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## IS OAKESHOTT EITHER PHILOSOPHER OF EDUCATION OR HE IS NOT? A CLICHÉ

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**Abstract:** The objective of this research paper is to find the basis due to which Michael Oakeshott can be considered a philosopher of education or he cannot be regarded as a philosopher of education? This question appears when anyone compares Oakeshott's work to the works of other philosophers of education. The latter had clear objectives for their systems of education and they devoted their lives for forming comprehensive system of education to achieve their suggested goals. They authored books, founded the schools and formulated the educational '-isms'. In contrast to them, Oakeshott had neither written any comprehensive book on education nor he had any job as an educationist. His works are not directly related to education with exception of some lectures and essays but the small collection is not sufficient foundations to call him a Philosopher of Education. Then how he can be called a philosopher of education? This research will focus on finding the solution to the cliché.

**Key Words:** Contents, Conversation, Learning, Heritage, Teaching, The Trio, To Be Human.

## General Background

The advent of the Nineteenth Century marked European political map, divided into two camps under the names of *'The Triple Entente'* and the *'The Triple Alliance'*.<sup>1</sup> These two camps had the roots in the last two decade of the Eighteenth-Century and the fourteen years of the Nineteenth-Century (1882-1914).<sup>2</sup> During that phase there was prevalent an atmosphere of suspicion, insecurity and threats from the opponents on the one hand while aspirations of support, reliance and assurance of fulfillment of the promises form the allied on the other hand. That environment was the preface to the World War I (1914-1918). This four-decade panorama and its consequent in the form of the World War I, and the aftermaths of that war affected the entire world in geography, politics, history, social sciences, economy, literature, ethics, philosophies, moral values and religious dogmas and it produced the consequences beyond imaginations. That means that political horizon was dominant element of that time Europe.

## Not a Philosopher of Education

The taste for philosophy was life long interest of Oakeshott irrespective of the fact that he was never a teacher of Philosophy. He was professor of political thought as well as he had varied interests and one among the interests was education. If on the basis of interests, some one might be called a philosopher of that field than Oakeshott might even be callad a philosopher of Horse Racing and Derby Race because he had great interest in that field and had written a book on that subject.<sup>3</sup> That conclude that writing a book or having interest in particular field did not mean that a person can be called a philosopher of that field. Same way Oakeshott had interest like many other fields, in education and he had been a professor and had a long service of teaching. Though he had written some essays and delivered some lectures on education but due to this account he cannot be regarded as philosopher of education. Due to the account of some essays or lecturers which had been latter compiled, Oakeshott does not qualify to be called a philosopher of Education.

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1 In the *'TheTriple Entente'* there were three conturies e.g. Britain, France and Russia while in the *'TheTriple Alliance'* there were German, Austria-Hengry and Italy.

2 Marsha E. Ackermann, ed. *Encyclopedia of World History*. Vol. 4. (New York: Facts on File, 2008), 420.

3 Guy Griffith and Michael Oakeshott, *A Guide to the Classics, or, How to Pick the Derby Winner* (London: Amphora Press 2017)

There are philosophers who devoted their lives for their philosophies and they produced writings on one specific field. They had fidelity and dedications to build particular systems to gain results from their own thoughts like Plato till modern ones. But Oakeshott had not written even one book on the philosophy of education. So he cannot be regarded as an educationist or a philosopher of education.

### **Etymology of the word ‘Education’**

As a term ‘*Education*’, like other ones in the fields of various knowledge has its roots in Latin language. There are two Latin words from which the term ‘*Education*’ had been supposed to be derived e.g. ‘*educere*’ and ‘*educare*’. The former means ‘*to lead out*’ or ‘*to train*’, while the latter means ‘*to train or to nourish*’.<sup>4</sup>

Another root had been said that the Latin ‘*educationem*’ and ‘*educatio*’ are the roots of English word ‘education’ and due to this origin ‘*education*’ means ‘breeding’, ‘rearing’ and ‘bringing up’.<sup>5</sup>

There is another etymological description of the word ‘*education*’ that it is combination of two Latin words e.g. Latin, ‘*e*’ which means ‘*out of*’ and ‘*duco*’ which means ‘*forward*’ or ‘*lead*’.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Trio: The Student, The Teacher, The Contents**

On the basis of this etymological description, anyone can conclude that the following components are the general aspects of the word ‘*education*’ such as: ‘*to lead out*’, ‘*to train*’, ‘*to nourish*’, ‘*breeding*’, ‘*rearing*’, ‘*bringing up*’, ‘*out of*’, ‘*forward*’ and ‘*lead*’. Due to these findings some questions arises e.g. *Firstly*, to whom we want to lead, to train, to nourish, to breed to rear, to bring up, to out of, to forward or to lead? *Secondly*, who will take up these tasks and why the one will do these assignments? *Thirdly*, what would be the contents of doing these tasks and who will decide the objectives and conclusion of these endeavors.

The answer to the first question is that The Subject (of this leading, training, breeding, bringing up and forwarding) are the Learners, the Students, the Disciples and the Youth of a Nation. The second answer is

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<sup>4</sup> Christopher Winch and John Gingell, *Philosophy of education* (New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2008), 63.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.wordsense.eu/educationem/>

<sup>6</sup> William Grimshaw. *An Etymological Dictionary and Expositor of The English Language*. (Philadelphia: John Grigg, L.R. Bily Printers, n.d).

that the Teacher, the Mentor and the Guardians of Knowledge will perform these tasks. The answer to the third question is that the contents of performing these tasks will be framed according to the objectives in favor of the future of the youth and development of the knowledge and the nation. For regarding any thinker as a philosopher of education, we can simply check that the thinker has discussed these issues or not. If these have been discussed, then we might consider the one as philosopher of education otherwise not.

### **Does Oakeshott's philosophy have these elements?**

Considering Michael Oakeshott as a philosopher of education, we have to analyze his writings that either he had discussed that The Trio (The Student, The Teacher, The Contents) and have replied to the above mentioned questions or he had no ideas about them. The decision will be shown by his-own writings.

Ian Tregenza said that Oakeshott, since 1940's to 70's penned down a series of elegant and provocative articles and essays on education generally and on university education specially. Tregenza's article "*Michael Oakeshott on the Character of Education*"<sup>7</sup> is pithy and precise analysis of Oakeshott's concept of education which very briefly summarizes his thoughts. He also throws light on religion and Christianity but also on the concept of school.

### **Features of Oakeshott's Philosophy of Education**

Though Oakeshott's writings have such titles which are generally related to politics and history and he had done his professional career as professor of political science and history. He done little in the field of education which was in the form of lectures and essays but according to Kenneth Minogue, the central business of Oakeshott's life was education.<sup>8</sup> He discussed the educational problems very clearly.

### **Definition of Education**

Timothy Fuller proclaimed that Oakeshott's task was inquiry and investigation about the "nature and circumstances of education".<sup>9</sup> Education possess central place in his thoughts and he regards education as an outcome of freedom. Education is initiation unto the way of self-

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.theimaginativeconservative.org/2017/12/michael-oakeshott-character-education-ian-tregenza.html>

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth Minogue, "Modes and Modesty," in *The Achievement of Michael Oakeshott*, ed. Jesse Norman (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1993), 49.

<sup>9</sup> <http://dgmymers.blogspot.com/p/the-voice-of-liberal-learning-michael.html>

understanding and self-discovery. The learning of education means to perform in humanly way.

The central theme of Oakeshott's philosophy of education is education and its aim is to learn how to be human. 'A man is what he learns to become'.<sup>10</sup> He said that the learning of what are concerned to ourselves is education. In the primitive ages, our forefathers, the race of apes sat for ours and converse among themselves. Those conversations were the first human utterances and they were about the possibilities of human lives.<sup>11</sup> That activity of conversation was the social activity and that made us able to be called civilized and credit our activities as the activities of human beings.<sup>12</sup> The utterance of human beings in that social activity is our inheritance.

He carves out another definition of education that education is 'an initiation into civilization'. The word 'education' may be recognized as the 'course of action' and initiation into the inheritance or civilization. It is a manner which shows the way to the material, intellectual, moral and emotional heritage of the human beings. Education is 'learning' procedure which distinguishes and identifies the various human utterances and makes possible to participate in conversation among these utterances and voices. So we may consider education, a procedure of self-discovery and cultivation of ourselves into civilization in the mirror of inheritance.<sup>13</sup> For him education is learning to know ourselves, ourselves as human beings. Education is a learning process in which we can recognize ourselves in reflection of the civilization.<sup>14</sup>

The first and the foremost objective of the education is to make a learner to be able to formulate his own thoughts and can make them clear and to comprehend what is passing before him and able to handle the inheritance of our civilization and society.<sup>15</sup>

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10 Michael Oakeshott, "A Place of Learning," in *The Voice of Liberal Learning: Michael Oakeshott on Education*, ed. Timothy Fuller (London: Yale University Press, 1989), 17.

11 Michael Oakeshott, "The Voice of Conversation in the Education of Mankind," in *What is History and Other Essays*, ed. Luke O'Sullivan (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2004), 198.

12 Oakeshott, 193.

13 Michael Oakeshott, "The Study of Politics in a University," in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1962), 304

14 Oakeshott, 304.

15 Michael Oakeshott, "The Universities," in *The Voice of Liberal Learning: Michael Oakeshott on Education*, ed. Timothy Fuller (London: The Bath Press, 1989; reprint 1990), 133.

Thus he defined learning like an activity due to which we can not only ourselves but also the world which is around us and we are inhabitants of that world.<sup>16</sup>

### **Oakeshott's Concepts of School, University and vocational Institutions**

The first place for formal learning is school. Now days school means an disciplined and organized institution where children learn systematically. But for Oakeshott, school is a place which is marked by the detachment from the immediate local world. School is derived from the Latin word *Scholé* which stands for leisure or play.<sup>17</sup> He regarded school education as a 'learning to speak before one has anything significant to say'.<sup>18</sup> In school education we learn because we are taught to learn without knowing our previous ignorance or understanding. Whatever we are taught, we are to learn. But now day the word 'School' has been defined as 'School: Study Centered Hours of Organized Learnings' while practical situation is 'Six Cruel Hours of Our Lives'.

### **The Roll of University Profeseors in Civilization**

We live in a social setup and we have a civilization. Any civilization is composed of some manners of living and pinciples of living lives. These manner are not physical entities but some sorts of skills, these skills are to be learnt. Learning any one of the skills means to borrow something from the total capital of inheritance.<sup>19</sup> There is an alliance of fellows in university, who are engaged in attending and caring the intellectual cpital of humanity which composes a human civilization. They not onle care but try to recover what has been lost or have been corrupted.<sup>20</sup> Consequently a university is a place of its own. While Vocational education aims at current manner of living and is related to the text and to whatever has been already known.<sup>21</sup>

The nature of the university education is that it is not the duty of university to inculcate any type of philosophy in her students but its duty

<sup>16</sup>Michael Oakeshott, "Learning and Teaching," in *The Concept of Education*, ed. R. S. Peters (London: Routledge and Kagan Paul, 2010), 108.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Oakeshott, "Education: the Engagement and its Frustration," in *The Voice of Liberal Learning: Michael Oakeshott on Education*, ed. Timothy Fuller (London: Yale University Press, 1989), 69.

<sup>18</sup> Oakeshott, "The Study," 306.

<sup>19</sup> Oakeshott, 307.

<sup>20</sup> Oakeshott, 308.

<sup>21</sup> Oakeshott, 310.

is to make them able to frame their own philosophies of life.<sup>22</sup> One of the tasks of any university is to teach the various branches of learning at profound level.<sup>23</sup> Oakeshott defined the roll of a teacher first of all to remove any preoccupations and prejudices form the minds of students and then to lay the foundations of knowledge.<sup>24</sup>

This very brief description of Oakeshott's ideas about education related concepts, such as, definition of school and university, the roll of teacher, civilization, manners of living and its contents the leaning the way how to live etc. The works on all these topics explicitly shows that he was a genuin philosopher of education and he had his clear thoughts about the contents and philosophy of education. Moreover to validate my thesis here in bellow there is a breif description that how other philosophers and educationsts saw Oakeshott's work and how they value Oakshott's as a philosopher of education.

### **Oakeshott as A Philosopher of Education: The Recognitions**

The *Michael Oakeshott Association* established in 2000 (after about 8 years of his death which is 1992), has published a list of Michael Oakeshot's all (then available) works, compiled by Efraim Podoksik based on Suzanne Tregarthen, John Liddington along with others' works. This Bibliography comprises fifty-two pages consisting the entries of his articles, papers, lectures, books and reviews published in April 2009.<sup>25</sup> This extensive Bibliography shows his versatility in the fields of knowledge. This *Bibliography* includes his works on Philosophy of law, Philosophy of History, Philosophy of art, Philosophy of Ethics, Philosophy of Political Science, Philosophy of International Relations, Philosophy of Knowledge (Epistemology), Philosophy of Education.

Kevin Williams in his "*Education and the Voice of Michael Oakeshott*" regards Oakeshott's work about education as "significant profile" in the present day fields of education.<sup>26</sup> Kevin says that Oakeshott has not only written directly on education but his other

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22 Oakeshott, "The Universities," 121.

23 Oakeshott, 132.

24 Oakeshott, *Rationalism*, 12.

25 <http://www.michael-oakeshott-association.com/bibliography/>.

[http://www.michael-oakeshott-association.com/pdfs/bibliography\\_whole.pdf](http://www.michael-oakeshott-association.com/pdfs/bibliography_whole.pdf)

accessed October 21, 2018.

26 Kevin Williams, *Education and The Voice Michael Oakeshott* (Exeter: Imprint-academic, 2007).

philosophical works are indirectly relevant to education. His “*Rationalism in Politics and other Essays*” is more close to education than to politics. His other works e.g. “*On Human Conduct*”, “*Work and Play*” irrespective of the essays and articles like “*The Study of ‘Politics’ in a University*”, “*Political Education*”, “*The Tower of Babel*”<sup>27</sup>, *The Character of a University Education*,<sup>28</sup> are exponent of his thoughts on his Philosophy of Education.

His earliest yet ignored work (that took thirty years to be sold for only one thousand copies) which was his PhD thesis “*Experience and its Mode*” is his Epistemology which also throws light on his philosophy of education. The modes of thought or the languages and the conversation directly influenced his thoughts on education.

The worth of Michael Oakeshott’s philosophy as a whole and his vision about future has been visibly delineated by Efraim Podoksik. In his book he devoted a whole chapter for the vision of Oakeshott about education.<sup>29</sup>

The salience of Oakeshott’s educational thoughts has been recognized by adding an article written by R. S. Peters in the book *Politics and Experience* edited by Preston King and B.C. Parekh, published by the Cambridge University Press 1968. In this article Peters has tried to explain Oakeshott’s educational philosophy and its different stages, this is very helpful in understanding Oakeshott’s scattered ideas on education.

The most celebrated compilation which puts special focus on Michael Oakeshott’s Philosophy of education has been materialized by Timothy Fuller.<sup>30</sup> He collected and compiled most valuable lectures of Oakeshott on education and also embellished this collection with his own introduction. This introduction is in itself a comprehensive and pithy article. It not only provides a guideline but also a gist of Oakeshott’s thoughts on education. It is worth reading and a torch of light for comprehension of Oakeshott’s thoughts about education.

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27 Oakeshott, *Rationalism*.

28 Michael Oakeshott, “The Character of a University Education” in *What is History? and other Essays*, ed. Luke O’ Sullivan (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2004), 373-90.

29 Efraim Podoksik, “Education” in *In Defence of Modernity: Vision and Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2003), 211-29.

30 Timothy Fuller, ed. *The Voice of Liberal Learning: Michael Oakeshott on Education* (London: Yale Press University, 1989).



R. S. Peters in his books on education cited Oakeshott at various places,<sup>31</sup> and he included Oakeshott's article in his edited books e.g. *The Concept of Education*.<sup>32</sup>

Many other scholars such as Robin Barrow and Patricia White also quoted Oakeshott and made many references and citations regarding education and relevant fields in their books or edited works.<sup>33</sup> In another edited book by Paul H. Hirst and Patricia White both the editors made a large number of reference of Michael Oakeshott's thought on education.<sup>34</sup> Paul H. Hirst, being himself the author of a book on education considered to quote Oakeshott, regarding "Knowledge and the Curriculum" and he made many references of Oakeshott with reference to education.<sup>35</sup>

Smeyers has included Oakeshott in the edited work as a whole chapter, not for his fame as political philosopher or for his works on history but Oakeshott as a philosopher of education.<sup>36</sup> This chapter throws light on his philosophical thoughts related to education.

In recognizing Oakeshott's works on education and his status as a philosopher of education there is a *Companion* edited by Paul Franco and Lesslie Marsh. A whole chapter *Un Debut dan la Vie humaine: Michael Oakeshott on Education* written by Paul Franco. In this book this chapter started by recognition and proclamation that Oakeshott's works on education are one among most attractive aspect of Oakeshott's philosophy.<sup>37</sup> That chapter concluded the impacts of Oakeshott's philosophy of education as a defense of liberal learnings.<sup>38</sup> Such elaboration of Oakeshott's ideas are evidence that he was a philosopher of education and dependent of liberal learnings.

A great contribution has been done by Efraim Podoksik who in my humble opinion is scholar of Oakeshott. Podoksik's *Companion*

31 Richard S. Peters, *Education and The Education of Teachers* (London: Routledge&Kegan Paul, 2005), 104.

32 Michael Oakeshott, "Learning," 108-22.

33 Robin Barrow and Patricia White, ed. *Beyond Liberal Education: Essays in honour of Paul H. Hirst* (London: Routledge, 1993).

34 Paul H. Hirst and Patricia White, ed. *Philosophy of Education: Major Themes in the Analytical Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2001).

35 Paul H. Hirst, *Knowledge and the Curriculum: A Collection of Philosophical Papers* (London: Routledge, 1974).

36 Paul Smeyers, ed. *International Handbook of Philosophy of Education*. (Switzerland, Cham: Springer, 2018), 325-36.

37 Franco, Paul. "Un Debut dans la Vie Humaine: Michael Oakeshott on Education." In *A Companion to Michael Oakeshott*, edited by Paul Franco and Leslie Marsh, (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 173-194.

38 Franco, Paul. "Un Debut," 192.

elaborated different aspects of Oakeshott's ideas and philosophy. A chapter Education as Conversation is clear evidence of the recognition of Oakeshott's being as a philosopher of science. Conversation is the central theme of his philosophy of education.<sup>39</sup>

The importance of Michael Oakeshott is recognized here in the book *Fifty Modern Thinkers on the Education: From Piaget to the Present* edited by Joy A. Palmer and published by Routledge in 2001. He has been selected among a lot of thinkers on education because he has been regarded as valuable to be discussed in the *Fifty Modern Thinkers on the Education*.

### **Epilogue**

This all show that Oakeshott had also been a real and genuine philosopher of education irrespective of the fact that he gained fame as a philosopher of history and political science. He remained unnoticed as philosopher of education but the above references about him and his works on education are evidences that he was also a philosopher of education. But it is need of time to explore his thoughts on education and other fields also.<sup>40</sup> The discoveries of finding the hidden seeds and latent offshoots of thought would be great service generally in knowledge and particularly in philosophy of education.

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39 Kevin Williams. "Education and Conversation." In *The Cambridge Companion to Oakeshott*, edited by Efraim Podoksik (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 107- 128.

40 Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2nd ed., s. v. "Oakeshott, Michael".

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