

# CONSTANT VALUES IN EDUCATION

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“THE worth-while experience of others embodied in the spoken, written or printed words,” writes Professor Demiashkevich, “is the common mental or spiritual wealth. Among the birth-rights of the child is the right to culture; in other words, the right to share in the accumulated experience of humanity.” He adds: “To assist the maturing educant in any way possible in the acquisition of the ultimate certainty seems to be one of the noblest and most important tasks of the educator.”

If we assume that education should be a preparation as well as the means for enjoying a useful and happy life, educationists must sooner or later decide what kind of education will lead to this useful and happy life in our modern society. Many radical or ultra-modern educationists loudly proclaim that we are living in a new world which demands new standards. The old values and standards are no longer applicable, they tell us, and should be discarded, or at least ignored. These educationists assume that change is one of the few realities which they cannot deny. They therefore assume that nothing should be fixed and definite in our philosophy of education.

The principles of the Progressive Education as represented by the official doctrine of the Progressive Education Association and the New Education Fellowship seems to be as follows. Schools should cease to impart bookish facts and should abandon formal discipline. Children must be active in school and handle things. Education is living. Actual life problems must arise in school, so that pupils may learn to meet new situations. Thinking is developed when pupils recognize the purpose of learning, when they undertake problems as their own, and work at them independently. Each child should learn in his or her own way, and at his or her rate of speed. All artificial stimulation, such as reward and punishment, must be abandoned. The project method, which does away with time schedule and separate subject, must be used exclusively. Teachers are merely to provide the setting, and the child is “self-activist.” All indoctrinations, and even moral values, are condemned. There is indifference to metaphysical truths relative to ultimate reality.

A full criticism of all these principles of Progressive Education cannot be presented within the confines of this article. But it is important that the Canadian people become fully aware of the significance embodied in the philosophy of Instrumentalism. Most of

the principles of the Progressive Education movement are to some extent making their way into our educational outlook, methods, and curricula. Probably a critical examination of a few of these principles may lead to a more extensive analytical evaluation of the Progressive Education movement as a whole. The Canadian people have a right to know the fundamental philosophy upon which our public education is based.

Instrumentalism, from which Progressive Education draws its inspiration, is either indifferent to moral values or condemns their educative use.

It is not concerned with metaphysical truths relative to ultimate reality. The Progressive educationist wants education to concern itself with immediate problems and needs. But what about the individual's spiritual and moral needs—the quest for an ultimate certainty? This need is felt by the majority of our people, and it is a very vital need. What about the building of character and the development of those finer spiritual qualities which lift man above the cunning of the beast?

Joseph Wood Krutch observed, "As soon as thought begins to seek 'ends' and 'aims' to which life is subservient, it has already confessed its inability to achieve that animal acceptance of life for life's sake which is responsible for the most determinate efforts to live." Kant expressed himself as follows in his *Critique of Pure Reason*: "Human reason, in the sphere of its cognition, is called upon to consider questions which it cannot decline, as they are presented by its own nature, but which it cannot answer, as they transcend every faculty of the mind."

"We want a philosophy of education," Professor Horne says, "that will relate our work to man's transcendent as well as his social relationship. And this conclusion may well be based on the nature of man himself and the kind of world in which he lives and must live. . . . If speculation satisfies an interest of man, it is not good pragmatism to reject it."

What may ultimately be produced by the instrumentalism of the Progressive Education movement? Surely if moral principles and all metaphysical truths are to be cast aside, we may expect a social philosophy such as presented by Diderot: "The real goal of life consists in the enjoyments it can furnish. Drinking good wine, eating delicate foods, resting in soft beds, this is what constitutes the sense of life. The rest is nothing but vain emptiness." Also from D'Alembert: "Oh, vanity of thought! Oh, poverty of our glory! Oh, smallness of our outlook! There is nothing really solid or tangible but drinking, eating, loving and sleeping."

We are told that history is a prophet looking backward. If history teaches us anything, it is that man does not live by bread alone. There is, and there always will be, a deep longing in the human heart for something higher than worldly pleasures and material things. Nations have always become great not so much by mere physical energy and wealth as they have by their ideals and certain spiritual factors which dominated their actions and achievements. The philosophy of life inevitably bound up with the basic concepts embodied in these theories of the Progressive educationist is an unhealthy and pernicious kind of individualism. This same philosophy was espoused by Protagoras, "Man is the measure of all things, of the existence of things that are, and of the non-existence of things that are not."

The sophistic movement spread into Greece after the Græco-Persian War. Sophists advocated a doctrine which denied the existence of any permanent values or any stable reality. Change to them was the only certainty which they could admit. Therefore practical success in worldly affairs was the greatest achievement of man. Unscrupulous sophist teachers, possessing some dialectic skill with the doctrine of change, presumed that they could teach without acquiring any portion of the accumulated knowledge of their age. They assumed that a teacher really need not know much of the particular subject under consideration since, according to their assumption, there were no fixed standards. The manner of presenting and attacking a problem was the important matter.

This sophistry ultimately degenerated into skilful verbal jugglery which presumably could prove anything, including that white is black, and *vice versa*. The sophistic movement undermined the moral fibre of the Greek people, and may well have been one of the important factors which led to the loss of Greek independence and the decadence of Greek civilization.

Similar movements which have denied the ultimate reality and the necessity of transcendent values have usually followed long and disastrous wars. A neo-sophistic movement swept Rome after the Punic Wars. Its decadent moral effect is analysed by Polybius in Books XXI and XXXIX of his *Histories*. The spirit of sophism was revived in the middle of the seventeenth century, at the end of the period which culminated with the Thirty Years' War. This movement again reared its head after the period which ended with the Battle of Waterloo. The next, in the wake of the wars of 1850-1871. The last is the one which is with us to-day.

It is an ironical historical fact that Mussolini and Hitler have been swept to power on the crest of liberal materialistic movements when established standards were being cast aside and moral values

were of secondary consideration. The conditions in Italy before Mussolini are well known. Prior to 1933, Germany was also experiencing a famine of values. The Treaty of Versailles was not the real cause of Hitler's rise to power. Before 1933, insistence on the sovereignty of economics was supreme in Germany. Anyone who refused to accept it was dismissed as romantic. To be transformed from an insignificant economic factor into a pillar of the nation was the vague and secret longing of every German. In 1932, German youth was a picture of dejection. A year afterward, the nation had been awakened to new energy and hope, and youth became charged with a new enthusiasm. The nation was no better off economically, but now the people had an ideal to embrace and a scale of value to guide them. Hitler had reshaped reality by ideals. It does not matter to our argument that Hitler may be a swindler in values. The fact still remains that a liberal movement which was rampant with materialism and lack of spiritual values was changed almost overnight by a leader who promised a reason for living and the idealism which is the fundamental strength of all great people.

No education which leaves out man's natural longing for an ultimate certainty and moral principles can long satisfy a nation. To leave out these values from education is to overlook the lesson and the guidance of history. These spiritual values are never destroyed. Even the savage adheres to some permanent moral values. To neglect these in education would be most unscientific.

Professor Demiashkevich warns us: "Sophistic nihilism is readily conducive to spiritual suicide, moral dissolution, and sordid emptiness of life. It creates in the masses of people the longing for a leader who says that he knows the truth and will make it triumph by crushing the heretics and dissenters. Violent abuse, when it does not kill, calls forth a violent cure."

Many educationists reject the fundamental tenets of Instrumentalism. They prefer the essentialist philosophy of fixed standards and the constants of moral values which the accumulated experience of the human race affirms to be the vital need of man. These comparatively conservative educationists, in contrast with the so-called liberals of the Progressive Education movement, take their inspiration from the growth and greatness of such democracies as England. Great Britain was the cradle of the industrial revolution, without suffering any violent upheaval. The peace of self-respect is in England. The Englishman knows how to cling to tradition; he retains the constants of all great civilization, yet gradually eliminates the evil which the development of industrialism brings upon society. England has had steady progress, though that progress has come slowly. Yet that nation has travelled faster

satisfactions as the mainspring of education and conduct, and which has made that which works synonymous with truth? What is the difference between exploitation and a philosophy which has found a moral sanction in the gospel of success, confirmed to the satisfaction of its exponents by a mechanistic psychology? Those who are loudest in denouncing the profit motive and the competitive spirit are fortunately able to forget that they ever propagated the theory that every child has an inherent right to ask, *Cui bono?*

The essentialists, or those educationists who would cling to certain constants, which human history has proved unchangeable, are accused of not being progressive, of not adapting themselves to a changing civilization. On the other hand, it would seem that the essentialists could give these so-called liberals an answer such as the following, given by Socrates:

“See now, most excellent Callicles, how different my charge against you is from that which you bring against me, for you reproach me with always saying the same thing, but I reproach you with never saying the same about the same thing. I wish, my good friend, that you would tell me once for all, whom you affirm to be better and superior, and in what particular.”

It should be apparent to us that the Progressives do not want indoctrination in the schools unless it is their own. It should be evident that Progressive Education must be examined very critically before any of its principles are adopted into a sound educational policy. Our fundamentally sound English social philosophy should definitely separate us from the Progressive Education school of thought. On the other hand, our good judgment should make us appreciate the necessity for readjustment to the needs of our present-day world. But that re-adjustment should not imply a wholesale rejection of all past standards and moral values. Our education, if it is to perpetuate the sound character of British institutions, must develop moral attitudes, appreciations, skill, and information, the value of which has stood the test of time and history.

We are faced with a neo-sophistic philosophy presented by the Progressive Education Association and the New Education Fellowship. Those who still cling to the education philosophy of constants take upon themselves the task which Socrates assumed in opposition to the sophistic movement after the Græco-Persian War. The task of the essentialist is not spectacular and sensational, in contrast with the Dewey school of Instrumentalism. The essentialist doctrine is exactly in the same position with regard to Instrumentalism as the Socratic philosophy was with regard to the sophistic philosophy which proved so disastrous to Greek culture and civilization.