganda or Sermons are some such spells. These if frequently repeated become mistaken for facts. They aim at persuading to modify the person but strive at the same time to avoid a genuine engagement of his judgment. Thus the emotive use to language is being employed to change both emotions and attitudes.

It may be in the fitness of things to try and analyse the tentative list of what Education refers to. According to O'Connor Education is :

1. "A set of techniques for imparting knowledge, skills and attitudes.
2. A set of theories which purport to justify the use of these techniques and
3. A set of values or ideals embodied and expressed in the purposes for which knowledge, skills and attitudes are imparted, and so directing the amounts and types of training that is given".

Here we must note that we refer to a tentative list rather than a rigid, over directed or over determined one. There is more than one content, one method and one aim of education. We have to guard against an innate passion for certainty in ourselves which though a source of enquiry and exploration is also the under current of most dogmatism and fanaticism. Therefore we must imbibe an open and critical habit of mind which is "merely the virtue of self-restraint" exercised upon this undeniable pursuit for certainty. Thus we may modify hypothesis in the light of further evidence and not accept matters whole sale just because sometimes an autho-

rity before us asserts it. When Leibniz discovered inconsistencies in Aristotelian Logic he hesitated from publishing the errors he had located because of respect and reverence for the great Master whose work could not possibly contain any mistakes.

In the Educational repertoire then teaching may perhaps be considered the most general concept for it includes according to Snook "Education which implies restrictions of value, Instruction suggesting restrictions of method and Training enlisting restrictions of content" and of course Indoctrination which needs further elucidation. The question before us is what sort of teaching qualifies as Indoctrination. One thing is for sure – the term Indoctrination is replete with emotive meanings which are generally condemnatory. Why does Indoctrination enjoy such a pejorative connotation whereas Education is perhaps our most cherished goal? i.e. the inalienable right of man to observe, inquire and to explore and not to be taken in, in the manner of Hans Christian Anderson's "The Emperor's New clothes" where voluntary suspension of doubt shrouds the truth.

McClellan considers Indoctrination a counterfeit of teaching and maintains that the "distinction between Indoctrination and Education presupposes the prior distinction between canons of thoughts and substantive beliefs subject to criticism by those canons". He continues to add that Indoctrination is a "catch-all for failure on the logical and moral criterion for teaching".

Although we may regard Indoctrination as a 'nebulous' term we can analyse it further by inquiring whether Indoctrination is so called because of its content, its method or its aim/intention? The content of Education comprises of facts which can be proved and are therefore certain and beliefs which can not be proved and are therefore uncertain. But this is an over simplification because there are

---

I.A. Snook. "Indoctrination and Education". Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972. p. 21.  
McClellan, James E. "Philosophy of Education" Prentice Hall New Jersey, 1976.

very few things which are absolutely and undeniably true. We do not have apodictic evidence and can not therefore talk meaningfully about absolute certainties. Our task in education should be less about teaching these and should be geared more to providing sufficient evidence to support the things that we do actually teach. As Russel said "we have to proportion the degree of intensity with which we hold our beliefs to the amount of evidence available for each belief". It would be an abuse of reason otherwise.

But merely omitting to support one's belief with evidence is not Indoctrination. Is indoctrination given this name then because of the method which is used to transmit a particular content ?

Here we must discriminate between putting forward beliefs assertively and emphatically without rational justification and suppressing rational argument altogether. It is only when reason and evidence are deliberately suppressed in the achievements of its aims which is the inculcation of beliefs that we can refer to Indoctrination proper. Education especially when it is 'good' aims to produce insight whereas Indoctrination denies insight deliberately and by all possible means. In this regard Brubacher suggests several possibilities in defining the infinitive "to teach" regarding methodology.

1. Issues might be presented as if they had but one side to them. This is variously called Education by Imposition, Authority, Indoctrination or Propaganda.
2. To present various contrary view points but to assure a favourable outcome for a pre-determined point of view.
3. To cause the pupil to investigate, to deliberate and to ponder. It would have all sides of a problem presented so that students could independently think themselves through



to their personal conclusions. This could be the method of academic freedom”.

The claim that Indoctrination is inevitable and sometimes may be necessary and desirable as in the case of little children does not hold much ground for even they can be given simple and straight forward reasons that they can grasp.

Indoctrination on this scale is a process of inculcating beliefs by non-rational methods of persuasion designed to bring unshakable commitment. Here Intention as a necessary feature of Indoctrination must be considered. Intentions can be avowed (what the Indoctrinator says he is trying to do) and real (what he is in fact trying to do) so that real intentions may not coincide with avowed intention. It is only when real intentions are of a dubious nature that Indoctrination takes place. It is based on the dictum “Think as we think and don’t dare question”. It is thus a prescriptive statement.

Indoctrination differs from Education not only because it involves trafficking in doctrine but also because it violates the criterion of respect for an individual that Kant’s moral dictum enunciates. The encounter between a teacher and a student should be in Buber’s terminology an ‘I-thou’ relationship rather than an ‘I-it’ one. It should be a dialogue rather than a monologue. Thus Indoctrination is fundamentally anti-educational and morally reprehensible. We are not the proud possessors of truth, only modest seekers of it for only successive approximation to truth can be found. Proof in the sense of mathematical demonstration, the Q.E.D of Euclid is not to be had. The true educationist like a true philosopher should be prepared to examine all pre-conceptions whether based on authority or tradition without any limits of any kind. Every man must

win back his right to say his own word to name the world and not be engulfed in a "Culture of Silence of the Dispossessed". We have to confront, to listen and to see the world unveiled.

We must then distinguish between Education which is a liberating process while Indoctrination denies liberty suppressing freedom of thought, speech and action. Education should not suffer from what is called "narration sickness". The task of a teacher is not to "fill the students with the contents of his narration - contents which are detached from reality, motionless, static, compartmentalized and predictable." Neither is it the fate of a student to become a container in which the act of depositing by the teacher takes place. Instead of communicating the teacher should not issue communiques. This is called the Banking theory of Education by Paulo Freire in which :

1. The teacher teaches and the students are taught.
2. The teacher knows everything and the students know nothing.
3. The teacher thinks and the students are thought about.
4. The teacher talks and the student listen meekly.
5. The teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined.
6. The teacher chooses and enforce his choice, and the students comply.
1. The teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher.
8. The teacher chooses the programme content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it.
9. The teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his own Professional authority, which he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students.

10. The teacher is the subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere project."

The Banking Concept of Education minimizes or annuls the student's creative powers. The alternative is according to him "The Problem posing Concept of Education. Let us analyse these two concepts. In Freire's words "Banking Education attempts by mythicizing reality to conceal certain facts which explain the way men exist in the world ; problem posing education sets itself task of de-mythologizing. Banking education resists dialogue ; problem-posing education regards dialogue as indispensable to the act of cognition which unveils reality. Banking education treats students as objects of assistance ; problem-posing education makes them critical thinkers. Banking Education inhibits creativity and domesticates (although it cannot completely destroy) the intentionality of consciousness by isolating consciousness from the world, thereby denying men their ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human. Problem-posing education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation of men as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation. In sum : Banking theory and practice, as immobilizing and fixating-forces, fail to acknowledge men as historical beings. Problem-posing theory and practice take man's historicity as their starting point.

Problem-posing education affirms men as beings in the process of becoming as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished, reality. Indeed, in contrast to other animals who are unfinished, but not historical, men know themselves to be unfinished ; they are aware of their incompleteness. In this incompleteness and this awareness lie the very roots of education as an exclusively human manifestation. The unfinished character of men and the transformational character of reality necessitate that education be an ongoing activity. We could very easily super-impose the

terms Education for Problem-posing concept and Indoctrination for the Banking Concept. Similarly we could refer to Gilbert Ryle's Reduction of "Knowing that" to "Knowing How" for Education should be our first priority not our last resort. We would not like to be in Kierkegard's words "a generation which for a mass of information sold its birthright of inquisitive ignorance" for no evidence can be so conclusive as to make further evidence irrelevant.

---

Ibid 46.

Ibid 56,