

The Being of Man and Education

Towards the Explication of the Philosophical Foundation of Education

Introduction

To situate education within the totality that is constituted by man's life and experience is the task of a philosophy of education. This venture therefore presupposes:

- i. a theory of MAN, for man is the educand and the educator;
- ii. a theory of WHAT IS VALUABLE for goals must be set;
- iii. a theory of TRUTH, because it can be reasonably supposed that educators are interested in truth and that questions of method and technique are subordinated to what has traditionally been known as the "quest for truth". The difference between the educator and the propagandist thus presents itself for the educator subordinates himself to Truth as a "regulative principle", and therefore opens his statements and his theories to revision and dialogue.

The philosophy of education is prescriptive. As it is rational reflection on the ideal of the "educated man" it has a regulative role over technique, methodology and procedure. It is obvious that there have been different paradigms of the "educated man" for which reason educational institutions have produced the *refined gentleman* of the elitist, liberal arts colleges, and the *practical, functional* specialists and technocrats of today's universities. We have, of course, in mind the formalized education of schools with which we shall predominantly be concerned. Philosophy of education can be prescriptive because it must involve a logical analysis of the concepts and basic statements of educational theory. Therefore, the philosopher of education will concern himself with questions such as: *What does it mean to learn? What criteria of verifiability are there for such statements as deal with emotional maturity, understanding, etc.?* Having logically analyzed education's basic concepts and premises, which I do not at all presume to be able to achieve completely in this study, the philosopher of education can lay down the expectations for educators and educands.

Common Educational Maxims

Whatever educational theory is maintained, there will be no objection to the assertion that it is not something new. This being so, man has always had ideas and principles to go by, albeit spontaneous and uncritical. By educational maxims we mean those commonly held definitions of the educator's enterprise that have been handed down through generations and survive till ours.

1. *Education is life.* The maxim underscores some valuable insights into education. In fact, education is not one activity among many others in life; it seems to be the activity underlying all others. Education's *raison d'être* is nothing less than life, obviously no mere biological survival (for which some education is necessary) but a truly human and humanizing life. One is then reminded of the succinct formulation attributed to F.J. Sheed: *Education is fitting man for living.*

As education is co-extensive with living, it is thoroughly temporal: the projecting of possibilities from one's facticities. The maxim though suffers the set-back suggested by the old scholastic

doctrine on the inverse relation between comprehension and extension: its scope is so broad as to denote scarcely anything definite. But our conceptual analysis of education aims at definiteness and specificity.

2. *Education is the transmission of knowledge and skills.* To enable a person to know and to do are undeniably worthwhile ends of an educational process. The conjunction of the two, in fact, is to be desired: that knowledge is put to use and that action is reflected on. We can once more abuse old Kant's phraseology: Action without reflection is blind; reflection without action is empty.

Knowledge and skills are cultural, i.e., they are products of the interaction of men among themselves and men with the world. Education then does involve the continuity of tradition.

But the maxim, if made the fulcrum of education, becomes the design for conservatism. The human spirit never admits of mere transmission. Contemporary philosophical hermeneutics moves us away from the conservatism even of the spoken word, and in so doing affirms the value of tradition. At every step of transmission there must be criticism for these are the elements of progress. Ontologically it is the dynamism of human becoming which is never merely reproduction of the past. And so education will prepare the student to receive tradition as it will enable him to move away from it through criticism.

3. *Education prepares a man to fit into society.* Any "education" that addresses itself and is designed for Leibniz's monad is not the education we have in mind, for education prepares a man to assume responsibilities towards others, as it must allow him to deal with experiences of love, friendship, even hatred and enmity humanly.

But man is not meant to be a piece that fits, for when education aims at producing men who "fit" then its ideal of society is a beehive or an anthill which, though efficient systems perhaps, are not too flattering for man. We suggest instead that education prepare man to *change* society. This means that we will have to review our egalitarian ideals, for the equality of all men as a motive

of education can easily mean levelling off into a boring and de-meaning sameness. Education prepares *unique individuals* to be *uniquely contributory* to the common good.

4. *Education must be responsive to national development goals.* This is a favorite government line, and understandably so. It can make sense, but it all depends on what it is meant to express. It makes as a supposition that the national development goals are acceptably set. It is however a present political reality that the setting of national development goals is a prerogative of the winning political party and its loyal think-tank of glamorized technocrats. To insist on the point above is to enslave education to politics. The educated man is the man who can *identify* goals of development and *criticize* (as well as *appreciate*) those that have been identified.

Education and the Dimensions of Being-human

It is common today to refer to the three educational domains: the cognitive, the affective and the psycho-motor domains, for man is a being who thinks, who feels, and who behaves. We will approach the dimensions of being-human in a slightly different manner.

At the outset we must make the decision that we want education to be sensitive and responsive to being human. I do not seem to be able to conceive it to be otherwise. Our point of departure will be the fundamental, irreducible experience we have of ourselves.

Corporality: The Experience of Being Bodily. Man experiences the concreteness of his existence in his body which he strictly speaking neither "has" nor "is" but which, in Marcel's words, *sympathetically mediate* his subjectivity.

His experience of himself is bodily, and other's experience of him is bodily. His body is his presence to others and his being-in-the-world. His body is not the encasement of his soul. In Rahner's *Spirit in the World*, man's body is the expression of his soul. On the whole, though, we prefer to avoid the terms "body" and "soul", especially in opposition because of dualistic associations. This brings us to the point of rejecting dualism as untrue

to experience and a confusion of conceptualization with reality. When man gets "divided" into body and soul, it becomes difficult to account for one's experience of a unified, individual self, unless one chooses the path of making experience take the back seat.

The consequences for educational theory need only be drawn: *First*, there is no education for the body that is distinct from the education of the soul, neither will it do then to assign the education of these different "parts" to different agencies. *Second*, there is nothing that can be rightly called "pure instinct" in man, and so man is thoroughly educable. And when we deal with the specifically somatic aspects of education, then we refer to *somatic integration*. Since there is no such thing as pure instinct, then there is validity in speaking of "sex education" even if there is such a thing as the sexual instinct.

Education towards somatic integration results in a person's acting (the subject is efficacious) with freedom and intelligence, given his somatic constitution as a matrix. A very early form of education is toilet-training. The evacuation of bowels is a somatic necessity. It is what one may call an "inbuilt" mechanism. But there are some decisions that must be made and patterns of behaviour that must be established in regard to it. That one feels hungry is natural, in the sense that the body is structured to register certain sensations indicating the need for nourishment. The person's reaction to hunger, his judgements in response to it, and his attitude towards it are the subject matter of education.

There is another important consequence of corporality: whatever has significance for man has an "incarnational" character. Put in the simplest terms: everything human must take on concrete form. To develop an art is to produce works of art. Justice must be incarnate in just social structures and just human relations. Wisdom expresses itself in words of wisdom, and even in the silence of wisdom. Hence education will also address itself to the expressive in man. The educated heart will leave its imprint in the form of a humanized world.

Intersubjectivity: The Experience of Being-with. Levinas has observed that a characteristic bias of the Western mind towards the thinking of man has been its "egological approach" sug-

gested by the questions most commonly asked: Who am I? What am I? Man, conceived of this way, is isolated, individual man who appropriates external reality by knowledge and conquers it by technology. Its culmination is Nietzsche's "will-to-power" which can also be the battle-cry of ruthlessness.

Such an egological approach, still pursuing Levinas' thought, is always *totalizing* in that it reduces the other to a part of the totality and fails to encounter him in his alterity. The practical consequences are many: selfishness and greed, dictatorships and totalitarian regimes, matches with go off as relationships but are merely disguised harmonizations of egoism. Education towards intersubjectivity moves towards the fundamental, lived realization of constantly being in the face of alterity (being witness to the epiphany of the face). This is the fundamental condition for *education towards justice*.

Intersubjectivity is the experience of being definable in terms of my relations with others — and for relations with others to be meaningful, the "I" must resist dissolution into anonymity. Neither does this mean a reduction to one's functions or roles.

To assert that man's existence is co-existence is not to state the obvious fact that there are such realities as communities and societies. It is to assert that these are imperatives of being human, though not necessarily in the specific historical forms they have taken. Man's existence progresses towards others in relations of love and friendship. At any time of my existence, I must assume an attitude towards the Other: it may be one of love, hatred or indifference, but the latter, which is the pretense that the Other is not there, can be carried out only in the recognition that the Other is indeed there. Neither can hatred be the basis of inter-relations for it is destructive both to him at whom it is directed and to him by whom it is directed.

The Ibanag term "mannono" and the Iloco "agnakem" are especially instructive. Both suggest maturation, and when the Ibanag says that "Mannono ngana y abbing" (The youngster is starting to mature) what he commonly means is that a youngster has started demonstrating concern and responsibility for others. Ac-

according to the unspoken philosophy of my people, then, maturation is measured by my response to others.

Our education has been predominantly education of the individual, the separated, distinct "I", and there has been very little effort towards pelling out the demands of education in intersubjectivity. The drift that has made us oblivious of the Other must be reversed by education, both in the home and in the school, that "sensitizes" the educand towards the call and the invitation that the Other's existence always is. The mere existence of another person, his mere presence, his face (*l'épiphanie du visage* — Levinas) is an invitation to me to recognize, to support and to cherish it. But just as we can be insensitive to aesthetic values because of lack of education (or miseducation) so too can we be insensitive to Ethical value, or the response to the call of the Other. The concern for human rights and the dignity of man in Philippine education is our belated response to the disastrous consequences of egological education. Education in human rights starts with a reverential attitude towards the Other which is the antithesis of the parental imposition that endeavours to make the child a reflection or mirror of his parents. Then, too, there is the fact that rights have been taken primarily to mean "rights against", so that posture has usually been adversarial. This syndrome is allied to the exaggerated juridical approach sometimes assumed towards human rights. But where the fundamental categories are not "crime" and "punishment" but "love" and "affirmation", then education in human rights takes on a more positive and constructive direction. Consequently, educating a child to obey the law does not consist in mechanizing him to "run" in a predetermined manner or to cower in fear before an anonymous imposition.

An example: Why do we stop at red lights?

The possible answers are: *Because if we go through we could be jailed or fined*, law as threatening or penalizing; or *Because if we went through, some other driver or pedestrian might be injured*, law as response to others. We submit that the education that results in the realization expressed by the third answer is the most response to the personhood and the subjectivity of Others.

Spirituality: The Experience of Transcendence. The word "spirit" does not command much respect in many circles of contemporary philosophical activity primarily because of its ambiguity and then too because it has, in the history of thought, been patently abused. We will use it in this section to mean the following: i. Man's experience of his freedom; ii. Man's experience of the call of value; iii. Man's infinite horizon.

To recognize the dimension of "spirit" in man is to reject as inadequate a materialist's approach to the mystery of man. By materialism we refer to the position that presents as exhaustive an explanation of man in terms of physical laws and processes. The physical object, as we know it, is explained entirely by its antecedents. Our experience, both of ourselves and of others, does not allow us to lump man into the same category. To speak of "spirit" with regard to man is to point at that "inner life" which manifests itself in man's reflecting on himself, man's questioning of everything, even himself, man's crisis of decision, man's unique "I" in relation to Others.

Freedom. Rather than join the already lengthy discussions on freedom, we will underscore the following ideas: Freedom refers to man's self-determination, characteristic of his personhood as self-possessed and self-governing. Freedom refers to the indefinability of my essence (of what I am) precisely because I must, in a very real sense, make myself, i.e., project my possibilities on the basis of my facticities. To speak of freedom is to speak of man's responsibility for himself and for others; it means that the shape of his life and that of others is his own choosing and so is the future of the earth. The experience of freedom is necessarily also unsettling, because it is the experience that my life is in my hands, that no one else answers for me, other than myself, and that having settled for some possibility, others may forever be closed to me.

Education for freedom will be education in responsibility, i.e., the ability to respond for myself and for others. Given this positive content, and moving away from the negative notion of freedom as the absence of constraint or restraint, there should be no need to educate a man first for freedom and later for responsibility.

Then too education for freedom must allow the educand to feel the *tension of freedom*; there must be no attempt to anaesthetize him from the anxiety that freedom entails. It is precisely this anxiety that drives home the unarticulated lesson that freedom is responsibility, that freedom is grave.

Lest it be thought that the phrase "education for freedom" makes of freedom something to be achieved rather than a fact, let in only be recalled that when we deal with man there is human reality only when there is something to be realized, that the facts are the projects!

That man is free finally means for education that the learner must be trained in the ways of decision and authenticity. To be suspicious of all forms of escape into the sanctuary of the anonymous multitude, to have to face the issues squarely and to be able to make choices and decisions definitively, fully assuming consequences, these are the components of educating a man to be free.

The Call of Value. Without involving ourselves under this heading in the intricacies of axiological theory we identify the fundamental orientation of man as orientation towards TRUTH and GOODNESS (a term I have deliberately chosen over the more abstract, and somewhat less real "The Good").

We concede that there will be a plethora of theories about the true and the good, but does this stand in the way of identifying the fundamental orientation of man to these values? Truth and goodness are called TRANSCENDENTAL because they are realized in concrete objects, events or acts but are not confined to them. In fact man investigates but is not stilled by any finding, man desires but is never quieted by any single good attained because he is called not by a specific thing or act but by a horizon of goodness and truth which, though intangible, are nevertheless real in the experience of man.

The Infinite Horizon. We have already suggested what is meant by the "infinite horizon" of man. We acknowledge indebt-

edness to Rahner's concept of "vorgriff" (or excessus) that is in turn inspired by Heideggerian thinking on Being. The sweep of man's inquiry is beyond limit: everything is questioned and is questionable, the questioner included. Neither is there a specifiable desideratum which marks the possible terminus of man's desiring. By this transcendence, man is more than the here and now while being totally immersed in the condition of historicity. There is an openness in man which, according to the testimony of the world's greatest religions, is the very horizon of theophany.

There is such a thing as the education of the human spirit which, of course, does not consist in the education of "one-half" of man (the unseen half) but the education of man as spirit. Obviously it will involve familiarizing the individual with the world's heritage of art in all its forms and a feeling for beauty that can only come about with exposure to its varied manifestations. It will mean providing the proper milieu for the blossoming forth of the works of the spirit, i.e., encouraging the "impractical" in the face of the smothering pragmatism that has impoverished man. It will mean legislating a minimum wage that provides for the needs of the spirit.

It is in the light of the present discussion that we note the wisdom in some form of self-criticism among artists. If properly effected, this continuing criticism can be the expression of humanity's decision to abide by the beautiful and to preserve it from cheap adulteration. Rather than stifling, this critical monitoring should then provide the impetus that leads to refinement and that settles for nothing base.

Maybe in the elementary school-rooms we must return to the practice of singing the praises of heroes and martyrs, recalling deeds of valor and holiness, above all holding up lives steeped in the commitment to TRUTH and GOODNESS for emulation. The world indeed has matured, but humanity will always need saints and heroes.

Finally, education should have the depth that enables the person to make sense of the word "God", perhaps in its different

cultural articulations. Whatever the conclusions of his struggle with the idea may be, the possibility of God must be discussed with him. The depth that is called for is that perspective towards life that spurs a man to ask questions about origin, meaning and destiny. It is only when such questions are raised that the word "God" makes some sense. But when the human spirit is so overwhelmed by the mass of data in what often is mistaken for education that there is neither time for nor importance given these questions, man fails himself. In this sense, the eclipse of God is the eclipse of man.

RANHILIO C. AQUINO
Graduate School
University of Santo Tomas
Manila